SHELAT, JAY N. Ph.D. Ordering the Chaos: Family, Nation, and Terror in Post-9/11 Anglophone Fiction. (2022)
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Ordering the Chaos: Family, Nation, and Terrorism in Post-9/11 Anglophone Fiction argues that forms of kinship limn the interstitial junctures of nationhood and political violence; family operates as a microcosm of the state when the former necessarily renovates its dynamics in the wake of terroristic acts such as 9/11 and the War on Terror. Beyond an act of reconciliation, I assert, this metamorphosis positions organizations and places of belonging as political arenas that demand interrogation alongside the macroscopic states. Analyses about contemporary fiction largely fail to recognize the intimate reaches of such political calamity, focusing instead on geopolitics, but my analysis of kin and home considers the pervasiveness of terror and uncovers how public political violence invades the nooks and crannies of the private sphere and consequently influences its makeup and dynamics. Looking at eight novels from the U.S., Iran, Pakistan, and China, *Ordering the Chaos* suggests that 9/11 and the War on Terror detrimentally shape the quotidian arenas that give our lives meaning. In focusing on the familial effects of these two events with ongoing consequences, I demonstrate how political ideologies no longer remain in the outward-facing policies of international affairs. Instead, *Ordering the Chaos* propounds that to fully understand the consequences of these violence historical ruptures, we must also turn to the inward, private arenas that inform our everyday lives.

Because the intersections of intimate spheres and historical violence are rife with analytical potential, *Ordering the Chaos* employs various methodologies to study family in post-9/11 literature. Beyond close reading, I utilize queer theory, material culture studies, postcolonial theory, and genre theory to parse how 9/11 and the Forever War shape familial organization. In this way, the dissertation sits at the crossroads of many other fields such as history, psychology,

and political science. Chapter one examines *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *Exit West* by Mohsin Hamid and uses Moustafa Bayoumi's notions of War on Terror culture contends that exilic practices like the PATRIOT Act and anti-Brown sentiments unmake and reorientate familial and domestic dynamics. Chapter two pairs Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* and Joseph O'Neill's *Netherland* to show how objects such as keys and colored pencils harbor the trauma and memory of 9/11 and other acts of political violence; these domestic things represent the ways the past haunt and disrupt kindred organizations in the present. Chapter three continues this idea of the past's present resonances and turns to Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* and Porochista Khakpour's *Sons and Other Flammable Objects*, which situate 9/11 in a long historical timeline of kindred-damaging imperial violence. To show this, I utilize theories of exceptionalism and orientalism that unveil how familial disruption and deterritorialization are the American empire's foremost display of force. Finally, chapter four takes a speculative turn and maintains that zombies in Colson Whitehead's *Zone One* and Ling Ma's *Severance* represent both the dismantling of family because of political violence and the very capitalist-colonial ideologies that effectuated 9/11.

Ordering the Chaos speaks to how kinship units and acts of politically motivated violence interrelate. The dissertation illuminates the correlations between macro and micro and public and private units of social organization and trots the globe to decenter the U.S. from discourse about 9/11 and the War on Terror and to underscore that the attacks were not an isolated incident. To do this, I necessarily take a global approach that affords an understanding of the Age of Terror's reach from the historically and systemically silenced vantage points of marginalized people. In so doing, I also confront numerous ways to dismantle imperial projects that burgeoned as a response to the Towers' collapse. Ultimately, *Ordering the Chaos* limns how

the rhetorics of terror and the aesthetics of violence inform and mold familial and domestic dynamics.

ORDERING THE CHAOS: FAMILY, NATION, AND TERROR IN POST-9/11 ANGLOPHONE FICTION

by

Jay N Shelat

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Approved by

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Dr. Christian Moraru
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DEDICATION

To the families who lost loved ones in the War on Terror and 9/11.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation written by Jay N Shelat has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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Ordering the Chaos is about families shaped by political and historical consequences. My parents, whose life stories are fundamentally molded by their postcolonial and immigrant subjectivities in a nation that outwardly rejects Brownness, moved to the U.S. without most their families. But the friends they made have become family by virtue of circumstance and shared histories. My childhood was informed by this family group. This large, created kindred unit continues to be the most enriching and fun community. They have taught me the importance of chosen family.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION:

AT HOME IN POST-9/11 FICTION

After 9/11, the *New York Times*, vital to reporting the attacks and the subsequent war, commissioned a series of advertisements that outlines the ongoing political crises through signifiers of American values. Published in November 2001, these five ads doctored Norman Rockwell's *Four Freedoms* paintings and, as Karen Engle points out, "enable identification with images of pre-9/11—pre-*collapsarian*—American innocence" (117). This innocence, moreover, materializes in the family. Take for instance, a renovation of Rockwell's *Freedom from Fear*, printed as a full-length page on November 2nd with a simple caption: "Make sense of our times." The only difference between the original and the updated painting is the newspaper; the 2001 version declares, "U.S. ATTACKED." A father grasps this paper as he affectionately—or perhaps worryingly—peers down at his sleeping children. While this advertisement aims to shows how being informed is a means of protecting and bolstering white, American family values, it also pinpoints the centrality of kinship and domesticity to the larger narrative surrounding the Age of Terror. For the *Times*, making sense of the new post-lapsarian era is a means of ordering the chaos that threatens the integrity of white American domesticity, the undergirding ideal that manifested the nation's destiny.

The more or less simple doctoring of the painting—repetition with difference—in other words, signals how media utilized family as a political tool to emphasize what was supposedly at stake after the attacks, and by extension the nation writ large. When America is attacked—the digitally altered piece tells us—so is its white, heteropatriarchal value system. Indeed, the Rockwell adaptations printed after 9/11 pair the terrorist attacks to other defining historical

moments. Take again *Freedom from Fear*. In changing the newspaper headline from reporting the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941 to the fall of the Twin Towers in 2001, the *Times* aligned both moments as defined by "sentiment, familial security, and the nation under threat" (Frascina 76).[1] This pairing collapses the historical timeline of violence across the 20th-century and into the 21st-century, and it underscores how narrative responses to such violence orbit family.[2] The home affords an intimate glimpse at how public acts of political violence are domesticated—how these acts are rendered inescapable because of their hypermediation and ubiquity. Naturally, then, violent cataclysms invade the home to renovate the existing family unit or to catalyze the creation of new kinship organizations. Family and home as a means to understand political violence is the principal concern of my project.

Ordering the Chaos takes up the relationship between political violence and family in post-9/11 fiction and shows how the September 11th attacks and the War on Terror alter kinship dynamics and understandings of home. In particular, it examines the way these acts of profound violence infiltrate the domestic sphere and altogether unmake the division between the public and the private. My definition of family and home as political entities in *Ordering the Chaos* is broad: Following thinkers like bell hooks, José Esteban Muñoz, and Ronak Kapadia, I define family and home as multitudinous, pluralistic organizations that thrive on understandings of belonging from and where radical, resistant politics can emanate.[3] The families and homes I parse here are queer in the sense that they move beyond the nuclear, blood-tied kith, and kin organizations people are born into; rather, the homes and families I wish to highlight are those that are constructed and cultivated by shared experiences, mutual ideologies, and a common desire to survive. The traumatic attacks and the inevitable imperial war that followed, I argue, compel the creation of new forms of family and domesticity. This is not to say, however, that the

nuclear family does not come under scrutiny here. In fact, it is central to my understanding of realms of belonging in the contemporary era because it underscores how traditional value systems stubbornly remain and communicate the inextricable interrelations between public and private, nation and kinship. I argue that family acts as an echo chamber that reflects the broader post-9/11 political crisis both in a larger national insistence on white heteronormativity but also in radical kinship organizations that resist the dominant strain of familial makeup. In addition, I claim that the home domesticates the public sociopolitical conditions, and the domicile's physical structure replicates the external political climate. Thus the constructions of the home and family are built with the tools forged by 9/11 and the war.

Accordingly, I maintain that forms of kinship showcase the implications of political violence and its relationship to nationhood. It is in this way that the family units I interrogate are echo chambers that reflect the state of the nation. Considering the family as microformations of the macro nation not only reveals the relationship between the two entities but also underscores how nationhood is built on principles of familyhood. The dynamics of the family, in other words, should, in the eyes of the nation, mirror the dynamics and ideologies of the state. In all, family uncovers the contours of nation's capitalist influence on the intimate sphere. Following 9/11 in the US especially, the quintessential family was deemed to be the paragon of white heteronormativity. Thus, I aim to show throughout that the narrative fixation on family and domesticity in post-9/11 novels carries with it the racist foundations that define the Age of Terror. The theme of home and kinship advance a sustained critique of the racial logics that formed in the wake of a marred skyline and never-ending war. The novels I study here, importantly, also de-exceptionalize 9/11 and the War on Terror as political and historic moments; instead, these novels treat the attacks and the war as part of a longitudinal history of

Western-imparted violence who strives to rupture the domestic foundations of intimate spheres. The unexceptional vantage approach I take in *Ordering the Chaos*, moreover, affords a viewpoint that looks from the bottom up; it allows for a look at 9/11 and the War on Terror's literary leverage through the perspectives of victims and innocent noncombatants. The representation of family in these books ultimately divulges the political charge intimate spheres carry because of their proximity to the state and allows for each book to be read as a historical novel in that they grapple with the ramifications of political upheaval.

While family narratives remain literary fixtures and have been since the advent of the written word, contemporary criticism and theorizations of forms of belonging after 9/11 have centered on white nuclear formulations. I emphasize the familial and domestic reordering, reorientating, and renovating processes that these two historical events have required, especially for families of color and non-American families. To put it another way, *Ordering the Chaos* deviates from a white, nuclear American gaze by considering queer and non-white dynamics of family and home. This reveals how political cataclysms alter the understandings of and compositional qualities of family and home for queer kinships and families of color differently than white nuclear families. My approach to 9/11 and the War on Terror therefore defines home and family as pushing back against Western, capitalist-colonial formations, because I privilege fiction about non-white and non-American domestic spheres and families and queerly constructed groups.[4]

Considering the aftermath of 9/11 and the War on Terror through the lens of family and domesticity in turn illuminates how dangerous political ideologies work within private arenas. These undergirding creeds reinforce capitalist-colonial ways of thinking that permit the deterritorializing invasion missions in Afghanistan and Iraq, and they construct the principles

that uphold the racially motivated attacks within the U.S. Scholars such as Anjuli Fatima Raza Kolb and Susana Araújo also read these post-9/11 "counterterror" ventures as colonial endeavors, but they offer panoramic readings of the consequences of the war. I break from these readings by zooming in on the intimate sphere and revealing how macro-level states use their policies and actions to maliciously enter the micro-level home and raze lives and livelihoods. Geopolitical concerns are domestic and familial concerns by virtue of who is affected. My methodological approach in *Ordering the Chaos*, therefore, is one of looking from the bottom up. By accentuating the effects on the intimate lives of innocent noncombatants, especially people of color whom the attacks and the war disproportionately affect, I underscore how dogmas of war and hegemonic power operate through domestic spheres. For instance, examining the complex, multi-racial and transracial chosen family at the center of Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* affords a look at how American exceptionalism enters the familial dynamic as a hereditary trait of sorts. Or considering how the queered relationship and domestic situation in Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* casts a glaring light onto state-driven anti-refugee tactics.

I am interested in expounding the intertwined relationships between nations, family, and home as they relate to 9/11 and the War on Terror. *Ordering the Chaos* follows the work of feminist, postcolonial, and queer studies scholars who reiterate the importance of recognizing intimacy's political resonances in the wake of global political upheaval—an upheaval, it must be said, that feels different abroad than it does domestically in the U.S. Thus, studying familial and domestic intimacies in the contemporary era "necessitates more sensuous ways of knowing and feeling that challenge the militarized imperatives of the state" (Kapadia 9). Ultimately, *Ordering the Chaos* articulates a gap in post-9/11 discourse by addressing the intimacies forged and lost as a result of the attacks and the War on Terror; in mining these kith and kin relations, I both limn

the stakes of such violence and accent how these collectives resist the hegemonic structures that seek to destroy them. The 9/11 family novels in this project pay attention to and center this inherent difference between American and specifically Pakistani, Iranian, and Chinese responses to profound acts of violence and how they deterritorialize and upset familial organizations. Thus, spanning another gap in post-September 11th literary criticism, I comparatively examine how cruel vies for power affect different kinship and domestic dynamics around the globe.

I. The 9/11 Family Novel

The works studied here, moreover, are what I term 9/11 family novels, books that center kinship and domestic life against the larger political backdrop of a post-9/11 world. While the immediate shock and literary representations of the attacks abated and became much more subtle—we see a particular shift in fiction that moves away from portraying the actual events—family and domesticity remained a thematic fixture. In other words, "family line and story line run in tandem" (Berman 1). Characters wander a new era looking for balance and clarity, and by and large they find it in the familiar. In this way, the 9/11 family novel, like Kristin J. Jacobson's notion of neodomestic fiction, is characterized by instability and uncertainty.[5] The reaches of the attacks and the War on Terror make precarious the intimate relationships and sites that comprise the domestic sphere. While family has been a fixture since the advent of storytelling, the family in relation to 9/11 has yet to be explored. Certainly, scholars such as Kathy Knapp have contextualized suburban fiction and domesticity in relation to the attacks, but an examination of the family unit itself and its contours as they are shaped by September 11th remains unexamined.

The 9/11 family novel situates itself within a tradition that is both old and new. It follows a trajectory set forth, in the English literary tradition, by the likes of Samuel Richardson in the 18th century, yet the external political frame around these novels defines the 21st century.[6] The

family novel, Yi-Ling Ru reminds us, "has long been present in the literary tradition, but the family novel did not evolve into a separate generic category until the beginning of the twentieth century" (99). Yet, despite its age-old lionized position, the family novel has fallen out of critical favor. Indeed, as Anna A. Berman writes, the very term "family novel" is rarely used nowadays, though writers in the 19th century routinely used it. I agree with Berman that it is high time to resurrect this lost term: "Recovering the lost history of the term family novel for English scholarship gives us a clearer picture of the conservative function family novels served up to the twentieth century and the way twentieth-century family novels built on this earlier tradition" (3). In so doing, we can clearly see not only how conservative (read: white heteropatriarchal) family units continue to prompt the literary scene but also how acts of political violence infiltrate and commandeer the domestic spheres in which family functions.

One of my central concerns in *Ordering the Chaos* is to show the relationship between family and domesticity. Reading family in relation to space accounts for how the attacks and the War on Terror both affectively and physically destabilize domestic and familial dynamics. The 9/11 family novel seamlessly interrelates the two supposedly separate spheres: what happens to the family affects the domestic sphere, and vice-versa. This inextricable co-dependency underlines how the two define each other. Conversely, Berman claims that the family novel and the domestic novel are "not synonymous," positing that the difference "is significant because the new focus on women and sexuality in English scholarship, which has deeply enriched our understanding of the English novel tradition, may at the same time have had the unintended effect of subsuming the family, treating it as a feature of the domestic sphere. Making the family subsidiary to a particular kind of space cut off other facets of the realist novel's treatment of family" (6). While I value the new critical focuses that Berman addresses here, I cannot divorce

family from domesticity. The spatial element of the home itself offers a material arena on which kindred dynamics play out.

The spatial relationship to family is integral to the 9/11 family novel in two analogous ways. First, the space of the home underscores the deterritorializing experiences of non-white families domestically after the attacks and during the invasion abroad. The familial dynamics of these novels are inherently molded by whether the space of the home exists, is jeopardized, or is revoked. Second, the home metaphorizes the nation and concerns itself quite literally with homeland security.[7] For instance, in the zombie novels I dissect, the home protects the indoor family unit from the external, foreign zombie threat. The domicile is weaponized into a barricade. Thus, *Ordering the Chaos* opposes Berman's understanding of family novels; the home, or lack thereof, is necessarily a part of familial dynamics. As I show throughout, the domestic sphere is the site of both belonging and exile, of racialized violence and transracial harmony. Home literalizes the waywardness of the post-9/11 era, both domestically (within the nation) and within the domestic sphere (the home). This instability drives the 9/11 family novel.

To stylistically echo the precarity 9/11 and the War kindled both nationally and domestically, these novels depend largely on analepsis, or flashback. This temporal instability, moving between past and the present and between pre- and post-9/11, not only periodizes the attacks, but it also signals the profound effects of the attacks and the War on domesticity. For example, in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (*Extremely Loud*), protagonist Oskar Schell grapples with the secondhand trauma of losing his father Thomas in the Towers; the novel follows Oskar as he looks for the lock to a mysterious key he finds in Thomas's closet. Foer constructs the novel around past moments between Oskar and Thomas and even farther back with Thomas's equally traumatized mother and father, survivors of the

Dresden Bombings. These flashbacks proffer both insight into the origins of the familial trauma, but, more importantly, they characterize how acts of political violence alter and shape the domestic sphere.

Moreover, analeptic moments as principal features in 9/11 family novels purports an understanding of character motivation as they relate to the domestic consequences of political tumult. As David Herman compellingly observes about analepsis, authors manipulate temporality and order "in a way that frames the present moment within a longer life-course that stretches back into characters' past and extends forward into their future, grounding what they do or fail to do in larger patterns of motivation—sets of interconnected reasons for acting—that would otherwise remain inaccessible" (72). In other words, temporal play in these novels promulgate why characters do what they do. But how does political violence factor into these motivations brought to light by temporal instability? Fatima Farheen Mirza's 2018 novel *A Place for Us* exemplifies how flashbacks inform character impulse. The novel follows an Indian Muslim family in California and their tribulations with each other and the nation at large. The 9/11 chapter begins with a disruption: told in present tense, the chapter unfolds with a fight between son Amar fighting his white classmates. The scene is filled with racist attacks typical in the wake of the attacks:

> "Look," someone says, "terrorist in a white shirt."
> …
> Amar is the one in white. …
> "Why don't you go back to your own country?" Brandon snarls.
> He stands to face them.
> "This *is* my country." (Mirza 111)

The present tense amplifies the tension and pinpoints a moment when both Amar and the reader recognize the racialized aftermaths of the attacks. Considering Harald Weinrich's notion of present tense as engagement, Kazunari Miyahara writes that in contemporary novels "when the

present tense is dominant in the tense-distribution of a certain passage, the passage as a whole is signifying to the reader that it should be read as an invitation to interactive discussion between the writer and the reader" (235). In other words, Mirza gears the reader to anticipate the emergence of post-9/11 racial tensions by encoding the scene with words that alert the reader to the novel's contemporaneity and impending effects on the family. Interestingly, Mirza chooses to divulge the attacks only after the kids fight at school, simply slipping into an analeptic mode with "It has been three days since September eleventh. That morning, Amar was almost ready for school… The [family] watched as the same image looped, and the newscasters repeated the same lines: Something devastating has happened" (115). The flashback to three days prior clarifies both Amar's fight and newfound changes to quotidian life for non-white Americans after 9/11. The analepsis, in other words, politically demarcates a before and after and the domestic implications of the here and now, of the post-9/11 age. *A Place for Us* positions September 11th in a flashback to highlight the present domestic tensions that plague the novel's central family, namely in that for Amar, political violence enters the domestic sphere and aligns with various other tribulations to unhome and render him placeless.

Placelessness is another key factor in the 9/11 family novel and is a theme that almost always manifests via racialized, exilic praxes at both the macro and micro levels of nation and community. Here, I follow Aparajita De's formulations of racialization after September 11th, particularly as it affects Brown and Black people: "the processes and experiences through which race becomes integrated as a default marker through attire, behavior, cultural and religious practices, an ascription through ethnographic, geopolitical, economic, religious, and immigration category ultimately segregating or integrating, classifying, or (dis-) identifying a group or community over others" (xi). De also notes that "racialization works in silencing the

heterogeneity of identities and experiences while pointing out the intercommunal tensions among racial and cultural identities due to an uncomplicated representation within a primarily white supremacist heterosexist ideology" (xii). In the wake of 9/11, writers of color addressed how this dangerous racialization swayed the pedestrian qualities of the now post-9/11 world. It should not be a surprise that many of these authors relate a sense of instability via displacement or unbelonging in spaces once heralded as home. Take for instance Changez in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist,* who, following the attacks, is racialized as dangerous and unbelonging in the office after he grows a beard. "'I don't know what's up with the beard, but I think it's making you Mister Popular around here,'" Changez's colleague tells him. While I explore this at length in Part I, for now I want to show how this brief scene revokes and denies Changez a place of solidarity and belonging, despite following his American Dream. Thus, racialization limns people of color as dangerous via odious, Orientalist stereotypes that ultimately seize both a physical home and the affective quotient of belonging.

I contend that racialization—operating under a logic of monoliths and buttressed by legal and social strictures such as the War on Terror, the PATRIOT Act, "See Something, Say Something" campaigns, President Trump's so-called "Muslim Ban," and more—uproots people of color from their home. As I explore in Part I with Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *Exit West* and then again later in Part III with Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* and Porochista Khakpour's *Sons and Other Flammable Objects*, kinship is partly contingent on home and places of belonging. Importantly, however, this loss of home does not relate only to Brown writers; as my readings of Colson Whitehead and Ling Ma attest, Black and Asian writers also confront the quest to find home after the attacks. Thus 9/11 family novels recall the process of deterritorialization and disillusion of the family through an attention to race, history, and state-

driven mandates that find their way into the innermost intimate circles. Clearly then, 9/11 family novels highlight the erasure of public-private dividing lines for non-white subjects by showing the kinship unit as an echo chamber. Global politics enter the domestic, familial sphere and attempt to disrupt the way of life, often succeeding and further marginalizing minoritized populations.

While the elimination of this boundary is not new to literature, post-9/11 fiction, especially the 9/11 family novel, portrays the phenomenon as a kind of domestic renovation. The family and indeed the home itself is forced to modify when the borders of the public and private are expunged: authors take care to underscore affective shifts within relationships and to illuminate physical changes to the home itself. In this way, the obliterating power of political violence speaks to and shapes domesticity. For instance, in *Exit West*, domestic terrorism in an unnamed city forces couple Nadia and Saeed to adopt both a romantic and fraternal relationship and to renovate their living spaces. Or in Ma's zombie novel *Severance*, home is so adulterated and threatened by the undead that the characters transform capitalist signifiers into domiciles and the personal becomes the public via shifts in interior design. Renovations of family and home demonstrate the intimate stakes of political violence and the lengths through which innocent noncombatants must go to achieve even a semblance of safety and stability.

Feminist scholars have addressed the need to renovate the home, but scholarship has yet to frame these domestic redesigns in light of the post-9/11 era. Jacobson, for example, examines how "the home's shifting ideal architectures reveal entrenched and changing ideas about the social construction of the American family, particularly regarding gender, race, class, (dis)ability, and sexuality" (78). My interrogation of post-9/11 family novels extends Jacobson's helpful formulations by considering domesticity in the Age of Terror outside of the U.S. and by

triangulating how the attacks and War on Terror ideologies construct kinship and domestic practices. These novels reveal how external political happenings incur profound internal change on the domestic sphere. September 11th and the War on Terror participate in renovating and redesigning principles of belonging and togetherness through a call to alter living spaces and interpersonal relations.[8] In 9/11 family novels, this impetus to renovate domestic life after the attacks originates from the desire for familial reunification. While novels such as *Netherland* do present a familial harmony after domestic renovation, others do not. Jacobson writes that renovation speaks to the ideal home and domestic practices, and while this certainly is true to an extent, in the context of 9/11 and the War on Terror, we see that futile renovations do not offer sound structural protection from the outside world. The ineffectiveness of home makeovers after September 11th, as in *Zone One*, suggests that the domestic realm, the site of paradigmatic American virtue, cannot overcome the tenuous and ubiquitous material and existential threat of terror.

Beyond the obvious emphasis on home and family, what Richard Gray calls a "domesticated crisis," the 9/11 family novel recalls a racialized characteristic that harkens back to the origins of domestic fiction in the U.S. (30).[9] The political and traumatic jostles in the wake of the September 11th attacks, I argue, influenced the composition of the home in these novels, similar to the way American exceptionalism and expansionism in the 19th century urged the literary scene to echo the virtues that arise from nation building. The domestic novel emerges from beliefs about nationhood and establishing a domestic sphere that both mirrored and augmented the settlement of a white, Christian U.S. These homes, in other words, resisted non-white "foreigners" who could upset the picturesque Protestant American home: "America's shifting demographics and national borders in the nineteenth century simultaneously expanded

the home and produced anxiety about the 'foreign' bodies that were newly incorporated into the national union" (Jacobson 27). Thus, on the one hand, home operates as a reflection of the virtues of expansion and Manifest Destiny, and on the other, it reinforces a barrier that "expelled the foreign within," as Amy Kaplan notes (19). In this way, Kaplan suggests, the feminine space of the home is an empire functioning under what she terms Manifest Domesticity. This ideology strives "to expand female influence beyond the home and the nation, and simultaneously to contract woman's sphere to that of policing domestic boundaries against the threat of foreignness" (28). In other words, an imperial creed undergirds the domestic realm, and an anxiety about an unstable white core characterizes the domestic novel.

This racist worry features prominently in the 9/11 family novel as well, divulging a fear of decentered whiteness characterizes literary history: authors sketch a white domesticity that fears the "foreign" subject encroaching on intimate spheres. For instance, Suzanne and Xerxes's relationship in *Sons and Other Flammable Objects* is met with resistance from Suzanne's parents. Upon learning about Xerxes's Iranian origins, Suzanne's mother Eleanor worries about his potential to be Muslim: "'Then, so, one has to ask, what is he … is he. …" (Khakpour 244). It is telling that Eleanor bring this up. As matriarch of this upper-class American family, she ensures that an outside threat, especially after 9/11, does not disrupt her space. The hesitation signals not only her Islamophobic apprehensions but also the threat non-Christian and non-white people supposedly pose on her WASP family. This example, like many others I analyze throughout *Ordering the Chaos*, demonstrates that 9/11's reaches extend far beyond geopolitical bounds. Rather, the attacks and their ramifications barge into intimate spheres and contribute to the construction and maintenance of the echo chamber domicile. The white family in this instance reflects the nation after the blow 9/11 dealt: afraid of the Brown other threatening to

disrupt their way of life.[10] Thus the 9/11 family novel uncovers how the racial logics of the Age of Terror go beyond the macro-scale imperiality after the fall of the towers and the start of the war. It shows instead how the very same ideologies inform the micro, familial and domestic makeups. Both definitions of "domestic" mirror each other—of the nation and of the home—to reiterate that the calculus of Manifest Domesticity still operates today.

These imperial considerations in turn reveal a gendered element of the 9/11 family novel that speaks to the thematic emphasis on an unstable domestic patriarchy. While much domestic fiction is traditionally considered a feminine genre, the 9/11 family novel is not necessarily so. As the corpus I study shows, male writers also question the family and the domestic sphere after 9/11 as a means to stabilize the ground beneath them and to gain a semblance of security after the nation—an enlarged reflection of the domestic sphere—fell "to her knees" (Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* 73). These male-centered narratives, moreover, suppose a precarity aimed toward the white heteronormative domestic realm and its trappings; the attacks destabilize and make vulnerable the security of the patriarchy. To put it another way, the overwhelming masculine response to the attacks capture what Elizabeth S. Anker calls "the domestic in jeopardy" and a "narcissistic American self-reference" (464). Post-9/11 literature's gravitation towards male crises and imperiled nationhood, Anker avers, exhibits a "perceived menace to paternity (equating fatherhood with patria or homeland) and corresponding onus to secure the threatened patrilineal bequest, thus figuring the sanctity of the father–son bond as the essence of what 9/11 jeopardized" (464). Anker makes clear that cultural supposition of a jeopardized *patria* is foolhardy. Patriarchal ideology undergirds the very imperial endeavors that catalyzed the attacks and fuel the ongoing War on Terror. Thus the 9/11 family novel's representation of

an endangered white American heteropatriarchal domestic realm reiterates capitalistic ideals that define the home after the attacks.

It makes sense then that the majority of popular 9/11 family novels are by white American men whose works inure a strange notion that whiteness was threatened in the attacks. The popularity of books by the likes of Jonathan Safran Foer, Jonathan Franzen, Joseph O'Neill, Jay McInerny, Don DeLillo, Ian McEwan, and Ken Kalfus, to name a few, underscores how white masculinity, the disillusion of family, and Western conceptualizations of kinship center 9/11 fiction. Therefore, my approach with the 9/11 family novel, while reflecting on the contributions these novels and novelists make to the contemporary literary scene, decenters the white maleness of the era. Following Anker's idea of "narcissistic American self-reference," my intervention in the field with *Ordering the Chaos* also suggests that 9/11 was not as cataclysmic as perceived for non-white people and nations. In so doing, I want to restructure the dimensions of 9/11 literature and to undo the white, male-dominated discourses about the so-called Age of Terror. The 9/11 family novel consequently unveils and unmakes understandings about the cultural aftermath of September 11th and the War on Terror by centering non-white and women authors who express variegated understandings of the modern literary scene and the attacks' resonating influence on the domestic sphere.

In a sense, the 9/11 family novel follows Jacobson's conceptualization of the contemporary legacy of domestic fiction; she claims that neodomestic fiction is "post-1980 novels that exhibit unconventional domestic topographies" and "represents and promotes the politics of instability and heterogeneity" (3, 4). Importantly, neodomestic fiction marks the shift in domesticity because male authors are also included as writers of domestic fiction, rather than afforded their own genre in suburban fiction. Jacobson rightly suggests that works set in the

suburbs, such as Richard Yates's *Revolutionary Road* or John Cheever's stories, belong in the category of domestic fiction because "modern suburban literature's hallmark masculine irony and domestic alienation connects to earlier American literary traditions, linking suburban literature to both the nineteenth century's antidomestic male and domestic female literary traditions" (119). Neodomestic novels from the 20th century like Richard Ford's *Independence Day* or John Updike's *Rabbit, Run* propose that this domestic alienation arises from the trap of suburbia, where home is first rendered a haven and then a snare. Conversely, my extension of this compelling contribution to domestic fiction studies comes from a place of specific historic upheaval. September 11th effectuated a masculine attempt to regain control of the home and family.

While the shifting gendered dimensions of domestic fiction represent a revision in contemporary understandings of domesticity and family life where the separation of genders is blurred in the space of the home, it does not elide the rampant twinned racism and sexism that continues to define post-9/11 America. The most popular 9/11 family novels—those that are given critical attention more than others—remain by and about white men. Take for instance Don DeLillo's popular 2007 *Falling Man*, a 9/11 family novel that hinges on familial reunification. Keith Neudecker works in the Twin Towers when the planes strike, and the book follows his journey reconciling and working through the trauma. Though he is estranged from his wife Lianne, after he escapes the towers covered in dust, dazed, and confused, Kyle finds his way back to her and their son Justin. Towards the end of the novel, attempting to reconcile differences with Lianne and heal their family, Keith pleads,

> "But then there's the other thing and that's the family. This is the point I want to make, that we need to stay together, keep the family going. Just us, three of us, long-term, under the same roof, not every day of the year or every month but with the idea that we're permanent. Times

> like these, the family is necessary. Don't you think? Be together, stay together? This is how we live through the things that scare us half to death." (214)

DeLillo pinpoints here how family attempts to order the chaos and make normal a world that has altogether shifted. Keith exceptionalizes family and falls back on traditional American ideals that provide a semblance of stability. The reiteration of the white heteronormative family, moreover, also mirrors the digital alteration of Rockwell's "Freedom from Fear" I mention above. In this way, too, DeLillo's novel echoes a numerous works about the aftermath of 9/11 on the nuclear family, namely Jay McInerny's *The Good Life*, in which a middle-class woman helps a rich white survivor of the attacks, spawning a tumultuous affair that boringly concludes with the end of the triste and the respective families reuniting. Despite terror and national security, the narratives argue, family remains as fixture of American values. As President Bush stated in his address to the nation on 9/11, "Terrorist attacks can shake the foundations of our biggest buildings, but they cannot touch the foundation of America. These acts shatter steel, but they cannot dent the steel of American resolve" (*American Rhetoric*). In this way, *Falling Man*'s Neudecker family functions as a microcosm of the larger American "family." This counter to the nation-as-family is a simple metaphor that carries with it the heavy implications of straight, white nationhood. Reading Anne McClintock's estimation of this age-old metaphor, Alexandra W. Schultheis posits that "the family metaphor provides a convenient, seemingly 'natural' model for reconciling violent historical change" (6).[11] When Keith implores Lianne that they stay "permanent," he reveals his selfish desire for stability despite her clear reluctance and urges for the re-establishment of the patriarchal ideal. Thus, the 9/11 family novel emboldens the cultural desire to reinvigorate white heteronormative perceptions of kinship. The literary landscape, at least in the example of DeLillo, participates in exceptionalizing kinship to reiterate a national

messaging that inaugurates a new era of pre- and post-9/11 told through the frame of intimate relations and domestic concerns.

The periodization that typifies most 9/11 family novels replicates a historical whitewashing that negates the experiences of victims abroad who suffer at the hands of imperial conquests after the attacks. Periodizing 9/11 reiterates an "us versus them" racialized binary framework that plagues the contemporary era. Concretized and reinforced by political leaders to justify imperial undertakings, this racist vie for hegemonic power seeps into the social realms that feature domestic spheres. In short, to say that 9/11 "changed everything" is to obviate, eschew, and remove the experiences of innocent noncombatants, thereby making the white experience of the attacks and the war the default in both a geopolitical and a social atmosphere. This process of erasing the non-white perspective marshals critiques of canonization that reify imperial ideologies that make up literary landscapes.[12]

While critics and the literary marketplace tend to favor literature by white men, especially as related to September 11th, the 9/11 family novel simultaneously exposes the racial politics of these upper-class white narratives and how that ideological construction of family informs American exceptionalism and international relations. Historicizing the conflict abroad in the context of adjacent instances of state-driven cruelty affords an intimate look at the domestic ravages of the imperial missions in the Middle East and parts of South Asia; doing so, moreover, relays the perpetual imperial vies of power that deterritorialize innocent noncombatants. For instance, *Burnt Shadows* by Kamila Shamsie goes to great lengths (echoed in its maximalist mode and temporal and geographic range) to underscore how the War on Terror is in fact a method of warfare that is part of an imperial tradition that principally seeks to uproot familial life. Shamsie's expansive narrative moves across time to highlight the intimate consequences of

specific Western-forged conflicts: the bombing of Nagasaki (1945), the Partition of India (1947), the Cold War in Pakistan and Afghanistan (1982), and, finally, the War on Terror (1983). In tracking how these historical events sculpt the central transnational and transracial constructed kinship group, Shamsie demonstrates how the Global South has endured militarily enforced deterritorializing pursuits long before the Western conceptualization of the Age of Terror began.

Therefore, I propound a reading of post-9/11 literature that decenters history away from Western gazes and accentuates the ordering collectives that often emerge from imperial chaos. *Burnt Shadows* certainly challenges the periodizing tendencies of post-9/11 literature and positions the War not as an anomaly that responded to the terrorist attacks but instead is an imperial endeavor that typifies Western history and tradition. Shamsie's novel also considers the kindred tethers sewn to resist that history and tradition: constructed kinship as a resistant counterculture. Thus, to be plain, not all 9/11 family novels emphasize the white heteropatriarchy. As I show throughout *Ordering the Chaos*, non-white and queer familial formations also necessarily resist the overarching national desire for straight white families. In this way, I follow Ronak Kapadia's notion of insurgent aesthetics, which focuses on "the creativity and fugitive beauty that emanate from the shadows of terrible violence incited by forever war" (9). From the cinders arises a radical politics of togetherness that challenges the very ideological formations that inform 9/11 and the War.

II. The Novelistic Appeal of 9/11, the War on Terror, and Family

The fiction I examine in *Ordering the Chaos* was published between 2005 and 2018, and they maps the generic and thematic developments of the post-9/11 family novel. This body of work tries to figure out what the attacks and the war mean, where they came from, and how to reconcile such a tumultuous present. For instance, *Extremely Loud, Netherland* and *The*

Reluctant Fundamentalist use the fall of the Towers and the start of the war to mark a new era. Toeing the line of periodization, these novels treat the terrorist attacks as a historical rupture and demonstrate that "the need to understand, the need to 'place' the event, is shared by victim and mere bystander" (Versluys 4). Moreover, we might call them pseudo detective novels, attempting to unearth and study the mystery of uncertainty and unpredictability that 9/11 represents, because they "[mediate] the direct experience of the terrorist attacks and [facilitate] their ethical-historical contextualization" (Banita 8). To understand 9/11 and the effects it has on his family, Oskar in *Extremely Loud* looks for clues; Hans in *Netherland* searches for answers about his familial collapse through a cricket bat; and Changez in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* quits America to concretize his political ideologies. It is therefore necessary to also consider how all the books depend on the past to understand the present. Analepsis clarifies the histories of families and nations in these novels, though only some effectively historicize and contextualize the U.S.'s imperial role. Thus, as I show, aesthetics provide a political avenue towards critical insight, and family operates as a porous barrier through which history's angel may look back through and look forward to. These intimate effects of political cataclysms across history illuminate the rhetorics and aesthetics of violence.

The novel form itself reiterates this relationship between history and aesthetics. Scholars such as Versluys, Banita, Martin, and others have all questioned the contemporary state and qualities of the novel, and rehashing the profuse debates here is beyond the scope of this project. But I want to briefly address the privilege of the novelistic form in 9/11 literature. Criticism generally agrees that the "9/11 novel" is favored; we rarely, if at all, hear about the "9/11 poetry collection" or the "9/11 play," though they certainly exist.[13] Why do does literature gravitate towards the novel to represent the attacks? Versluys posits that the novel "entails the denial of

the reductive logic of terrorism, the black-and-white ideological view that legitimates indiscriminate violence" (17). The novel form, he continues, encourages authors to embrace "the viewpoint of the Other" and "employ an ethics that gainsays binary thinking" (17).[14] I suggest that the novel form offers a unique opportunity for metaphor and verisimilitude that, simply, other forms do not. The novel affords a stylistic and thematic freedom that cannot be replicated, for instance, on a stage.

That is, the 9/11 novel utilizes stylistic gymnastics to reflect the instability and anxiety prominent after the attacks. A case in point is *Zone One*, in which zombies metaphorize the post-9/11 dread of invasion and instability, and the third-person narration presents how family participates in constructing protagonist Mark Spitz's perceptions of the city. Khakpour's *Sons* also adduces this; several perspectives color how post-9/11 America reflects Iran during the Islamic Revolution. Novels, Sarah Wasserman eloquently puts it, "push and pull us in two directions to show us that, while permanence is a fiction, the past cannot simply be discarded" (243). Thus by representing through form and style the instability of the contemporary age brought on by such political violence, the 9/11 novel ultimately reveals not only the power narrative fiction has over the zeitgeist and how we still depend on novels to parse the waywardness and virulence of the present, but it also demonstrates how to meaningfully acknowledge the narratives of innocent noncombatants whose lives are bereft of loved ones.

Like September 11th, the family unit and domestic concerns fit the novel form as well. As I mentioned above—and as scholars such as Nancy Armstrong, Andrew Hoberek, and Valerie Sweeney Prince have argued—narratives often hinge on the interrelation between and histories of family and home. These novelistic concerns, moreover, reveal a political motive. For instance, Sweeney Prince writes that "[t]he search for justice, opportunity, and liberty that characterized

the twentieth century for African Americans can be described as a quest for home" (xii). Thus home and political and institutional oppression become intertwined: home, in Sweeney Prince's estimation, curtails the terror of racial discrimination. The novel form provides ample space to tease out this twinned thematic-political agenda. But the novel is an ample form for familial narratives also because its architecture compels multiple strands of plot, numerous characters, and varying points of view. The novel form weaves a complex tapestry that mimics the dynamics and complexities of the family itself. As Ru puts it, "the family novel's narrative form has a horizontal structure which interweaves multiple conflicts between members of a group as well as of different units and generations" (105). Therefore, I privilege the novel in *Ordering the Chaos*; as a form, it best suites the political charges the war and the attacks brought onto the intimate sphere.

III. The Structure

Ordering the Chaos is comprised of four parts, each with two chapters. The eight sections not only map a trajectory of post-9/11 fiction by considering how family remains thematically central to contemporary literature, but they also underscore how post-9/11 fiction necessarily critiques and admonishes hegemonic vies of power via private spheres. In that way, *Ordering the Chaos* highlights how fiction politically works toward dismantling disenfranchising and deterritorializing projects of terror.[15] Part I, "Terror at Home," examines *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) and *Exit West* (2017) by Mohsin Hamid. Taking up the anti-Brown Islamophobia that defines the post-9/11 era, I argue that both domestically and abroad, legally and socially indorsed exilic practices operate as a means of revoking familial and domestic stability. Using Moustafa Bayoumi's theorizations of War on Terror culture, I claim that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* shows how imperial ideologies that fuel American imperial missions

abroad work at home as well. In this domestic and workplace novel, 9/11 and the beginning of the War on Terror pry apart the central relationship between Pakistani Changez and American Erica and Changez's family abroad. These historical events and the rampant social resistance to Brownness, moreover, urge him to return to Pakistan. In this way, I argue that War on Terror ideologies are ubiquitous and frame the United States' image of itself. The calls for unity after the attacks, the novel reveals, are canards that ironically disclose who indeed is considered part of the nation. Changez's repatriation to Pakistan demonstrates the exilic properties of War on Terror culture; legal sanctions like the PATRIOT Act and social resistance to Brownness revoke any sense of belonging. My examination of *Exit West* centers how these exilic dogmas create and cultivate refugee subjectivities in the Greater Middle East. Domestic terror and state-driven exilic exercises destroy the unnamed city where protagonists Nadia and Saeed fall in love. The horror of the street disrupts the sanctity of the home through egresses; windows and doors, barriers between the public and the private, become useless, forcing a re-dynamization of the familial and domestic realms. Both the interpersonal relationships that make up the family and the physical, material features of the transient homes Nadia and Saeed occupy change as the political violence reaches a fever pitch and bombards the home. The queering of the domicile and the family in *Exit West* ultimately uncovers how terrorism, from the state writ large and from social sentiments, jeopardizes intimate spheres.

The material concerns in *Exit West* become more central in Part II, "Familial Fracture," where I examine *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005) by Jonathan Safran Foer and *Netherland* (2008) by Joseph O'Neill. I contend that these novels represent the trauma of family-cleaving political violence through objects. Using material culture studies, I claim that things in these 9/11 family novels act as reflections and miniatures to mirror and uncover the disillusion of

the public and private realms. I first examine how things that make up a home metaphorize the violent acts that mar kinship structures in Foer's novel. The object world and the materiality of the novel itself—its structure and postmodern genre blending—recall the losses faced in 9/11 and the 1945 Dresden Bombings. I argue that *Extremely Loud*'s style locates the intimacy of violence on the central family's dynamics and history renders the past inescapable in the present. The aftermath of national and familial fracture materially appears in *Netherland* through cricket equipment. Looking at dualities embedded in things, I maintain that these objects potentialize a temporary queer kinship and call attention to a post-9/11 exceptionalist politics. After his wife and son leave New York, protagonist-narrator Hans cultivates a transient queer family with Chuck Ramkisson, the Trinidadian captain of the Staten Island Cricket Club. Cricket bats and balls encode a gay relationship between Hans and Chuck, but at the same time, these things and the cricket pitch itself resonate with colonial and exceptionalist endeavors that define and privilege the Western world. Ultimately, the materiality of cricket amalgamates family and nation to underscore the precarity of post-9/11 life by potentializing queer liberation, but it simultaneously represents the colonial-capitalist projects that reify heteronormative nuclear family.

Part III, "Familial Sagas," broadens the scope and looks Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* (2009) and Porochista Khakpour's *Sons and Other Flammable Objects* (2007). I suggest that 9/11 family narratives incorporate the histories of other times and places to indict American exceptionalist and imperial endeavors. The families in these two novels carry the burden of what I call a long historical timeline of violence. Beginning with *Burnt Shadows*, I argue that the chosen family at the novel's heart beats with pain of Western imperial violence: the unnecessary bombing of Nagasaki, the India-Pakistan Partition, the Cold War, and the War

on Terror cleave the multi-national, multi-racial family, thereby proving that such hegemonic nations gain control abroad via the control and destruction of kinship and domiciles. My reading of *Sons*, moreover, similarly locates how a history of violence rests on the shoulders of families. I suggest that the Iranian Revolution and 9/11 each other in their relationship to falling. Using falling as a conceptual framework to read the novel, I posit that scenes of tumbling, cascading, and crashing bind the demise of the nuclear family to political falls. In this way, instability links the micro and the macro to reveal the inextricability of family and nation. The two novels in Part III oppose each other, namely in their endings. *Burnt Shadows* sees the fall of the decades-long kin group, and *Sons* sees the reunification of the nuclear family. This difference highlights post-9/11 culture's indecision about how politics treats family: does national strife bring family together or tear it apart?

Part IV, "Domestic Horror," moves away from realism and considers zombies as representations of a post-9/11 invasion anxiety. I argue that the undead recall 9/11 by acting as symbols of capital-colonial violence and uncover the political implications of the attacks. This final part demonstrates how zombie fictions urge a reconceptualization of family and home beyond nuclear formations. Thus both *Zone One* (2011) by Colson Whitehead and *Severance* (2018) by Ling Ma utilize white heteronormative families to mirror and critique the exceptional and capital-colonial ideologies that brought about 9/11 in the first place. *Zone One* sees an attempt to re-exceptionalize the white nuclear family at the end of the world, and the novel's grim conclusion undergirds how the politicization of heteronormative kinship is futile and ridiculous. *Severance* uses the working (un)dead to accentuate how the capital-colonial nexus of the Western world contributes to reifying the white nuclear family. But the ending of *Severance,* I argue, is hopeful. From the ruins of the future arises a revelatory potential to start anew with

anti-capital and anti-colonial understandings of kinship. This post-family formulation urges that kinship amidst political chaos can be sites of beginning and becoming, of organizations where limitless possibility towards meaningful, inclusive collectivity emerge. Finally, the conclusion delineates the political limitations of the 9/11 family novel, especially in light of the 20th anniversary of the attacks and the war and the ongoing violent acts that allow for the disillusion of the public-private boundary. Not only does the post-9/11 literary landscape still largely eclipse the material effects people of color face abroad and domestically, but fiction itself is also a lackluster avenue toward dismantling the capitalist-colonial dogmas that continue to terrorize and deterritorialize innocent noncombatants. Fiction cannot save the world, but it can encourage forging radical kinships and collectivities that resist, demolish, and abolish the perilous ideologies that fuel the world.

CHAPTER II: DOMESTIC TERROR:

LOST HOMES AND WAR ON TERROR CULTURE

After mistakenly imprisoned for terrorism charges, Chuck tells his mother from a New York City phonebooth, "'I want to come home, Ma'" (Naqvi 262). This desire is understandable given the circumstances for Brown men after 9/11: wrongful convictions, emotional and physical assault, and a pitiful feeling of unbelonging abound. H. M. Naqvi's *Home Boy* speculates on the meaning of home for three Pakistani men after September 11th. Such negotiations of home and family ventriloquize the growing animosity toward Brown people in twenty-first-century America. Part I looks at this rift in Pakistani-British-American writer Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *Exit West*, two novels that dissect the manifestations of terror at home and ask, What happens when national violence unseats your place within the home and within your family? I argue that political violence emblematic of a War on Terror culture—ranging from military invasion to the creation of a refugee state—unsettles intimate circles, forcing exile or dynamic change. This ecology of hate, furthermore, combines a litany of methods to bar and deterritorialize Brown people by legislative means (the PATRIOT Act) or technological advancements (the shift from hand-to-hand combat to drone warfare). But the backlash against such exilic ideologies is necessarily pervading too.

In response, activists and artists alike combat the brazen anti-Brown, often Islamophobic sentiments. One resistant method is to tell their side of the story, a literary depiction of the non-white author's experience of 9/11 and the War on Terror. Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* addresses the racialized attempts to chop the Brown branch from the nation's family tree. To do so, he spotlights the interwoven politics of family, nation, and home. My

analysis of the novel broadens the definition of family, embracing any assemblage where one feels a sense of belonging and inclusion. In this first section of the chapter, I trace how three family structures in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* highlight how protagonist Changez's different adopted families define and redefine the notion of home. September 11th influences the corporate, national, and nuclear families that dictate Changez's life, and the attacks reveal America's racially exclusionary practices. The antagonistic reactions to the terrorist attack, as depicted in the novel through familial ramifications, clarify America's imperial and exclusionary ideology—that the War on Terror culture works domestically as well as internationally. In turn, family becomes a political scope that magnifies post-9/11 American imperial endeavors and racial politics. Thus, I ultimately claim that the novel's familial aspects locate borders between the public and the private spheres, determining who is part of the family and who is not. This reading of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* offers a look at how macro and microscopic familial organizations feign an inclusive liberalism; nevertheless, in reality, especially as they recall 9/11 and the War on Terror, these families cast members out, unveiling a racialized praxis that reverberates with the exclusionary practices of empire.

Yet 9/11 and the War on Terror's damning ramifications do not stop at exile from the United States; these violent moments progenerate a global refugee society that is permanently unsettled. As I show in section two on *Exit West*, subjective notions of family remain in jeopardy as the War on Terror continues to morph, hurtling inward toward the home. Domestic features in *Exit West* operate as channels of escape and harm. Doors and windows communicate political violence for protagonists Nadia and Saeed, and in turn, the novel's central family reconstitutes itself and its practices as they adopt refugee subjectivities and leave their terrorist-run home. If, as I argue about *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, 9/11 and the War on Terror reinforce American

borders through exilic practices and a removal from different family units, then the refugee crisis depicted in *Exit West* presents a contradictory picture of global movement that not only redefines normative ideas of family and home but also signals a new vision of borders and policing. Thus, I claim that *Exit West* fixates on abolishing boundaries between nations and public-private divisions through egresses; yet, at the same time, it privileges the drone as a War on Terror policing technology that reassembles these same borders, particularly in the refugee communities, to uncover a refugee anxiety reminiscent of a terrorist anxiety. The section about *Exit West* deviates from the family slightly to emphasize how the architectural integrity of the domestic sphere influences the intimacies housed within.[16] *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *Exit West* both centralize the interrelated politics of family, home, and nation. Hamid makes clear that home is where family is, but national politics disturb the peace, uprooting and unsettling notions of intimacy and belonging.

I. Denying Home: Families, Exile, and 9/11 in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

Possibly set in a *dhabba* in Lahore, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is a novel-length monologue from radical academic Changez to his nameless American interlocutor. Changez's story recalls his time at Princeton and his job at a small valuation firm called Underwood Samson.[17] He looks back on his relationship with a white woman named Erica who struggles with depression after the death of her childhood sweetheart Chris. The narrative takes a sharp turn after 9/11 shakes the world, and a racial anxiety hurtles forward. As the War on Terror begins to rage, the protagonist-narrator recognizes a shift in his reception in various circles. At the same time, Changez worries about his family in Pakistan and his relationship with Erica, underscoring how Brown people negotiated the personal and political in America when the war was "over there". After sabotaging his position at Underwood Samson and after Erica's suicide,

amidst the mounting racist pressures, Changez returns to Pakistan where his anti-American rhetoric as a lecturer catches the eye of the CIA. The narrative leads the reader to believe that the American interlocutor is an agent with a hit on Changez. The ambiguous ending between Changez and the American highlights the never-ending clash of the East and West, exacerbated by 9/11.

The novel's formal and thematic innovation speaks to its critical response; scholars examine an array of subjects, interrogating the book's form, agenda, and treatment of global calamity. But in its stylistic characteristics and political considerations about 9/11 and the War on Terror, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is about family. Scholars have yet to approach the book from a familial lens—one that I argue throughout this project is a methodology to grasp a work's political elements. Simply put, reading the family as a political entity itself affords an understanding of large-scale political actions and values. Indeed, the novel's most obvious stylistic choice—the monologic structure—relates to the political traits of family. Calling the American interlocutor "you" and "sir" throughout, Changez in turn addresses the reader as well. We (the reader) become the you (the American), intimately bonding with Changez over a meal and a long conversation. In so doing, the reader/American becomes implicated in Changez's exile from his various families. Hence, Hamid entrenches family down to the most miniscule narrative elements. Family glues the novel's larger pieces together, and for Changez, family means putting down roots and belonging to a nation. His time at Princeton and employment at Underwood Samson are predicated on his family's finances and social stature; his relationship with Erica is defined by a familial love; his anger with America and the War on Terror burgeons from concern for his family abroad. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, with its panoply of themes and intricacies, always goes back to family.

To that extent, Hamid positions family against a tumultuous backdrop of the early 21st century to depict a specifically human aspect to an inhuman political moment. Events like 9/11 oftentimes, by virtue of their enormity, mask subjective ramifications, especially abroad. I zoom in on the intimate to uncover how a macro history that privileges white American narratives impacts Brown communities whose perception of the prosaic is clouded with the bullets, drones, and bombs of the Forever War. While *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* works within a literary tradition of Muslims at home in America, it differs by fusing formal qualities and history to resist the dominant discourse about Pakistanis in post-9/11 America. In that way, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is akin to *Home Boy* (H.M. Naqvi) and *Home Fire* (Kamila Shamsie), novels that also concentrate on the domestic impact of post-9/11 Islamophobia.

I extend Moustafa Bayoumi's idea of War on Terror culture, a staple of which is anti-Muslim sentiment. Bayoumi considers the conflict as an ecology of racist praxis that works internationally and domestically. Within the borders of the United States, moreover, the culture of the War on Terror violently excludes Muslim people. This Islamophobic culture "relies on excessive secrecy, differential rights, innovative forms of racism, expanded executive power, and permanent war" (19). Whereas Bayoumi examines the large-scale ramifications of the Muslim American experience, I concentrate on how the War on Terror culture functions within the family—how that reprehensible culture manifests within the supposedly sanctimonious realms of comfort and peace. Specifically, in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the War on Terror's familial culture shifts national and familial acceptances after 9/11. Race becomes an entry ticket to join collectives, which in turn reify national exclusionary politics. Therefore, the War on Terror's logic in Hamid's novel uncovers how the family adjusts, either to resist or succumb to exclusion. The domestic sphere fundamentally, though reluctantly, changes. My analysis spotlights this

post-9/11 culture's ubiquity: no sphere or person is untouched. It is my hope that in approaching the War on Terror culture through a familial account, we can begin to see the human consequences of an inhumane predominant logic that enacts a racialized praxis of exclusion against a counterfeit backdrop of national familial fealty.

In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, War on Terror logic enters the home and speaks to a history of imperial deterritorialization and how that imperial calculus operates in America. Changez's home in Lahore reeks with colonial residue—stubborn reminders of a traumatic past that begins to return during the War on Terror. The buildings are "in varying states of disrepair—which date to the British era and function geographically and architecturally as a link between the ancient and contemporary parts of our city" (Hamid 170). Changez's worries about his home—which is pervasively in jeopardy—are understandable. Yet, this imperial violence in the Pakistani domestic sphere crops up in America too. Changez's feelings of difference escalate after 9/11 when the threat of national incrimination by virtue of religion and race looms as largely as the empty space of the Twin Towers. Such precarity is what Rajini Srikanth observes about the contemporary Brown experience, blaming media outlets for a "disregard of the abuse and racially motivated attacks suffered by many South Asians in the months following the September 11, 2001, attacks" (53). This eschewal afforded a see something, do nothing attitude that perpetuates abuse. After 9/11, in other words, South Asians are rendered both a visible threat and a target. While Changez is an immigrant and "never an American" in the years he lived there, he embraces and settles into the American culture, but racist American culture shuns him (Hamid 33). Thus stripped of his immigrant status, he instead registers as an agent of chaos, a saboteur, a terrorist.[18] We see then how colonial enterprises operate overseas and within

American borders, forcibly removing Changez from his established familial organizations and revoking his home.

For a book about the violent undoing of family and home, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* markedly refrains from depicting violence, depending rather on style as a more coercive method to portray familial cleaving and exclusion. Before 9/11, Changez sees himself as part of a national collective, claiming New York City is "like coming home" (Hamid 32). In fact, this sense of belonging even appears in the most anatomical particles of his speech. As Margaret-Anne Hutton observes, "When Changez recounts his pre-crisis days the pronoun 'we' designates a number of collective identities" such as his classmates at Princeton and his colleagues at Underwood Samson (64). "We" is part and parcel of an inclusive grammar in the sunshine days prior to 9/11. But, as the adage goes, everything changes after the attacks. Indeed, Changez's name is a homophone for "changes," reflecting the notion of post-9/11 alterations. "Changez" is also the present, second person of the French for "change" and is another name for Genghis Khan, the Emperor of the Mongol Empire. The name's etymology is as global as the novel's various settings (Pakistan, Greece, the United States, Chile), and the globality of "Changez" therefore positions the protagonist as both an arbiter of violent political change like his imperial namesake *and* a victim of imperial, exilic maneuvers after 9/11.

Style in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, moreover, presages the consequences of political violence on Changez's intimate circles. From the outset, Hamid invites readers to be aware of Changez's enigmatic narration and motives. The etymological play with his protagonist's name in tandem with the unreliable narration paints Changez as a Janus-like figure: two-faced and dynamic, he remains a step ahead of the American interlocutor and the reader, curating the narrative to emphasize his predominant concerns, namely the intimate impact 9/11 and the War

on Terror has on his familial circles. But whereas Changez manipulates his monologue, kindling a plethora of interpretive possibilities, America's insistent banishment of the Brown threat remains assured. That is, in more ways than one, the novel's mischievous style stands in diametric opposition to national intent; whereas Changez's character and motives are called into question as illustrated through the profuse ambiguities laden in the novel's structure and anatomical features, America's mission to wash its hands of the Muslim/Brown threat from the national family is crystalline.

Like many post-9/11 novels, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* emphasizes the national familial connections drawn in the wake of September 11th. "Your country's flag invaded New York after the attacks…," Changez tells the American, "They all seemed to proclaim: *We are America*—not New York, which, in my opinion, means something quite different—*the mightiest civilization the world has ever known; you have slighted us; beware our wrath*" (79).[19] The flood of flags attempts to expunge borders within the U.S. and calls for harmony. Ironically, however, this nation as family concomitantly erects walls around those who differ, like Changez, and practices a form of banishment. To that end, the flag as a symbol of wrath is also the material symbol of the War on Terror culture, taking shape internationally and domestically as racialized violence and exclusion. While it never outwardly names the PATRIOT Act, passed on October 26, 2001, Hamid's book vaguely refers to the law—as an expulsion method to remove Brown men from the family table. Changez notes, "Pakistani cabdrivers were being beaten to within an inch of their lives; the FBI was raiding mosques, shops, and even people's houses; Muslim men were disappearing, perhaps into shadowy detention centers for questioning or worse" (94). One nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all, or so it goes. Changez, while not physically assaulted, recognizes the racially motivated attacks as American revenge tactics—an attempt to

insist control. For example, a man Orientalizes the protagonist in a parking lot: "He made a series of unintelligible noises—'*akhala-malakhala*,' perhaps, or '*khalapal-khalapala*'—and pressed his face alarmingly close to mine" (117). This tense interaction concludes with a concretizing moment that dichotomizes the sense of home Changez feels in a post-9/11 world when the assailant calls him a "'Fucking Arab'" (117). Racism devolves and unsettles the U.S. from a sanctuary to a hellscape.[20] These domestic attacks and the exilic drive ultimately actualize the protagonist's repatriation to Pakistan. We see Changez at an impasse as he confronts the national family's racist protection of specifically white Americans: how can he call home the place that does not want him there? It becomes abundantly clear to him that only the select majority is welcome to partake in the national family.

Regardless of this exclusion, family remains the center of Changez's world, even though he relishes in America falling "to her knees" after the attack (Hamid 73). In fact, family breaks the hypnotic spell that enraptures the protagonist: "But hearing them speak of their loved ones, my thoughts turned to Erica, and I no longer needed to pretend. … I was almost relieved to be worried for her and unable to sleep … and ignore for a time my initial sense of pleasure" (74). While Erica begins her slow depressive descent toward suicide, America continues to lash out against Afghanistan. Changez initially does not fret about the invasion, because Pakistan "had pledged its support to the United States, the Taliban's threats of retaliation were meaningless, [his] family would be just fine" (94). At the dawn of war, Changez trusts the U.S. to respect allegiances, and he organizes this faith around his family. In other words, he takes America for its word and believes that his loved ones abroad will be safe.[21] While they remain unharmed, as I explain below, his family's safety is almost compromised as the War on Terror nears Pakistan's borders and as India prepares for war. The invasion of Afghanistan insults Changez on fraternal

grounds. He says, “Afghanistan was Pakistan’s neighbor, our friend, and a fellow Muslim nation besides, and the sight of what I took to be the beginning of its invasion by your countrymen caused me to tremble with fury” (100). In this sense, family extends to the international alliances, and the War on Terror culture shatters the kindred relationship forged throughout history. The family, whether nuclear or (inter)national, grips Changez by weaving political upheavals into its sinews.

Racist and exclusionary politics wilt the familial construction Changez and Erica cultivate.[22] Within the War on Terror culture, the couples pays the price for their transgressive courtship: Erica is ravaged by the past and commits suicide, and Changez is banished from the nation. While founded on mutual love and care, the relationship is nurtured by an imperial reverence. Changez routinely invokes empire and an empress when describing Erica, a WASP. For example, he characterizes her as a queen: “When I first saw Erica … so stunningly *regal* was she. Her hair was piled up like a tiara on her head” (Hamid 17). In another description, Changez thinks “she is an empress-in-waiting” (80). (Am)Erica’s imperial allure and majesty foreshadow the dormant imperial acts to follow 9/11.[23] Nevertheless, after September 11th and the invasion of Afghanistan, Erica exiles Changez from that shining American familial dream, turning it into the “American nightmare” (Donnelly 9). Changez wonders where things failed: “I never came to know what triggered her decline—was it the trauma of the attack on her city? … —but I think I knew even then that she was disappearing into a powerful *nostalgia*” of which Changez is not a part (Hamid 113). The culture of the War on Terror clarifies the metaphorical eviction from their relationship. Whereas at the beginning of their courtship, Erica and Changez welcome each other into their respective lives with a disregard of race and culture, the end of their romance is singed with the ash of 9/11. The terrorist attacks, in typical fashion, deem Changez undesirable in the

American family and, by extension, the nation. The Forever War seeks to unmake any and all intimacies. September 11th ironizes domiciles and kinship that once poised inclusivity and contorts them into intimacies of blacklisting.

Erica introduces Changez to an exciting new world of belonging; she is, in other words, his ticket to what was previously out of reach. Indeed, he tells the American, "I realized I was being ushered into an insider's world—the chic heart of this city—to which I would otherwise have had no access" (Hamid 56). Not only does their familial relationship work within social circles, giving Changez a taste of what he will later miss, but it also works privately. For a brief time, their relationship represents a domestic nonpareil, a stereotypically simple relationship with quiet dates in the park where "Erica wore a straw hat and carried a wicker basket" (58). This cursory detail highlights the possibilities of their burgeoning relationship; Erica could potentially fulfil the missing family piece in Changez's American life. But the moment the Towers fall, familial dreams crash too, waking Changez up from his American dream. Suddenly, Erica is inaccessible, plagued with the memories of a bygone era.[24] Her nostalgia ironically amplifies Changez's desire to remain at home in America. He even pretends to be her dead ex-boyfriend, Chris, while having sex—a deliberate act of performing as a white man (Maxey 132). Changez tells the American, "I cannot, of course, claim that I was *possessed*, but at the same time I did not seem to be myself. … Her body denied mine no longer; I watched her shut eyes, and her shut eyes watched *him*" (Hamid 105).[25] The lengths to which Changez goes to stay with Erica unveil America's seductive powers. Avirup Ghosh claims that this strange sexual moment reflects the protagonist's inability to "'penetrate' a culture that is not [Changez's] and an inscrutable past that Erica is trapped into" (52). I extend Ghosh's claim by approaching the sex scene through a familial lens. Changez and Erica's struggle to consummate their relationship without tapping into

the past—specifically Chris—suggests a kind of post-9/11 unbelonging and rejection from the traditional family unit that Changez yearns to establish with Erica.

Furthermore, Chris embodies the familial and domestic nostalgia Erica latches on to: he had "an *Old World* appeal" (Hamid 27). As Erica says, "'So I kind of miss home, too…Except my home was a guy with long, skinny fingers'" (28). People predicate home, and Erica's familial relationship with Chris underlines the home where she feels most comfortable. It is the pre-9/11 world with Chris where the old-world appeal carried the promise of a new world. If the Old World nostalgia recalls the "romantic strain in American nationalism," then it is rooted in a nationalist worldview predicated on puncturing families and intimacies (Hartnell 343). Empire is a project of kinship and domestic destruction, and the nostalgic turn to a time rampant with white nationalism instead of reconciling the trauma and loss of 9/11 is a kind of temporal mechanism that determines the makeup of the national family. It makes sense then, as Anna Hartnell notes, that "Chris, recalls not only Europe's Christian roots but also Christopher Columbus' encounter with the Americas, and the continent's status in the European imagination as an object of its own discovery" (343). This colonial nostalgia leaves no room for Changez in the family, and Erica puts him in the "past tense," solidifying this rejection (Hamid 135). After Erica commits suicide, Changez's final interaction with his American lover is through her manuscript; he believes the book will answer his questions about her intent, their relationship, and the powerful nostalgia she bowed to. He simply hopes to find that she included him in her narrative. [26] Instead, Changez realizes neither of them appear in her book:

> I could not locate Erica in the rhythms or sounds of what she had written; it seemed a mistake, offered me no clues. … When I put down the manuscript, it was not with the conviction that Erica was either alive or dead. But I had begun to understand that she had chosen not to be part of my story; her own had proven too compelling and she was—at that moment and in her own way—following it to its conclusion, passing through places I

> could not reach. I saw I had no option but to pursue my own preparations to leave. (166-167)

Like the "insider's world" he otherwise has no access to without Erica, Changez cannot enter the "places" her Old World nostalgia takes her. Erica is a WASP buffer into the upper echelons of America, and without her position in his American nuclear family, Changez remains an outlier on the outside looking in. This realization is particularly damning because it solidifies that Erica never saw him as part of a nuclear family; if she is not in her own narrative, then Changez certainly does not make an appearance. Erica's decision to excise herself from Changez and not the other way around highlights the exclusionary actions of white America after September 11th. More specifically, it evinces the familial culture of the War on Terror as rooted in anti-Brownness, a bulwark of the Old World appeal. In other words, Erica's nostalgic reversion falls in line with the sweeping anti-Muslim and anti-Brown narratives pervasive after the Twin Towers fell. Her book is the final nail in the coffin that actualizes Changez's choice to quit America.[27] This crushing awareness spotlights for Changez the futility of the American Dream, especially after the profound (inter)national trauma of 9/11 and the War on Terror.

While the novel focuses on Changez's unbelonging within the American family after the Towers collapse, it also portends his exclusion even before 9/11. The culture of the War on Terror preemptively appears through a tension between cultural plurality and white American supremacy, an idea I address in part three with *Sons and Other Flammable Objects*. On the one hand, pre-9/11 New York City encourages Changez to take "advantage of the ethnic exception clause that is written into every code of etiquette and [wear] a starched white kurta of delicately worked cotton over a pair of jeans" to dinner with Erica's family (Hamid 48). The attire blends cultures and nationalities to reflect pre-9/11 New York City's embrace of a global family that supposedly transcends markers of difference. In fact, his outfit speaks to the "open-mindedness

and … *cosmopolitan* nature of New York in those days that [he] felt completely comfortable on the subway in this attire" (48). Public acceptance of this cultural blending, of American desiness, dichotomizes the reception of it in the domestic sphere.[28] At first, Changez is at ease in Erica's home, nostalgic for the familiarity of family:

> I felt at home. Perhaps it was because I had recently lived in such a transitory existence … and longed for the settled nature of my past; perhaps it was because I missed my family and the comfort of a family residence, where generations stayed together, instead of apart in an atomized state of age segregation… (50).

The nuclear family defines Changez's perception of home and belonging. In the comfort of Erica's domestic space, he recalls his own family and highlights a stark contrast between American and Pakistani family makeup. On the other hand, however, comfort and sanctity vanish when the family patriarch, a nameless capitalist, insults Pakistan, deeming it a place where "'the elite has raped that place well and good, right? And fundamentalism. You guys have got some serious problems with fundamentalism'" (55). Though he does not disagree with the comment, Changez admonishes it, regarding it as a paradigmatic "*American* undercurrent of condescension" (55). This American patronization, furthermore, sprouts from the same branch of superiority that bears the idealistic fruit of American impenetrability and supremacy. Erica's father's comment, more specifically, also conveys a sense of domestic superiority—that *over there*, fundamentalism runs amok. This brief, tense scene anticipates what emerges as War on Terror culture, suggesting that the imperial ideology of American supremacy and an anti-Brown, Islamophobic exclusionary praxis has been festering for years. What unnerves Changez is not the difference in familial makeup, but the discernment that a national collective of cultural and racial rejection informs the American nuclear family.

Therefore, to counter his unbelonging in this nationalistic family, Changez curbs the blow by rebuking with a group where he does belong: his Pakistani family. Rather than unpack the minutiae of Erica's father's essentialist comment and instead appealing to his Pakistani culture's reverence to elders, Changez slyly utilizes kin to combat the attack: "'Yes, there are challenges, sir, but my family is there, and I can assure you it is not as bad as that'" (55). Thus, as a tool of resistance against a racist American hegemony, family is a counterculture to the simplistic and generalized political understandings of Pakistan.[29] Changez underscores national pride using a rhetoric of family to intercept Erica's father's power grab. The comfort and discomfort of the domestic space and the American nuclear family begin to expose the cracks between inclusion and exclusion, which become cavernous in the wake of 9/11.

Furthermore, fundamental differences between Erica and Changez manifest through Western and Eastern conceptions of family. Though fleeting, the descriptions of his familial life in Pakistan communicate the protagonist's perceptions and definitions of home. When he and Erica first meet, he describes his family: "'When I was a child, there were eight of us, eight cousins, all in the same compound—a single boundary wall surrounded the plot of land my grandfather left to his sons, you see—and we had between us as many as three dogs and, for a time, a duck'" (Hamid 19).[30] In this simple detail, Changez varies the notion of "nuclear". It is not the mother-father-child construction identified by Western kinship parameters; instead, the Brown family, specifically the Pakistani family, is an entanglement that takes root in legacy. Changez's nuclear family is comprised of grandparents-uncles-aunts-cousins-mom-dad-siblings. The nuclear family so prominently defines Changez that Erica notices immediately after meeting him, marking how it shapes his identity, "'You give off this strong sense of home…You know that? This I'm-from-a-big-family vibe. It's nice. It makes you feel solid'" (19). Home is family,

and family is home. This idea echoes throughout post-9/11 fiction; like with the Goldens in Salman Rushdie's *The Golden House*, family forms the home, even if the structural integrity of familial foundations lays in peril. Moreover, as an immigrant, Changez's home is not just his network of relations, it is also Pakistan. Thus family and nation coalesce in the immigrant experience Hamid conveys. It makes sense that Changez deploys his family to resist assumptive understandings of Pakistan like he does with Erica's father. This conception of the Pakistani family, a tangle of relations, does not inherently fit into the American concept of family, and it certainly is not a piece that fits into the national puzzle after 9/11. Hamid employs family as a method of not only showing difference between America and Pakistan and Erica and Changez, but he also uses the theme as a marker of resistance and a lens through which to understand the War on Terror culture.

Throughout *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, family unfailingly teeters as global conflicts snowball; in fact, political strife defines itself in relation to family, constantly identifying the opportunity cost of war. Pakistan, Hamid reminds us, was wedged between a rock and a hard place at the beginning of the 21st-century: the US and the War on Terror approached from the West, and India advanced with nuclear arms from the East. The two political clashes induce in Changez a fear for his loved ones. He tells the American that the invasion of the Middle East rages "homeward, towards [his] family in Pakistan" (Hamid 94). Suddenly, the War on Terror becomes personal. He breaks down his family's individual views: "My mother was frightened, my brother was angry, and my father was stoical—this would all pass, he said. I found reassurance in my father's views, and I dressed myself *as though they were my own*" (94, my emphasis). Changez's affective response to his family's reaction uncovers his oscillating opinion of the crisis. Like his home nation, he feels pressure from both sides. On the one hand, he

worries about his family, but on the other, his relationship with (Am)Erica remains key. He even goes as far as to deny the War on Terror's rampant targeted attacks on Pakistan. He tells Wainwright, "Pakistan had pledged its support to the United States, the Taliban's threats of retaliation were meaningless, my family would be just fine" (94). But the blindfold comes off when Changez watches troops land in Afghanistan, Pakistan's neighbor and ally, and he can no longer deny American empire's threat toward his family and homeland. The logic of the War on Terror deterritorializes the kinship unit through imperial terror, locating the intimacies of both the private sphere and international relations.

In its destruction of barriers between familial and national collectives, moreover, the War on Terror culture unmakes the form and function of the domestic sphere. Reminiscent of how the British Empire completely shatters Okonkwo's family and forces a recalibration of tribal responsibilities and makeup in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, the culture of the War on Terror defamiliarizes the domestic sphere by militaristic means. During a visit to Pakistan, Changez learns that the home front has literally become the place of action, transforming into a makeshift military camp. That is, as the menace of war entraps Pakistan from the East and West, the response is an all-out militarization of the domestic sphere. Changez's brother tells him, "'There is an artillery battery dug in at the country house of a friend of mine, half an hour from here, and a colonel billeted in his spare bedroom … so things are not good'" (125-126). This layering of political calamities and reconstituted domestic spaces in Pakistan opposes the nostalgic turn in America. The author pits the two nations against each other, juxtaposing intimate effects and revealing how war fundamentally alters the face and function of Pakistan's domiciles and leaves America's domestic sphere unscathed beyond the attacks.[31] While domestically America resolves to find solace in national family stitched together like the stars on

the flag, it seeks to unmake homes and family abroad. Changez claims this idea is difficult to conceive in an American context when he addresses this disparity to his silent counterpart. "It will perhaps be odd for you," Changez says, "—coming, as you do, from a country that has not fought a war on its soil in living memory, the rare sneak attack or terrorist outrage expected—to imagine residing within commuting distance of a million or so hostile troops who could, at any moment, attempt a full-scale invasion" (127). America's privilege, Changez argues, is in its position as a hyperpower and its avoidance of war within its borders. The lives of others are not in the American purview, and keeping the war overseas preserves the sanctity of the American domestic sphere. Instead, to ensure this distanced violence, domestic spaces abroad must undergo a militarized alteration.

To that extent, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* makes clear that the threat of war is an affront to the familial/domestic sphere, particularly in that it re-dynamizes the makeup of the kinship unit. As the shift from a home to a battery above demonstrates, political upheaval violates the sanctity of intimate spaces because it expunges the dividing line between the public and the private. When Changez visits his family in Pakistan, the dynamics of his nuclear family feel more or less the same until dinnertime when the voices of loved ones merge with the cacophony of war. Hamid paints the culture of war seamlessly into the familial dynamics. Narratively, the colors of war and family bleed into each other: "Already, the Indian army was mobilizing, and Pakistan had begun to respond: convoys of trucks, I was told, were passing through the city, bearing supplies to our troops on the border; as we ate, we could hear the sounds of military helicopters flying low overhead" (Hamid 127). The rhythms of the sounds converge, signaled by "I was told" and "as we ate, we could hear." The semi-colon is a porous barrier that marks the overlapping of public and private, of national war and domestic peace. The

adulteration of the domestic sphere—whether auditory as with the union of sounds or practical with the modification of the home to a battery—also invades Changez's family dynamics. He tells the American, "My brother cleaned his shotgun. One of my uncles stocked up on bottled water and canned food. Our part-time gardener was deployed with the reserves. But for the most part, people seemed to go about their lives normally" (127). Adnan Mahmutović argues that "terror itself is a form of wormhole travel" in the novel— that terrorism, specifically the War on Terror and 9/11, is a communicative medium that spans the gap between public and private spheres, similar to the magical doors in *Exit West* (16). Read in this way, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is about systems and networks. I extend Mahmutović's compelling claim by locating the wormholes within the intimacy of the domestic territory. Not only do the systems at play in the War on Terror culture link nations, worlding the global, so to speak, but they also world the domestic, bringing the international conflicts to the home.[32] In other words, international strife (whether the Indo-Pak standoff or the War on Terror) enters the home and threatens to blow its routine and familiarity to smithereens. As connective tissues, then, terror and violence aim to militaristically topple everything. While things are largely normal when Changez visits, the added tasks, new positions, and precarious livelihood within the nuclear family reveal how the culture of war colonizes the domestic sphere and reorients the quotidian to skew the familial setup.

As such, Changez's post-9/11 trip is one of Pakistani reencountering. The protagonist realizes that his short time in America, specifically as an Underwood Samson employee, tinges his perception of his domestic space. When he arrives in Lahore during a quick visit, he remembers "the Americannness of [his] own gaze" and is "struck at first by how shabby [the family] home appeared" (Hamid 124). It is only after he realizes "that the house had not changed

in [his] absence" and instead he in fact had that he switches off his American gaze. This brief scene showcases the coercive and imperial power of American capital and its effects on the perception of home. Throughout the novel, Changez recalls his family in Pakistan, especially as the culture of the War on Terror climbs to dangerous heights. He takes them into consideration when he creates another family with Erica, and he thinks of them when he gets the job at Underwood Samson. Yet, his short tenure at Underwood Samson invades any and all considerations about his familial home in Pakistan. It is therefore critical that "Changez considers the furnishings of the house *before* turning his focus on his family" (Darda 114). The very first thing Changez does is evaluate his home with his new capitalistic gaze—like that of a "particular type of entitled and unsympathetic American" (Hamid 124). And we see how it overpowers Changez's perceptions and receptions of his family and domestic sphere in particular. In other words, the protagonist initially cannot escape this capitalist state of mind, extending his valuation duties at Underwood Samson to his domestic sphere in Pakistan.

To foreswear his capitalist Americanness, Changez hinges on his *Pakistani* family and history. He resolves "to exorcise the unwelcome sensibility" that informs his domestic value judgements (Hamid 124). Darda claims, "Too ashamed to recognize the precarity signaled by his family's social conditions, [Changez] instead engages in a fantasy of mastery in which he controls these conditions through a financial calculus" (114). While Changez utilizes his training at Underwood Samson here, it is not a "fantasy of mastery." In fact, to value his family home is to confront the family's social and financial shortcomings. In addition, it is imperative to recognize that Changez backtracks on this American gaze and re-dons his Pakistani gaze. He notes the house's "endearing grandeur, its unmistakable personality and idiosyncratic charm. Mughal miniatures and ancient carpets graced its reception rooms; an excellent library abutted its

veranda. It was far from impoverished; indeed, it was rich with history" (125). Thus, Changez not only values the house capitalistically a la Underwood Samson, but he also values it nationalistically. Indeed, he feels guilty about bringing the U.S./Underwood Samson worldview with him to Lahore, wondering "how [he] could ever have been so ungenerous—and so blind…" (125). History trumps capital; the nuclear family beats corporation—no matter how tribal and close-knit the latter presents itself to be. It takes family and national legacy to assuage Changez of his American capitalist conditioning.

As a response to his otherwise abiding capitalist disposition, Changez symbolically aligns himself with a larger Pakistani and Muslim collective as a mode of resistance to the War on Terror culture and America at large. He achieves this through a beard. Scholars routinely address the beard, but few acknowledge it as a way for Changez to embrace his nuclear family and his national, Pakistani family.[33] Initially, he compares himself to his similarly bearded father and brother; the beard acts as a familial marker and spans the gap between his life in Pakistan and America. He obligingly tells his American interlocutor,

> [The beard] was, perhaps, a form of protest on my part, a symbol of my identity, or perhaps I sought to remind myself of the reality I had just left behind … I know only that I did not wish to blend in with the army of clean-shaven youngsters who were my coworkers, and that inside me, for multiple reasons, I was deeply angry. (Hamid 130)

The post-9/11 world and the culture of the War on Terror imbues this statement of resistance. The novel's framed narrative and cultural cues never let the reader forget that the plot operates in the tumultuous era bereft of the Twin Towers where a global, anti-American resentment prevails. Changez's decision to grow a beard, therefore, recalls not only the anti-Muslim sentiments rampant in the nation but also nods to what he left behind in Pakistan. The beard affords him the opportunity to stand in arms, so to speak, with his Pakistani kin at a time when they are targeted

and ostracized from other nations. Yet, if the beard executes a subjective method of political resistance for Changez, combatting the culture of the War on Terror and India's threats, then it acts as an objective harbinger of terror to his corporate family in America.

Changez's beard signals a terrorist anxiety within Underwood Samson that renders him a persona non grata in the eyes of the corporate kinship unit.[34] Indeed, Changez's position within the company is the paradigmatic marker of his American success. The firm functions around the adage "focus on the fundamentals."[35] Changez explains to the American that the corporate slogan "mandated a single-minded attention to financial detail, teasing out the true nature of those drivers that determine an asset's value. … [O]ur job required a degree of commitment that left one with rather limited time for such distractions" (Hamid 98-99). Focus on the money.[36] But, Underwood Samson is a reflection of the U.S., so following 9/11, the culture of the War on Terror resounds in the fundamentals of Underwood Samson. Changez's beard is one such distraction that uncovers the underlying exclusionary ideology akin to both nation and company.[37] The first instance of Changez's corporate familial exclusion occurs in the airport right after the attacks. His colleagues—this team/tribe/family—abandon him to navigate racial profiling at an airport, leaving him "that evening very much alone" (75). As the invasion of Afghanistan begins, these exclusionary practices escalate. Again: the Underwood Samson family adopts the War on Terror culture that saturates the nation. To that extent, the corporate kinship only goes so far, and the beard certainly does assuage tensions. Changez recognizes the anxiety his beard causes: "Traveling on the subway—where I had always had the feeling of seamlessly blending in—I was subjected to verbal abuse by complete strangers, and at Underwood Samson I seemed to become overnight a subject of whispers and stares" (130). This recognition counters the earlier embrace of his American desiness, when he culturally transcends borders in his kurta

and jeans for dinner at Erica's home. Public and the private sectors rhyme in their paranoid reception of the beard and quicken the pace to remove Changez from the corporate family.

Certainly, Changez's beard is a marker of difference and a racially charged indicator of the terrorist figure, and it eventually excludes him from the corporate kinship unit, but its symbolic purpose rests in a familial and domestic concern for the lives of others that America ignores. Joseph Darda writes that Changez grows a beard as a reaction to these racist and Islamophobic methods of social organization: "Maintaining a beard is Changez's way of reminding himself of and thereby offsetting the American norms that restrict his capacity to recognize the lives of others. The beard is a sign of global solidarity with Muslims in Asia and the United States, the latter being monitored and detained under the newly ratified PATRIOT Act" (116).[38] I agree with Darda that the beard layers the office with a corporeal form of anti-Islamophobic resistance, but I want to consider the facial hair against what matters most to Changez, his family and home. In fact, familial and domestic politics inform his beard not only in its relationship to his father and brother, but also in its rebuff of American hyperpower on Pakistan's allies: "I wondered how it was that America was able to wreak such havoc in the world…with so few apparent consequences at home" (Hamid 131). The War on Terror endangers his family and nation through a mobilization of empire, but the beard is what his colleagues reject *not* the violence. Changez's hairy anticolonial resistance, thus, calls attention to the unfair fight and the disregard for the other side.[39] That Wainwright—a Jamaican colleague who presumably understands the devastations of empire—conveys the problem of the beard further highlights the ironic cruelty of Changez's corporate family rejection. Wainwright offers unsolicited advice about the beard, underscoring a feigned solidarity: "'Look, man,'" he counsels, "'I don't know what's up with your beard, but I don't think it's making you Mister

Popular around here … You need to be careful. This whole corporate collegiality veneer only goes so deep. Believe me'" (Hamid 130-131).[40] Wainwright, whom Changez deems his closest friend in the company, hints at the racialized practices of collegiality at work before 9/11. Reminiscent of Erica's father's comments anticipating the War on Terror culture's exclusionary agenda, Wainwright's advice signals that the corporation as a family has always been an inherently exilic one, just not an obviously discriminatory one. Such is the American capitalist way, but the culture of the War on Terror brings these prejudices to the fore. The corporate rebuff scathes in part because Changez learns that Underwood Samson fundamentally rejects him nationally and culturally. They pay no mind to the ravages of war beyond the borders of an "exceptional" America, forcing Changez to quit his capitalist American dream and return home.

The repatriation to Pakistan brings the narrative to the present, which, like the past, centers around family and the West's colonial remnants. On a final stroll with the American, Changez notes the "family-run establishments, passed gently from generation to generation," observing "how often the words *brothers* and *sons* appear in their signage" (Hamid 171). I mention above that the buildings in Lahore recall colonialism's lingering architectural presence in Pakistan. That colonial creed returns with the War on Terror, and the mention of mom and pop shops underscores for the American and the reader what is at stake with American interference in Pakistani affairs. Family, what buttressed Changez's counter to Erica's father's inflammatory remarks about Pakistan, remains fundamental as the War on Terror rages. Similar to the familial nature of shops, Changez clutches to the intimate relationship he had with (Am)Erica: "I had returned to Pakistan, but my inhabitation of your country had not entirely ceased. I remained emotionally entwined with Erica, and I brought something of her with me to Lahore" (172). It is the familial relationship that resonates most. From the dangerous exilic politics rises "the gravity

of an invisible moon" shoring him with his love for Erica (172). Yet, this love rots to apathy toward America as the endeavors in the Middle East amplify.

This anti-American sentiment, moreover, is presumably why the American visits Pakistan; while Hamid never makes clear the American's intentions, Changez believes he is an undercover assassin.[41] The final pages see the *dhabba* wait staff, at Changez's command, surround the American and the Pakistani men. Those seemingly innocuous figures, we learn, play a more calculating role beyond that of interlocutors of intimacy through food; they are also specters of death, another form of intimacy. The novel's famously ambiguous conclusion leaves Changez and the American suspended in time, nations pitted against each other forever: "But why are you reaching into your jacket, sir? I detect a glint of metal. Given that you and I are now bound by a certain shared intimacy, I trust that it is from the holder of your business cards" (184). Changez divulges his life story to the man, intimately binding the two, akin to family members. The possibility of political violence undergirds their relationship and accentuates public violence ambushing the private intimacies. This ambiguity it heightened in the final setting: the men stand outside in public but are alone in the privacy of the empty streets. The conclusion's manifold readings speak to the enduring strife between America and Pakistan, of national families in enduring conflict despite the mutuality between the two. Once again, style operates as a political channel that emphasizes the pronounced contestations between national families while muddying the interpretative waters of Changez's narration.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist zeroes in on a particular person's particular life during a particular time in history, capturing a snapshot of an immigrant who almost achieves the American Dream. And as Changez rises to the top, his short-lived intimacy with Erica and his relationship with of Underwood Samson fortify access to this dream's pomp and majesty.

Hamid's novel, however, is a cautionary tale above all, warning against the legal and social exclusion Brown people face in the ashy post-9/11 moment. Tracing the familial relations throughout *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, I highlight the lives of others—how the culture of the War on Terror wreaks havoc and uproots families and homes while America remains at peace. What is at stake when the fighting continues to be relegated "over there"? Changez discovers the answer as his American families banish him and as his family in Pakistan faces the threat of American military endeavors. Changez recognizes that his falling out with the U.S. emblematizes an American experience, an integral part of the nation's imperial legacy. The book paints the subjective portrait of interrelations against a terrifying background of exclusion and imperial militarized practices, underscoring how public and private spheres comingle. Read twenty years after 9/11, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* feels fresh because the racist, unfounded exclusionary politics it examines remain largely the same in Trump's America.

II. Unsettling Home: Family, the Refugee Crisis, and Drones in *Exit West*

> All I see in hindsight is the chaos of history repeated, over and over, reenacted, reinterpreted, the world, its fucked-up heart palpitating underneath us, falling, messing up again and again as it winds its way around a sun. And in the middle of it all, tribes, families, people, all beautiful things falling apart, debris, dust, erasure.
>
> Valeria Luiselli, *Lost Children Archive*

> To become a refugee is to know, inevitably, that the past is not only marked by the passage of time, but by loss—the loss of loved ones, of countries, of identities, of selves.
>
> Viet Thanh Nguyen, *The Displaced*

Hoards, caravans, gangs. Collective categorizations of deterritorialized and displaced refugees dehumanize. To boot, the media amplifies such rhetoric, spurring an anxiety of invasion into viewers. The above quotes by Luiselli and Nyguen oppose media representation and instead concentrate on human life. Refugee literature stakes the claims of movement—viscerally

acknowledging that national, family, and self all hang in the balance. In his 2017 novel *Exit West*, Mohsin Hamid zeroes in on a couple's refugee journey: when magical doors appear, granting escape from a nameless city overrun by terrorists, protagonists Nadia and Saeed leave their homes behind and exit west. [42] While the unidentifiable city triggers readerly assumptions about Nadia and Saeed's home, the vague setting also universalizes the potentials of refugee subjectivity. In turn, conjecture forces readers to question their own positions within spaces of belonging in moments of political precarity. The novel asks, what would you sacrifice to pass through a door? These doors collapse space between nations and place refugees—whom Hamid calls migrants—in camps. Desperate to find stability, the refugees leave behind Saeed's father and create a new family unit as they transition from Greece to London to the outskirts of San Francisco. As they move, their understandings of intimacy, home, and family evolve. Like many first romantic dalliances, however, the two fall out of love; with each exit through a door or experience with state-encouraged unsettling, Nadia and Saeed concretize their own desires from intimacy. This change in relationship, moreover, marks the dangerous liaisons between political influence and interpersonal intimacy. The political impetus for their refugee status girds their relationship, as 9/11 does with Erica and Changez's in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Refugee literature affords a look at the political causes and ramifications of displacement, and *Exit West* uncovers how deterritorializing endeavors like the Forever War manipulate and reorient human connections to that both define and redefine understandings of love, family, and home.

As noted at part I's outset, this second section of the chapter reads domestic features as vehicles that unsettle the meaning and dynamics of home and family in *Exit West*. Windows and doors—both barriers between the public and the private—change purpose amid the chaos of political upheaval in the novel's unnamed city. This home renovation in turn catalyzes the

central relationship to also metamorphose in its construction and practices. When terrorism quite literally enters the home, affective deterritorialization renovates familial traditions and dynamics. These changes, furthermore, continue as doors span the space between nations, creating an ironic, hyper-surveilled yet borderless world in which everyone is a migrant. I thread a through line that traces the influence of the domestic sphere on Nadia and Saeed's movements West, and my approach through the windows and doors explicates the human effects of political crises.

Like many refugee narratives, *Exit West* documents the fluctuations of intimacies as characters battle terrorism, hyper-surveillance, and other political ploys aimed at razing relationships. Nadia and Saeed come together only to come apart, and familial fates lie in the hands of a destiny delimited by geopolitical concerns. In that way, the novel falls in line—stereotypically, perhaps—with works such as *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* (Laila Lalami), *The Refugees* (Viet Thanh Nguyen), and *The Farming of Bones* (Edwidge Danticat) to underscore the human quality of the refugee experience. Refugee and migration literature postulate the reach and extent of movement. To be sure, survival is paramount, as Nadia and Saeed's journey testifies, but so is loss. Who and what is left behind is both material and metaphorical, ranging from a lemon tree and a father to the traditions and familiarity of home.

The refugee experience, we can say then, is about the will to live and the pain of sacrifice. Post-9/11 sentiments and War on Terror technologies go beyond the Forever War's Middle Eastern and South Asian battlegrounds and go global through the reception and perception of the refugee crisis. In excavating the intimacies that are created, destroyed, and recreated throughout Nadia and Saeed's refugee journey, we see how the public and the private—the macro and the micro, the state and the family—interrelate. Hamid literalizes the politicization of the domestic sphere through doors and windows to underline the most intimate

effects of political upheaval. That is, egresses and the family units within the domestic sphere take on political charges. Accordingly, the relationship at *Exit West*'s center counters the (inter)national political upheavals. Terrorism and the refugee subjectivity fundamentally alter the face of intimate circles, and the sacrificial elements lost in the wake amplify the trauma of this forced re-calibration. *Exit West* especially foregrounds such loss in the sustained dismantling of family throughout Nadia and Saeed's journey westward. This kinship cleaving is part and parcel of the terrorist activity in their home city. In the wake of bombings, violence, and western exits, the two agonizingly lighten their familial loads, letting members of their families go one by one.

The terror-driven displacements in *Exit West* speak to the global political insecurity caused by the War on Terror. While the novel does not seem to fall into the parameters of the quintessential post-9/11 novel like other works I study in this project, its exigency deems it part of a larger conversation about the Forever War era. *Exit West* marks a shift in fiction that no longer centers 9/11 and instead emphasizes its many consequences. The refugee crisis directly correlates to the innumerable unsettling and deterritorializing practices that plague the Greater Middle East and South Asia in the 21st century. According to Brown University's Costs of War project, "at least 37 million people have been displaced as a direct result of the wars fought by the United States since Sept. 11, 2001 … People fled their homes for all reasons common in armed conflict, such as aerial bombings and done strikes…" (*New York Times*). To be clear, the War on Terror's destabilizing projects abroad are to blame for the 21st-century refugee crisis; ironically, those displaced victims of the Forever War are in turn denied refuge by the nations at fault and are maligned via policing technology that organically originates from War on Terror culture. Claire Callien writes, "By engaging in wars abroad, participating in the destruction of entire regions and societies, exploiting cheap labour and natural resources, and supporting

autocratic and authoritarian regimes, these democracies create the very refugees that they then reject" (736). I mention in the previous section that a staple in War on Terror culture is the exilic and Islamophobic practices within the US; here, I put forward that the crisis and the subsequent xenophobic rejection of refugees contributes to that same malicious culture. *Exit West*, though it problematically frames refugee and migrant subjectivities as synonymous, spotlights the dual punches the War on Terror packs by showing Nadia and Saeed's extraterritoriality and by depicting the sacrifices, consequences, and metamorphoses of the couple's own families and intimacies.[43] If brutalities like the War on Terror unmake affective realms such as the home and the intimacies that give our lives meaning and purpose, then the shared traumatic experience of refugee subjectivity welds resistant, intimate bonds that oppose the unmaking enterprise.

These intimacies, moreover, are evident from the start of the novel. The first line reads, "In a city swollen by refugees but still mostly at peace, or at least not yet openly at war, a young mand get a young woman in a classroom and did not speak to her" (Hamid 3). Not only does this blatantly foreshadow the future of the city and its characters, but it anchors Nadia and Saeed's relationship to a fraught political background. Perhaps Hamid's most experimental novel, *Exit West* spotlights the central relationship by naming no other characters.[44] The tangents of political crises often lose sight of the human relationships at stake, focusing instead on the obtuse progenitors of the difficulties. Hamid explains in an interview with NPR, "I wanted to focus on the more human and lasting stories of Saeed and Nadia. What happens before you move, and what happens after? And so the doors allowed me to focus on parts of the migration narrative that often get de-emphasized" (npr.com). Hamid's authorial justification echoes an argument I make throughout this project: political literature—be it historical or speculative fiction—accentuates intimacies between characters to de-center the violence of political upheaval. *Exit*

West foregrounds literal and metaphorical familial maiming and the effects of splintering violence through Nadia and Saeed. The political crises in the novel orbit the central familial concerns. To ensure this, Hamid employs windows and doors to open channels of intimacy, constructing passageways of love and hate, movement and rootedness, and war and peace.

Windows represent the intimate effects of political upheaval; they radically shift from innocuously inanimate to dangerously animate. While both windows and doors segregate the inside and the outside, their purposes shift as the violence in the unnamed city escalates.[45] Consequently, the domestic sphere marks the rapidly deteriorating political situation. Certainly, the brutal deaths and the increased militarized police presence register the dire situation, but to convey the affective toll of upheaval, Hamid manipulates the domestic sphere as both a weapon and a shield. This repurposing of the home recognizes the instability of the prosaic as governmental structures and societal foundations collapse. The narrator states,

> One's relationship to windows now changed in the city. A window was the border through which death was possibly most likely to come. Windows could not stop even the most flagging round of ammunition...Moreover the pane of a window could itself become a shrapnel so easily, shattered by a nearby blast, and everyone had heard of someone or other who had bled out after being lacerated by shards of flying glass. (71)

What looks outward flies inward in this dystopian city. The home no longer separates the domestic from the world; rather, the world forces itself into the home through violent means. In fact, the architecture of the home itself is more dangerous than the armed militants outside. Death is "possibly most likely to come" from the windows, creating a kind of dangerous hierarchy within the city. Unlike in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* where the outside world threatens to destroy the domestic sphere, in *Exit West* the streets and the domestic sphere both threaten to destroy the people within, highlighting the dangerous evolution of the Forever War.

Furthermore, the adulteration of windows signals a recalibration of domestic organization and dynamics. Windows not only kill at a higher rate, but they also ironize the domestic sphere and deliver the final blow to cement social upheaval. No longer safe in their own homes, people are forced further away from the outside, distancing themselves from the edges of the home, away from the barrier between the public and the private. As they become more insular within the domestic space, Saeed and Nadia renovate their homes. Interior design becomes a method of survival rather than an aesthetic mode. Saeed's family "rearranged their furniture" and "placed bookshelves full of books flush against the windows in their bedrooms, blocking the glass from sight but allowing light to creep in around the edges" (Hamid 71). Bookshelves, which hold instruction, now obscure the knowledge of what occurs beyond the walls. Nadia similarly "taped the inside of her windows" and "would then glance at her windows and think they looked a bit like amorphous black works of contemporary art" (72).[46] Through this hideous tableaux vivant, we see yet again a micro focalization on terrorism's domestic effects; interior design as protective measures showcases how the material elements in a home forcibly adopt new roles, manipulated to take on more critical tasks.

While windows almost guarantee death, the supernatural doors bestow covert and hopeful escape routes that dichotomize the harsh reality of the "death trap of a country" (Hamid 72). The narrator conveys the enchanted modification, "The effect doors had on people altered as well. Rumors had begun to circulate of doors that could take you elsewhere, often to places far away, well removed from this death trap of a country. … A normal door, they said, could become a special door, and it could happen without warning, to any door at all" (72). As connective sinews between places, corridors to safety, the doors in *Exit West* suture different environments, stitching relationships between seemingly disparate nations. For example, when Nadia and Saeed

first enter a door to leave their city, they arrive in "the bathroom of some public place," which they quickly realize is on a beach. This transfer from the claustrophobic city to the expansive shore, opposite spaces in more ways than one, hints at a birth. From trapped to free, or so Nadia and Saeed think. In fact, "[i]t was said in those days that the passage was both like dying and like being born" (104). In another description, the narrator notes someone's transition between these mystical doors: "…the closet doorway was dark, darker than night, a rectangle of complete darkness—the heart of darkness. And out of this darkness, a man was emerging," and this man slides "to the floor like a newborn foal" (8, 9). This language of rebirth, like everything in the novel, rings with the political; the doors provide an avenue to a new life, of course, but they also reevaluate and recalibrate social organization and domestic structures.

Windows and doors—egresses that should separate the trauma and drama of the outside from the peace and harmony of the inside—operate as borders. They divide spaces, which in turn demands a difference in behavior. How we behave in public differs from how we behave in private, and the materiality of these spaces necessitates a negotiation in behavior. That is, things, especially gadgets, mark different spaces and places. Liliana Naydan argues that cellphone screens in *Exit West* also work as border metaphors, showing "the relationship between national borders that function as divisive screens and screen-based digital technologies that speak to the problems of and possibilities of globalization" (434). Yet, I would like to apply this idea to the home and see how its upshots function on the novel's romantic center. How do windows and doors change Nadia and Saeed's familial behavior? Hamid's treatment of domestic features adheres to *Exit West*'s larger political concerns. In this world, the domestic is as political as the national, thereby presenting a sketch of the contemporary world that inextricably yokes the public and the private, the macro and micro; in so doing, the domestic plays on the same political

field as the national, demanding equal attention. As I discuss throughout the project, leveling the domestic and the national spheres on the same plane reveals how political tumult reshapes affective realms, namely family. Recognizing windows and doors as metaphors for national borders exposes altered behavior—not simply from the inside to the outside but also within the intimacies of kinship that political calamity simultaneously generates and obliviates.

The doors' promise and the streets' terror together insinuate the familial bonds between Nadia and Saeed. Importantly, Hamid personifies these potential portals, "an object with a subtle power to mock, to mock the desires of those who desired to go far away, whispering silently from its door frame that such dreams were the dreams of fools" (Hamid 73). Against this hope to flee, Nadia and Saeed develop their relationship. Coupling the necessity to escape and the budding romance, Hamid shows how terrorism informs and molds their relationship. Once again, the inmate takes on a political charge, influencing and affecting social and private environments. Here Hamid, unlike in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, depicts the generative powers of political upheaval; as the city falls, the relationship rises. Nadia and Saeed's two-person family resists the national political crises, defying war's inherent need to decimate intimacies. And while their relationship does not turn the political tide in their city, it does provide a foil to the turmoil. In that way, Nadia and Saeed's relationship embodies what Ronak Kapadia calls insurgent aesthetics. Kapadia claims post-9/11 works that emphasize connection and "not failure of contact" propose "human connectivity and intimacy, even the virtual kind, across the digital divide, thereby generating a mode of insurgent aesthetics that powerfully resists the stultifying and isolating effects of the US forever wars" (90).[47] Such is the nature of Nadia and Saeed's relationship; that kinship forged amid political chaos counters the destructive powers of war.[48]

However, forged in the fiery explosions that choke their city, Nadia and Saeed's relationship also counters the abhorrent violence that tears family apart. As the courtship flourishes, families around them unravel and, more specifically, family members are literally ripped apart. The first instance of such violence occurs early in the novel, right after the protagonists meet. The narrator builds tension with a matter-of-fact statement about the intensity of loss during political upheaval: "In times of violence, there is always that first acquaintance or intimate of ours, who, when they are touched, makes what had seemed like a bad read suddenly, eviscerating real. For Nadia this person was her cousin…" (Hamid 31). "Eviscerating" foreshadows her cousin's future, and the narrator utilizes a very long sentence to characterize this cousin, and, like the blast of a bomb, cursorily conveys his death. The cousin was

> … a man of considerable determination and intellect, who even when he was young had never cared much for play, who seemed to laugh only rarely, who had won medals in school and decided to become a doctor, who had successfully emigrated abroad, who returned once a year to visit his parents, and who, along with eighty-five others, was blown by a truck bomb to bits, literally to bits, the largest of which, in Nadia's cousin's case, were a head and two thirds of an arm. (32)

The lengthy descriptions of the man who seemingly does everything "right" still falls victim to the terrors of the militarized city. "Literally to bits" encourages readerly empathy for the man whom we barely meet; this affective presentation, moreover, depends on Hamid's long sentence, constructed with a grammar of terrorism that is simultaneously long-winded (reflective of the never-ending quality of the Forever War) and unexpected. Presented as an ironic democracy, terroristic acts unabashedly kill anyone. The cousin's literal splitting apart also forecasts a metaphorical splintering of the family.

In concert with the imbrication of public and private lines, intimacies not only become more and more endangered as street-level unrest amplifies, but also the lost kinship ties become

more meaningful. Similar to Nadia's cousin, Saeed's mother is suddenly and violently killed. Hamid once again employs a long, clause-filled sentence to convey the gruesome moment, though this time he flanks it with meditations on altered domestic organization. In fact, the sentence initially centers on Nadia toying with the idea of living with Saeed's family and subsequently it moves outward to Saeed's mother: "But part of [Nadia] still resisted the idea of moving in with him, with anyone for that matter … and she might have waited much longer has Saeed's mother not been killed, a stray heavy-caliber round passing through the windshield of her family's car and taking with it a quarter of Saeed's mother's head…" (Hamid 74-75). Saeed's mother's head splitting apart prefigures the impending familial crisis and echoes the fractious symbiosis between the public and the private. We also see here another instance of a window failing to protect. Hamid addresses this disturbance between social realms narratively as well. The matter-of-fact conveyance of Saeed's mother's death reflects the regularity at which terror unstitches established threads in kinship. The long sentence easily weaves from Nadia to Saeed's mother, ferrying with it the sinews that construct their lives in this precarious city: from subjective desires such as moving into Saeed's home to the objective fighting on the streets, the public and private meld and everything is at stake.

The novel portends a world in which national upheaval unsettles every rooted societal assemblage and practice, from family to funerals: "Funerals were smaller and more rushed affairs in those days … Some families had no choice but to bury their dead in a courtyard or at the sheltered margin of a road" (Hamid 79). Plainly, the family bows to the vicissitudes of political violence. Saeed's mother's death also shifts the protagonists into a doctored familial organization. Nadia stands at the edge of independence and familial responsibility, taking on new roles as "a chaste half lover, half sister to Saeed in close proximity to his parents" (74). But

Saeed's mother's death catapults Nadia into unknown kinship territory: she is forced to sacrifice her cherished independence and conform to the patriarchal norms she defied in the first place.[49] Hence, the belligerent destruction of social boundaries concomitantly unmakes familial structures and hurriedly pieces it back together again for some semblance of normalcy. The unmaking and remaking of the kinship unit recalibrates traditions and understandings of established domestic practices. Nadia calls Saeed's father "father", solidifying her position within the family as a pseudo daughter-in-law, though Nadia and Saeed are not married. The domestic sphere maintains its foundations in patriarchal norms, but it is refurbished with Nadia's wavering participation in the established sexist routines she disavowed when she quit her own nuclear family. Terrorism expands and contracts definitions of intimacies. Kapadia theorizes that the War on Terror "evokes queer forms of belonging, desire, and intimacy that often evade recognition or translation…If global forever war manipulates, conflates, and destroys communal bonds, … then it also engenders the conditions of possibility of imagining alliances and fugitive coalitions anew" (31). The Forever War and the refugee crisis queer the family and the home, addressing the political charges intimacies and private spheres take on because of political violence and upheaval. The unrest in the unnamed city and the way militants queer public and private organization further erases the dividing lines between spheres.[50] The window that failed to save Saeed's mother signifies and frames how terrorist politics restructures subjectivity and social organization.

Just as windows doubly transmit violent domestic unsettling and eradicate the public and the private dividing line, doors too interlink politics and family. The magical doors signify the refugee's contestation between life and sacrifice. After Nadia and Saeed pay for access out of their terrorized city, they earnestly prepare for their departure. Yet the struggle to live or stay

casts a shadow on preparations for Saeed in particular. While he "desperately wanted to leave his city," he worries "he would come back, and the scattering of his extended family and his circle of friends and acquaintances, forever, struck him as deeply sad, as amounting to the loss of a home, no less, of his home" (Hamid 94). *Exit West* presents a unique perspective on the refugee subjectivity; the vacillation of staying and going compels Nadia and Saeed to painfully embrace their newfound positions as refugees. No longer citizens, they move into an in-between space where they are either "invisible or hypervisible" (Nguyen 15). This either/or subjectivity, moreover, rhymes with the polarizing tethers of either staying and dying or leaving and sacrificing. Hamid further amplifies the refugee's deterritorializing experience with a crushing blow of familial disunification. Saeed's father decides not to leave, simply claiming, "'Your mother is here'" (95). While one part of this traumatized family splinters westward, another part remains rooted in place. Familial separation here, unlike the stories reported in the media, is willful. Saeed's father rests his decision to stay not only on his late wife, but also on an understanding of kindred politics. The narrator states, "…the arc of a child's life only appears for a while to match the arc of a parent's, in reality one sits atop the other, a hill atop a hill, a curve atop a curve, and Saeed's father's arc now needed to curve lower, while his son's still curved higher…" (96). Thus, for these characters, the refugee experience formulates a calculus of political impetuses that in turn spark a need to escape the city and alter familial dynamics and prescribed roles. Refugee status blends the public and the private, the political and the personal.

This sacrifice to leave Saeed's father behind further queers familial dynamics. Hamid's other works never eschew the normative patriarchal family; however, in *Exit West*, the writer reshapes the patriarchal family as a consequence of the refugee experience. Saeed's father tells Nadia that she must adopt the patriarchal mantle in some sense, acting as the role of a father to

ensure Saeed's safety: "…he was entrusting her with his son's life, and she, whom he called daughter, must, like a daughter, not fail him, whom she called father… and all he asked was that she remain by Saeed's side until Saeed was out of danger" (Hamid 97). The repetition of "daughter" ironizes the protective patriarchal role Saeed's father stresses earlier. He recognizes as the city falls around them that "he had come to that point in a parent's life when, if a flood arrives, one knows one must let go of one's child … because holding on can no longer offer the child protection" (96). Thus, Nadia takes up the paternal position, poised to protect Saeed. The opportunity cost of the refugee experience is perpetual instability; the ground beneath consistently shifts like the rattle of an explosion. The loss of a home, city, and nation is a macroscopic destabilization, but, as we see in the choice Saeed's father's makes, the new familial dynamic pinpoints a more intimate unsettling. Indeed, Hamid characterizes this affective deterritorialization as a symbolic death: "…by making the promise [Saeed's father] demanded [Nadia] make she was in a sense killing him, but that is the way of things, for when we migrate, we murder from our lives those we leave behind" (98). The sentence's passive voice signals the lack of agency in the refugee experience. While I resist Hamid's conflation of the migrant and refugee here, I believe the familial sentiment is apt. The relocation from place to place—whether forced or willful—necessitates sacrifice. *Exit West* presents this poetically and as a grim reality. The refugee experience means familial cleaving is inevitable.

This renovation is even more evident when Nadia and Saeed leave through the magical doors, exiting westward toward what they hope is a better life. In that way, *Exit West* recalls many mid-century migration narratives that romanticize the West. Novels like Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* or Julie Otsuka's *The Buddha in the Attic* highlight the disillusion of migration to nations like the United States or England, where xenophobia abounds. Anti-refugee

encounters inform the disrupted life Nadia and Saeed try to establish in other nations as they transport across the global North. Naydan writes that the protagonists "live their physical lives as circumscribed by the violence of their Eastern home while their imaginations disconnect, struggling westward toward a dream of emotional and psychological stability" (438). Yet the circumstances of refugee life and the xenophobic logic that surveils the camps curtails a stable domestic life. The author literalizes this refugee anxiety through technology; the material culture of the War on Terror polices the refugees. Throughout the novel, cameras and drones—techno-avian machines of the Forever War—monitor movement. If post-9/11 literature, as I explain in part three with *Sons and Other Flammable Objects*, grapples with questions of falling, then this contemporary literary moment also has to do with flying.[51] Eyes search the skies for both planes and drones. Flying innovations of brutal and distanced warfare have a twofold purpose here.[52] First, they act in lieu of soldiers, dropping bombs and other destructive weapons; second, as surveillance tools, they inherently destabilize Nadia and Saeed's domesticity.

Specifically, drones unsettle the different homes the couple creates for themselves as they move across the globe. For instance, when the young couple arrives in London to a much larger domestic space—"surely a palace, with rooms upon rooms and marvels upon marvels, and taps that gushed water that was like spring water and was white with bubbles and felt soft, yes soft, to the touch"—drones undercut the simple luxuries of a room and running water (Hamid 122). The buzz and booms of this technology adulterate the palatial London home: "Every day a flight of fighter aircraft would streak through the sky, screaming a reminder to the people of dark London [the lightless migrant camps] of the technological superiority of their opponents" (154). This show of force as a policing tactic constantly reminds the refugees to stay within the parameters of the camps lest they feel the wrath of techno-warfare; in that way, London feels rather like the

protagonists' home city. Nadia often finds herself "waking from a dream and thinking for a second that she was back home in her own city, with the militants, before recalling where she really was" (129).[53] The militarized police force also echoes the militants of their not-too-distant past. In another telling instance, Nadia considers why the nativists—the violent anti-migration crowd—"advocate[ed for] the wholesale slaughter" of the refugees; she draws similarities between the violence in London and her own home city, wondering "whether she and Saeed had done anything by moving, whether the faces and buildings had changed but the basic reality of their predicament had not" (159). In these sudden flashes of questioning her condition, Nadia reflects on the pervasiveness of Forever War technologies and affective attempts to destroy social organization. Like the militants who run amok in her city, the police in London aim to destroy the domestic realm the migrants so painstakingly create.

Hamid makes clear that warfare is the state-sponsored response to the refugees exiting through doors. This political retaliation pushes the central relationship to a breaking point. To stave off the refugees entering London, the military/police put in place "a cordon moving through those of London's boroughs with fewer doors, and hence fewer new arrivals, sending those unable to prove their legal residence to great camps" (Hamid 137).[54] The camp's topography echoes the unnamed city's domestic sphere; the protagonists barricaded themselves away from the windows, inching slowly toward the center of their living spaces. Like a set of concentric rings nested within each other, the camp's structure forces the refugees deeper and deeper into the interior of their makeshift domiciles. Large groups congregate in cities "and in the adjacent parks, and around this zone were soldiers and armored vehicles, and above it were drones and helicopters, and inside it were Nadia and Saeed" (137). Ironically, however, and unlike the first time they experienced this militarized claustrophobia, political violence does not

bring Nadia and Saeed closer together. Instead, the hyperintimacy of close proximity enforced by the state strains their relationship to "a state of unnatural nearness in which any relationship would suffer" and their intimacy morphs into a "that between relatives rather than between lovers" (140). The family that once prospered despite the fraught political environment falters as political strife continues to barrage personal intimacies through domestic conduits.

One military tactic—which speaks to the War on Terror culture that informs *Exit West*—that adulterates the domestic sphere and changes its inhabitants is darkness.[55] Claire Gallien argues, "World conflicts, which force people out of their living places in order to survive, are also about controlling natural supplies, including water, oil, and valuable ores" (723). The same goes for electricity in *Exit West*. Darkness shadows the microscopic nation building within the encampment; state-restricted access to light devolves international community and intimacies. The state forces refugees to dismantle collectives into smaller contingencies: they "[reassemble] themselves in suits and runs of their own kind, like with like" (Hamid 146). In turn, this lightless "Dark London" amplifies the tensions between the refugees and their brutal police counterparts, because it literally illuminates the differences in domesticity. Nadia and Saeed "[imagine] people dined in elegant restaurants and rode in shiny black cabs, or at least went to work in offices" as compared to dark London where "rubbish accrued" and where "fights would sometimes break out, and there were murders and rapes as well" (146). The state-sponsored barring of the domestic resource opposes the purpose of the doors. Whereas magic doors promise escape from the claustrophobia of the unnamed city, a lack of electricity lumens the inhumane treatment the refugees receive. The state makes unnegotiable the refugees' subjectivities and forcibly re-dynamizes their relationship to each other.

This human rights affront is compounded by the inhuman inventions of the Forever War; drones and other animalistic, antihuman creations destabilize any semblance of peace in the "Dark London" camps. To that end, the machines adopt a monstrous quality that mobilize fear as a policing mechanism:

> …Saeed and Nadia could occasionally glimpse tanks and armored vehicles and communication arrays and robots that walked or crawled like animals … Even more than the fighter planes and the tanks these robots, few though they were, and the drones overhead, were frightening, because they suggested an unstoppable efficiency, an inhuman power, and evoked the kind of dread that a small mammal feels before a predator of an altogether different order, like a rodent before a snake. (Hamid 154)

Reminiscent of an AT-AT walker from *Star Wars*, these robots depict the literally inhumane and unhuman lengths states go to destroy and deterritorialize refugees. This xenophobic War on Terror logic goes beyond the Greater Middle East and even works within the borders of the romanticized West. Similar to the portrait of America hellbent on exiling the Brown "terrorist threat" after 9/11 in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the militarized police state in *Exit West* intimidates the refugees through a surveillance methodology dedicated to dismantling tenuously and traumatically constructed domiciles. The animalistic policing technology affectively displaces the refugees, dehumanizing them and rendering them prey.[56]

In his study of drone warfare and surveillance, Kapadia asks an intriguing question that speaks to the disturbances of home and intimacy in *Exit West*: "How then do these twenty-first-century technologies of distanced warfare and remote surveillance from above rearrange people's collective sense of place, space, and community on the frontiers of the forever war?" (47). The answer comes during the battle of London, a firefight in which the military and police try by all means necessary to blot out the refugee "stain" on the outskirts of London.[57] Hamid's political agenda is clear: the chaos of the battle paints London like the unnamed city. Writing

elsewhere, Hamid affirms, "Treating nativist sovereignty as a virtue, and migration as a crime, threatens to make the United Kingdom dysfunctional" (*The Guardian*). Recalling their old city where bombs made windows into weapons and where they were "confined to their apartments … marooned and alone and much more afraid," the protagonists must repurpose and refurbish their domestic space in this dysfunctional London to protect themselves (*Exit West* 57). In London, "They went to their room in the back and pushed their mattress up against the window and sat together in one corner and waited" (162). Windows once again transform into murderous apparatuses that fail to do their job. The repetition of firefights right outside the domestic sphere shake the protagonists awake from their Western dream. Exiting West has only taken them from one militarized situation to another. Political violence often repeats itself, thrusting the past into the present time and time again. Mai Al-Nakib proffers that in addition to shrinking space between places, the doors "also reveal how the far removed was always already closer than we thought" (237). In this way, then, *Exit West* makes startingly clear the ever-uprooting violence toward the refugee, keeping domestic spaces in flux. State-enforced violence unendingly destabilizes the refugee experience and subjectivity.

This unsettling drone-armed police state where Nadia and Saeed sought refuge also progenerates a shift in intimacy. As they "talked as they often did about the end of the world" against this demoralizing political domestic battlefield, Nadia and Saeed stand in stark relief of each other (163). Throughout the novel, the two follow the "opposites attract" cliché: Saeed is religious, Nadia is not; Nadia is sexually active, Saeed practices abstinence; Saeed's home life is happy, Nadia's kinship dynamics are so frenetic that she leaves her family. Yet, the enchanted doors seem to dispel (or de-spell) their romance, because in London, they stand at odds with each other about the crisis and the militarized response:

> "I can understand it," she said. "Imagine if you lived here. And millions of people from all over the world suddenly arrived."
>
> "Millions arrived in our country," Saeed replied. "When there were wars nearby."
>
> "…Our country was poor. We didn't feel we had so much to lose." (164)

The polarized political positions about refugees and migration contorts the relationship that initially opposed the fractured political situation. Intimacy is not enough to combat the politically fraught and violent nature of the refugee experience; the external factors are too damning and overwhelming. And while the relationship cracks, it does maintain a familial quality, coming "to resemble that of siblings, in that friendship was its strongest element" (204). One of the final acts Nadia and Saeed perform together follows this understanding that romance has evolved into fraternity. A drone crashes into "the transparent plastic flap that served as both door and window of their shanty" and Nadia and Saeed decide to bury it (205). For once, the egress protects the two from the signifier of their refugee subjectivity. The home, though different than their previous ones, is stable as its defining relationship changes one last time. And unlike Saeed's mother whose burial is a hurried and untraditional affair, the funeral for the drone marks a shift in the protagonists' understanding of their refugee status. The funeral ritualizes the inescapability of the hunter-prey binary between the state and the refugee. Indeed, Naydan contends that the protagonists put to rest "the notion that escape from a vast if not ubiquitous network of violence exists as a possibility in the twenty-first century" (439). Built on the foundations of political precarity that warps into refugee subjectivity, *Exit West*'s central familial relationship evolves while its external shapers continue to sustain an immutable deterritorializing project. Nadia and Saeed will always be refugees.

With *Exit West*, Hamid zooms in on the intimacies at stake in the refugee crisis. The refugee experience—one of constant unsettling—is often dehumanizing, but Nadia and Saeed's relationship presents the crisis as affectively human. Against the perilous political circumstances of their home city and the journey westwards is a more-or-less simple story about first love. Yet, Hamid complicates this familial intimacy; the central relationship combats the deterritorializing project of terrorism and counters the dehumanizing representations of refugees. To that end, the spheres that house people and the barriers between the public and private morph. Egresses take on a murderous mode and communicate the stakes of political chaos. Windows are shrapnel, unable to protect those behind the glass, and they signal the extent of upheaval; similarly, while doors offer a way out, they are policed and lead to an inevitable violence. Thus, the novel argues, affective deterritorialization of projects like the War on Terror (which sparked the current refugee crisis) do not remain distant; rather, these endeavors sneak into homes and unsettle stability and unmake kinship dynamics, traditions, and makeups. Familial alterations, moreover, follow when Nadia and Saeed become refugees. In the West, displacing methods look similar to those of their home city: drones and War on Terror technology seek to deterritorialize and once again the domestic sphere takes on a violent valence. Hamid's novel demands more intimate interrogations of the refugee experience and posits that contemporary politics overshadow who is at risk in moments of mass displacement. In so doing, *Exit West* encourages an empathetic perception of the lives of those who are unfairly deemed aliens or intruders. Through a familial and domestic focus of *Exit West*, we understand that geography is destiny. The material objects that unmake homes and alter families—a subject I take up further in the next part—ring with loss, making tangible the geography and destiny of death in the post-9/11 moment.

CHAPTER III: FAMILIAL FRACTURE:

OBJECTS OF HISTORY, TERROR, AND LOSS

To fill the void of her father's untimely and tragic death, Sylvie keeps. Teetering towers of old papers and cans line the walls of her childhood home. The narrator of Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping* notes that Sylvie keeps these objects "because she considered accumulation to be the essence of housekeeping" (180). To keep a home is to keep things. Read another way, Sylvie's housekeeping counters what is lost: this desire to paper over the cracks with stuff is an affectively material response to familial loss. "'Families should stay together,'" Sylvie quietly says, "'otherwise things get out of control'" (186). The chaos of the mass of objects is not lost on her, of course. She is aware of the simple truth that things cannot rectify the loss of loved ones. But perhaps she finds solace in knowing that objects like cans is often less transient than people, staying with us for a longer time and accruing more and more history as layers of dust settle atop themselves. Robinson published *Housekeeping* in 1980, but I begin this chapter about things, history, and family with such an example to cast light on American fiction's enduring obsession with objects as a response to tragedy and violence.

In Part I, I examined the domestically deterritorializing effects of the post-9/11 world: how family metamorphoses and notions of nation unsettle when political violence literally enters the home through War on Terror technologies. Here, I scale things down by interrogating how a Forever War exactness can be configured through the physical things that shape American families. I propose that scalar shifts down from sweeping social exile to intimate, domestic objects unveil how 9/11's aftermath is everywhere, not just in distant battlegrounds of the War on Terror.[58] Materiality is a hub of the post-9/11 world; after all, two massive objects collapsed

in the attacks. This chapter analyzes the contours of materiality, family, and history when they collide. I trace this material emphasis to underscore how personal and national histories commingle and materialize through objects, rendering the past inescapable in the present. Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (*Extremely Loud*) and Joseph O'Neill's *Netherland* depict, as I show in what follows, how things represent history's role in organizing and reorganizing the central families' domestic dynamics. This concentration on objects limns the traces of political violence and its wake. An object works, Susan Stewart claims, as a "mirror that is also a microscope" to reflect and reveal the tension between the public and the private and the ways such violence shatters that barrier (42). As such, with the division of space erased, objects once shielded from the external take on destabilizing charges that renovate the internal. In this way, *Extremely Loud* and *Netherland* lean on objects to accentuate the material burden of political violence and how, consequentially, familial fracture becomes a miniature of national crisis. These novels are "discursive efforts that turned our attention to everyday objects, as though compensating for the discursive inability to characterize the scene or the sense of demolition" (Brown 278). Put simply, things help order and contain the chaos in the aftermath of 9/11.

First, I argue that Foer uses things in the world of the novel and the physical book itself to constantly remind the Schells of the cavernous familial abandons suffered in the wake of the Dresden Bombings and 9/11. Next, I investigate O'Neill's treatment of materiality and history through the initial marital rift between Hans and Rachel van den Broek and how cricket not only temporarily queers the family but also represents an American exceptionalist ideology that benefits white subjects. The crucial differences between *Extremely Loud* and *Netherland* have to do with familial outcome and form. Whereas the Schells will never regain familial unity (echoed

in the novel's fractal form) outside the realm of fantasy and narrative manipulation, the van den Broeks reunite. O'Neill takes far fewer formal liberties, depending on a more lyrically realist mode that amplifies the beauty of nostalgia. Both novels afford a view of 9/11's effects on the home and family that stand as stark white counters to the other, specifically non-white, families I examine in this project.

Material cultural studies interrogates the treatment of and histories of objects and materials; such inquisition unearths how things add to our understandings of social forms at the global, national, and individual levels. Within literary studies, moreover, thing theory offers a toolkit to close read the relationship between objects and narrative. This second part of *Ordering the Chaos* takes up the role historical violence plays in relation to objects, following in the footsteps of scholars such as Elaine Freedgood and Kinohi Nishikawa. The aspects of thing theory I work with here also extend from Bruno Latour's take on Actor Network Theory (ANT); specifically, one of his approaches to relations that we deem social is the sociology of associations, which offers a vocabulary about "how society is held together" (13). Society, Latour compellingly posits, is "a circulating fluid," capricious and vulnerable to change and bound by material and non-material actors (13). Such is the case with family, a network of relations that, as I show throughout this project, morphs on a whim because of political violence and state-enacted regulation. Furthermore, this chapter stressed that kindred relations can be welded by human and nonhuman actors. Plainly, objects can construct relations as strong as people can. Here, I ask specifically, what can objects tell us about 9/11's impact to the family within the home? That two massive objects, representing American exception and triumph by virtue of their sheer majesty, fell *and* the simple fact that most people experienced the fall through the television (the quintessential domestic thing) makes clear the necessary application

of thing theory to 9/11. Looking beyond the TV, I show how the spectacle of the attacks manifests in other things: keys, answering machines, cricket gear, grass, and within the book itself. Following Susan Stewart, I call for a scalar interpretation—how macroscopic events and their aftermaths can take form within the microscopic intimacy of things that comprise our homes and sense of belonging. While many scholars have studied the materiality of 9/11, none have yet to examine how those things affect the family and the domestic sphere. The intimate realms of belonging analyzed through the scalar relationship of macro and micro ramifications highlight the ubiquity of the past in the present and unearths an exceptionalist politics, emblematic of post-9/11 America.

I. The Things of History: Objects and Familial Loss in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*

While curious, nine-year-old protagonist-narrator Oskar Schell's quest to unlock the mysteries of a key he finds in his dead father's closet takes center stage for most of the novel, *Extremely Loud* also tells the larger story the Schell family. Grandma and Grandpa are the sole surviving members of their generation after the Dresden Bombings. Grandma's sister, Anna loved Grandpa and dies while pregnant with his child; subsequently, Grandpa develops aphasia and loses the ability to speak, depending on his body and journals to communicate. The grandparents' chapters are comprised of unsent epistles that feature linguistic and spatial/material play. In New York City 56 years later, Grandma and Grandpa's son (and Oskar's dad), Thomas, dies during the terrorist attacks. September 11th kicks off Oskar's hunt for the lock.[59] Along the way, he meets a colorful cast of characters whom the key and various tribulations bind together. Like his grandparents' chapters, Oskar's are filled with visual insertions that disrupt the reading experience. The polyphonic narrative proclaims the horrors of

familial loss, and the three protagonists navigate roiling aftershocks of trauma that ensnare them in the trap of memory while they negotiate the abandon of loved ones in the present. Indeed, the narrative swings from the past to the present abruptly—a temporal slippage that reflects my main concern: the past dawdles in the present. In this way, the past never threatens to spill over; rather, the traumatized familial past always remains in the present. Repression and historical abstraction fail in this doubly victimized kinship unit, because the pain of loss takes material form in objects.

In *Extremely Loud*, objects exhibit the familial fracture that political violence conveys. Foer couples the intimate effects of 9/11 and the Dresden bombings to accentuate America's position as both victim and perpetrator. These two events, moreover, relay how the opposing positions the nation held inevitably led to similar, devastating consequences. Coupling 9/11 and the Dresden bombings, in other words, de-exceptionalizes the attacks and makes prosaic the effects political violence imparts onto families. These conjoined events relate the trauma inherent to the Schell family's history, and the novel's tri-stranded narrative structure echoes the repetitive nature of history's influence on the perpetually grieving German-American Schells. The chapters follow a pattern: Oskar, Grandpa, Oskar, Grandma. This alteration reveals the novel's architectural reflection of recurring familial loss; the physical book embodies familial breakage. Moreover, this architectural integrity is buttressed by things that continuously recall the material effects of familial loss. In moves that erase the distance between reader and character, Foer includes representations of the physical material Oskar and his grandparents use to communicate their pain: photographs and other linguistic and graphic additions make for a visual reading experience that literalizes for the reader the Schell family's tragic disunity. These physical inclusions rhyme with the materials that fill the novel's object world. Oskar's key, Mr. Black's crammed apartment, and other things— like the book itself— personify the intimate

losses political violence inflicts. Foer houses familial loss everywhere: the material world rings with it, ranging from the book the reader holds to the key Oskar finds. I ultimately contend that the material ubiquity of political violence and violent politics are permanent fixtures within the home, coloring familial organizing principles. Rendered a spectacle by its magnitude and hyper-medialization, 9/11 specifically dominates the American domestic sphere and family in contemporary novels as a tragic reminder of the intimate reaches of the vicissitudes of history.

As my opening example asserts, the hauntology of familial loss proliferates in fiction, and Foer contributes to the trope by merging it with political violence. In other words, the novel's political heart (rupturing historical acts) overlaps the emotional center (family). The profusion of things attends to this fractious combination by exteriorizing the internal turmoil of loss and trauma; thus, *Extremely Loud* becomes a repository of the ephemeral, networked across space and time and illustrated through a formal calculus that extends the 9/11 novel genre. In that way, the book is not only akin to Foer's other novels, *Everything Is Illuminated* and *Here I Am*, but to other post-9/11 fiction such as *The History of Love* and *Great House* (Nicole Krauss), *The Zero* (Jess Walter), and *The Overstory* (Richard Powers). These novels take up systems of belonging (which here I broadly define as family), political violence, and the material representations of both to show the permissive, pliable nature of the novelistic form. Whereas objects such as those I examine here are stubborn to their forms, the novel has an ever-changing form that is happy to evolve alongside the historical moment or narrative agenda. In short, novels of this sort materialize the dematerialized: they preserve what is gone—in the case of Foer's book, a sense of stable wholeness—within the auspices of a bound, contained object.

Scholars largely overlook the flood of things in *Extremely Loud*, focusing instead on Oskar's secondary trauma and its postmodern qualities. The object-world in the novel reflects the

deluge of things that carry the sodden trauma and memory of 9/11. Paper and other random things take on new meaning after 9/11, especially in New York City where pages rained down with the ash from the Twin Towers and missing persons flyers covered walls. Things encode the resounding boom of the attacks and attempt to order the subsequent confusion, despair, and loss; and an examination of the things in *Extremely Loud* fortifies a fresh, political reading of a family's bereavement. The Schells recruit things (photographs, spaces, household objects, and more) to reconcile history's uprooting powers.[60] As Kristiaan Versluys writes, the "mustering of visual, paralinguistic means of communication … introduce the unsettling nature of the events into the very texture of the prose" (81). Just as Thomas's missing presence destabilizes Oskar's life and Anna's death silences Grandpa's voice, the material inclusion of photographs and other communicative methods unsettles the reading experience. This gaze at material uncovers how the overarching American narrative endured after 9/11; what changed, rather, were the intimacies that fuel our prosaic lives. "American character probably did not fundamentally change…," Sam Cohen writes about 9/11, "however, the intentional crashing of four commercial airlines…altered more than daily life" (3). Materiality in *Extremely Loud* foregrounds this idea that 9/11 reverberated beyond the prosaic. Indeed, Oskar uses things to define family, as I show below in my readings of various objects. Matthew Mullins boldly claims that postmodernism "is a resolutely materialist aesthetic," and that "what makes literature postmodern is its preoccupation with the material things and interactions that constitute those seemingly ready-made social categories" (*Pieces* 3). So, in other words, the family as a social construct is made up of things, of material. Take, for instance, how Oskar's understandings of family and Thomas specifically materialize from things. The fall of the Towers contributes to that as well, revealing not only the ephemerality of the things but of people as well. For the protagonist, 9/11 changed how things

look and what they mean. The familial object world morphed with Thomas's death: the empty seat at the kitchen table inaugurated a new era, accrued with things that bear the mark of loss.[61]

To further echo the intimate reaches of loss, Foer intertwines sundry narratives and graphic materials to construct the book as a metatextual and physical object of ever-abutting familial and national trauma. *Extremely Loud* resembles a Russian nesting doll, archiving history through familial sagas.[62] In concert with the grandparents' narratives, Oskar's *Stuff That Happened to Me* book metanarratively illustrates an archive of loss.[63] The "Stuff" in the title doubles as a name for events—occurrences that have impacted his life, namely 9/11—and as evidentiary material about 9/11 and Thomas's death. Foer includes photos of Oskar's "world" and object relations, making the book a multimodal object. These photos gloss the boy's interests and trauma. For instance, there is a photograph of Stephen Hawking, Oskar's favorite scientist, and the famous still of Laurence Olivier's Hamlet holding Yorick's skull, a role Oskar later plays in the book.[64] On the one hand, *Stuff* stabilizes him, used as a material sleep aid. On the other hand, it is filled with images that destabilize Oskar, reminding him of 9/11 and the mysterious way Thomas perished. In this way, Oskar is never far removed from the loss of his father, and he is constantly on the hunt for the reparative answer to the familial fracture. Foer's metanarrative experimentation becomes a physical thing to convey the Schell family's inter-domestic deterritorialization.

As it makes physical the altered familial dynamics through its architecture, *Extremely Loud* should be read as inherently political. Indeed, reviewers of the novel took issue with its seeming apolitical charge, criticizing Foer for not depicting the attacks and thus sentimentalizing or softening them. For instance, in his scathing review, Michel Faber writes in *The Guardian*, "It is a triumph of evasion … whose net effect is to distract the reader (and Foer) from harsh truths.

It promises to take you to Ground Zero, but helplessly detours towards the Land of Oz, spending most of its time journeying through the Neverlands in between." Such remarks fail to recognize that the book's politics extend from a different avenue, one that it is inherently more intimate and subjective. Countering Faber, Elizabeth S. Anker writes that post-9/11 fiction politically positions the attacks as a "menace to paternity (equating fatherhood with *patria* or homeland) and corresponding onus to secure the threatened patrilineal bequest, thus figuring the sanctity of the father-son bond as the essence of what 9/11 jeopardized" (464). Thus, my reading of Foer's seemingly apolitical book underscores that the family is in fact a political entity that requires interrogation, especially after calamities such as September 11th and the Dresden Bombings. As I argue throughout this project, seeing family and nation side-to-side as reflections of each other not only broadens the perimeters of the political to embrace affective arenas but also makes plain the codependent relationship between the two assemblages.

Hence, reading familial politics begets a reading of national politics as well. This line of inquiry about the novel remains underdeveloped. Jennifer Rickel claims that post-9/11 *bildungsromans* like *Extremely Loud* "explore anxiety about state protection through a metaphor of the father-son relationship within the coming-of-age narrative" and that the books "engage with the coming-of-age story of overcoming threats to 'patria or homeland,' in order to contextualize the current deployment of the narrative of American victimhood" (173, 174). Broad themes, nation and family create an interface that welcomes a further narrowing to include relics that knowingly and unknowingly represent history. Incorporating materiality into the fold foregrounds the material weight of the Dresden Bombings and 9/11 and compels a reading of *Extremely Loud* that speaks to the political implications of such historical events within the home. In this way, as mentioned in Part I, conditions of violent aftermath disintegrate the

distinctions between the national and the individual, the public and the private, to deterritorialize affective realms with stakes in and on the domestic and familial spheres.

Oskar's quest to find the key's accompanying lock has been read, by Versluys and others, as a metaphor to *work through* the trauma of loss.[65] Metaphorically, however, Oskar's New York City adventure, initiated by the familial severing, can also be read as a racialized reconciliation for the national affront 9/11 imposed. The Schell family's resounding pain represents the specifically white liberal familial subject's pain. In Part I, I discussed how a War on Terror culture legally and socially bars Brown people in particular from national collectivity, underscoring the exilic culture that the attacks spawned. In *Extremely Loud*, however, such exile is blatantly absent. Nation means together, and together means family. Matthew Mullins deems this depiction of post-9/11 national unity "traumatic solidarity" and claims the novel "posits that an unbreakable bond between identity collectives such as nations based on the common experiences of trauma. Foer does not eradicate identity borders, however, but posits a sense of community that crosses those borders" ("Boroughs" 301). In this way, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* diametrically opposes *Extremely Loud*. Whereas one casts a light on the walls built after 9/11, the other presents a world without them. Hamid consider the events from the Global South and depicts the dangerous racialized responses to September 11th that castigate Brown people. Foer, conversely, maintains a purely white American outlook, emphasizing the domestic concerns of the attacks and painting a picture of a national family that eschews the international and racial ramifications of 9/11. The novel whitewashes the racialized aftermath. Despite this issue of post-9/11 representation, the family saga in *Extremely Loud* depicts how political violence emulsifies the public and the private through household objects, rupturing the integrity of domestic terrain.

No object conveys 9/11's uprooting power more than the key, harboring the memories of familial harmony and the pain of loss. As I show below with William Black, the key becomes a symbol of mourning, collectivity, and response; moreover, its origin, so to speak, springs from the vacuum of familial loss. The unsettling of the Schell home and familial dynamics extends in part from the emptiness of Thomas's coffin. As a means to materially fill that looming hole, Oskar finds solace in his dad's things. Whereas the coffin, bereft of a body, tells a traumatic history of loss, the closet brims with things that carry a history of familial cohesion. "Even though Dad's coffin was empty, his closet was full," Oskar remarks, noting the importance of things in his bereavement process (Foer 36). The closet's fullness and coffin's emptiness oppose each other to expose how familial loss materializes physically through objects and through empty spaces.[66] Thomas's death gives Oskar what he calls "heavy boots"—times when his grief feels embodied, stopping him from moving forward. So, to counter this feeling of heaviness, the protagonist leans on stuff: "…it made my boots lighter to be around his things, and to touch stuff that he had touched, and to make the hangers hang a little straighter, even though I knew it didn't matter" (36-37). Oskar admits to the seesaw nature of materiality. Yes, things make his boots lighter but for how long? Do objects matter without their owner? Despite these pressing questions, however, the boy continues to revel in Thomas's closet.[67] While everything is transient, the life of objects is often much longer than that of people. Like Sylvie in the opening example, Oskar picks up on this in his father's closet, recognizing how space and objects have the uncanny ability to moor the past. "It still smelled like shaving," he observes, fixating on Thomas's lingering material and empirical presence despite his absence (36).

Thus, the closet and its things also recall a former familial unity and reiterates the transience of family. Oskar visits the closet and discovers the key when wearing particularly

heavy boots because "Mom was with Ron in the living room … She wasn't missing Dad" (Foer 36). The reliance on emotionally resonant space, memorialized by Thomas's possessions, extends from a frustration with Mom's seemingly inappropriate method of mourning (unbeknownst to Oskar, Ron is a friend who also grieves intimate loss). The threat of a familial recalibration in which Ron replaces Thomas sends Oskar to the closet to relocate the past in the present. It makes sense then that the closet remains frozen in time, an archive untouched since Thomas's death. The boy finds the key in a vase—one that Thomas bought as an anniversary gift. The key's relationship to the closet and his father grabs the boy's attention:

> *What the?* I opened it up, and inside was a key. *What the, what the?* It was a weird looking key, obviously to something extremely important, because it was fatter and shorter than a normal key. I couldn't explain it: a fat and short key, in the little envelope, in a blue vase, on the highest shelf in his closet. (37)

The refrain "*What the*" ostensibly works as a truncated version of "What the hell?" and, more importantly, as a question about objects themselves. *What* is this thing? The concluding string of prepositional phrases narrates the key's spatial position within the closet. Oskar connects the arbitrary thing to his father, revealing how objects engineer networks of remembrances.[68] From these associations burgeons the ostensible journey to unlock the key's secrets and the spiritual quest toward domestic stability. The small key has monumental consequences, providing Oskar with an enduring object connection to Thomas through a macro-micro material register.

This forced meaning between Oskar and the key's object-subject relationship also imparts how character traits and values in *Extremely Loud* work as kinship objects, inherited items from loved ones.[69] Borrowing from Janet Carsten, Sara Ahmed writes that kinship objects "may be values, capital, aspirations, projects, and styles. Insofar as we inherit that which is near enough to be available at home … we inherit the nearness of certain objects more than others,

which means we inherit ways of inhabiting and extending into space" (86). In other words, the key orientates Oskar to inhabit a world without his father while allowing him to believe it orients him to the world *of* his father.[70] Before he dies, father teaches son that the tiniest action consequently alters space, time, and meaning. Moving one grain of sand in the Sahara changes it completely: "'If you *hadn't* done it, human history would have been one way… But you *did* do it, so…?' I stood on the bed, pointed my fingers at the fake stars and screamed, 'I changed the course of human history! … I changed the universe!'" (Foer 86). This moment of inspiration and earthly purpose fuels the remainder of Oskar's story, though it is not enough to help Oskar completely reconcile paternal death. The key has a maturation value, instructing Oskar about the transience of life and family, but it cannot fill the void. Versluys argues that Thomas "has instilled in [Oskar] an inquisitive spirit that seeks adventure for the sake of adventure" (104). This "inquisitive spirit" should be read as a kinship object (or kinship value). Doing so recognizes the quest's origins in familial values; Oskar searches for a way to live in the present with a thing from the past, hoping that the tiniest discovery provokes restorative consequences on the Schell family's disorientation.[71]

Oskar responds to familial instability through material meaning making; he invents to reverse history's impact on his family. But imagination is futile: Oskar recognizes that nothing can overturn the hegemony of death and history. Oskar tells his Grandfather (also named Thomas): "'I want to stop inventing. If I could know how he died, exactly how he died, I wouldn't have to invent him dying inside an elevator that was stuck between floors, … There were so many different ways to die, and I just need to know which was his'" (Foer 257).[72] In constructing a narrative about his father's death and discovering why the attack occurred, Oskar searches for relief. This trauma of unknowing associates itself to Oskar's imagination, and he

invents things to find an answer for his father's death. The boy's internal anguish finds external materiality in his imagination. These imagined objects and ideas are mementos from a bygone era and are creations of an idyllic future that ground Oskar with fond memories of a complete family. But they also uproot him, forcing him to acknowledge that Thomas is not a participant in the post-9/11 world.

Our worlds, scholars such as Ahmed and Brown suggest, are defined in part by objects; we use things to orient ourselves to our surroundings. But they also help us orient ourselves *within* ourselves. The book's opening lines depict Oskar orientating himself before Thomas's funeral where an empty casket waits. The boy invents a special teakettle that not only comforts through song and humor but also allows him to hear his father's lost voice: "What about a teakettle? What if the spout opened and closed when the steam came out, so it would become a mouth, and it could whistle pretty melodies, or do Shakespeare, or just crack up with me? I could invent a teakettle that reads in Dad's voice, so I could fall asleep" (Foer 1).[73] Thus, from the start of the book, Foer signals the integral duality of objects that inform Oskar's identity and the spaces he inhabits. Things sooth, providing laughter and joy, but they also recall trauma. Versluys writes, "Oskar's inventions speak to his intent to reinvent the world, to live in a world that has remained free from trauma, in which the unthinkable has not yet happened. He wants to make reality malleable so that it conforms to his desires" (102). Oskar's inventions certainly convey a nostalgia for a pre-9/11 world in which his family is intact, but these creations also help manage trauma itself. Inventions grant him access to revel in the "what if" moments that offer comfort. Creating, whether in his "laboratory" at home or while on his way to his father's empty coffin funeral, is an affective process that stabilizes what is destabilizing. Oskar reinvents the present and the past through his imagination, making this moment without Thomas less painful.

Therein lies the boy's struggle to overcome Thomas's death: it was out of the blue, unexpectedly unraveling the tight-knit blanket of familial unity.

Thomas haunts the novel's object world. His presence is felt through things, or, as Brown offers, "things also confer individual identity" (158). At the start of his quest to find the missing lock, Oskar visits an art supply store to figure out if "maybe black meant something" (Foer 44). "Black" is written in red pen on the envelope the key was inside. What follows is a pseudo-detective scene in which material clues help Oskar piece together the case of the red "Black." A store clerk shows the precocious protagonist a pad of paper next to a rainbowed array of pens. Looking at the pad, Oskar realizes that "'*Black was written by Black!* I need to find Black!'" (46). While the plot moves forward narratively with this important discovery, it also slows down with the graphic inclusion of pad's pages themselves. Foer adds three pages to enhance Oskar's sleuthing; the pages feature squiggles and names and the color of the pen in the corresponding color. The pages are a blizzard of random words and markings. But, in one corner of the pad—the last page included—is Thomas Schell's name in red ink. Presumably, this is the same red pen Thomas used to write "Black" on the envelope. The material affixation of the art store pad within the book pinpoints the material afterlife Thomas lives. The pad and the physical book itself shelter Thomas. He lives on but only fleetingly, leaving traces of himself everywhere. The material world houses the missing father in a way that the physical world cannot.

Simultaneously, the colorful pages demand that the reader investigate the pad as well. We help Oskar on his quest when we pore over the pages of materials—the clues. To that end, as participants in the quest for the lock, the readers orient themselves within Oskar's traumatized world through the object of the book itself. We forcibly reconcile the tragedy of 9/11 and configure for ourselves the protagonist's position. As Rachel Greenwald Smith posits, "The

epistemological uncertainty characteristic of the aftermath of trauma is thus reflected in formal innovation and fragmentation. The novel thrusts the reader into a textual morass that forces an identification with the confusion and devastation of its central character" (156-157). In other words, the metatextual material in *Extremely Loud* encourages empathy through engagement, forging a bond between reader and character as they both look for clues.[74] The reader joins Oskar as he vulnerably narrates and materially conveys his attempts to overcome trauma.[75]

This character-reader relationship reflects the sinuous relations between objects within the book. Just as the reader aids Oskar on his quest, the interconnectedness of things guides him to learn more about Thomas's haunting presence. After ripping out the pad's pages to keep for himself (therefore to include in the narrative), Oskar "[runs] around the rest of the store, from display to display, looking to see if [Thomas had] tested any other art supplies. That way [Oskar] could prove if [Thomas] had been buying art supplies or just testing our pens to buy a pen" (Foer 50). He uncovers a network of objects related to his father, presented through catalog:

> His name was *everywhere*. He'd tested out markers and oil sticks and colored pencils and chalk and pens and pastels and watercolors. He'd even scratched his name into a piece of moldable plastic, and I found a sculpting knife with yellow on its end, so I knew that was what he did it with. (50)

The list of supplies and the ubiquity of Thomas's name links him to the material world, and Oskar uses these things to orientate himself in a world without his father.[76] The art utensils show Oskar his father's presence from beyond the grave; at the same time, however, their connections highlight the inescapability of the attacks because Oskar is forced to remember the historical moment in which Thomas died. The loss of *patria*, as Anker reminds us, is both personal and national by virtue of the scales at work in the novel. The objects Oskar deems evidentiary in the

search are proxies in the macro-historical and micro-familial consequences of 9/11. Just as Thomas appears through stuff, September 11th remains in the material memory, always proximal.

The ever-present memory of 9/11 laden within Oskar's scrapbook materially domesticates national trauma. After the discoveries at the art supply store, the boy lays awake, thinking about the potentials of a quest and the connections to be made with Thomas. His insomnia is an offshoot of his traumatized state, and to quell nighttime disturbances, Oskar flips through *Stuff*. Most imperative within the scrapbook is Lyle Owerko's famous photograph of a man falling from the burning buildings. While this image comes into play much more prominently at the conclusion, its inclusion early in the novel signals Oskar's preoccupation with how Thomas died and the national trauma of 9/11. Did Thomas fall like the man in the photo? Is Thomas the falling man? I consider the material inclusion of the photograph within the panoply of graphics as a scalar agenda resonant in much 9/11 literature. The exteriority of the image and the attacks enters the home and unsettles the family when Oskar questions whether Thomas is the subject of the photograph. Hence, Oskar welds nation and family through the photograph, forging meaning about his family through the defining image of American tragedy. *Extremely Loud* controversially concludes with a 15-page flip book of altered history.[77] Oskar realizes that his scrapbook is "completely full" with "maps and drawings, pictures from magazines and newspapers and the Internet, … The whole world was in there" (Foer 325). The scrapbook is a Russian doll of associated worlds and object relations. The world within worlds metatextually echoes *Extremely Loud*'s multiple narrative strands that blur and intermingle very specific times and places; and the litany of things that fill *Stuff* mummifies the past in the present, fossils of a bygone epoch of familial unity and national peace. Oskar finds the images of the falling man,

tears the pages out, and "reverse[s] the order, so the last one was first, and the first was last" (325). The removal and reversal are acts of wish fulfilment.

Moreover, when he flips the images, turning the falling man into the floating man, the protagonist rescinds national and personal history. The effect is reparative; he reinvents the past, erasing trauma for himself and the nation. Rickel posits such an ending for the novel "presents a fantasy of American triumph over tragedy that bends the bildungsroman to characterize the US at once as victim and savior" (185). Specifically, the grammar of the ending politically commentates on redoing the past. Indeed, the grammar of historical revision here beseeches inquiry as it relates to Oskar's dream of familial reunification. Historical revision is familial revision. Foer shifts to the conditional mood after the reversal when the boy speaks in a language of possibilities. Oskar reverses the laws of physics to relive his final moments with Thomas:

> I'd have said "Dad?" backward, which would have sounded the same as "Dad" forward.
>
> He would have told me the story of the Sixth Borough, from the voice in the can at the end to the beginning, from "I love you" to "Once upon a time…"
>
> We would have been safe. (Foer 326)

The novel's final lines materially and grammatically depict familial loss. I address the spatial aesthetics of familial fracture and trauma below, but for now I want to focus on how the space on the page echoes the undoing and redoing of time in concert with the conditional mood. Each space on the page belabors the reversal process, slowing down time, and keeping Thomas in the conditional imaginary for just a little while longer. The final words, however, shatter the illusion: "We would have been" leaves Oskar and the nation vulnerable. The first-person plural concretizes the collective solidarity and trauma Americans faced after 9/11. To Oskar, without

the father, nation and family lay assailable, vulnerable to the hauntings of past, the trauma of the present, and the uncertainty of the future.

Historical revision, however, is futile, and the elder Schells understand this intimately. Both Grandpa and Grandma Schell survive the Dresden Bombings and witness 9/11 (through the television, no less, the staple domestic object of togetherness). Foer yokes World War II and 9/11 through kinship to emphasize the inescapability of the past's tyrannical presence in the present.[78] Atchison maintains that the inclusion of Oskar's grandparents' narratives provides a "continuity of traumatic discourse" (360). The familial history, therefore, attempts to "bring together elements of post-traumatic survivals without universalizing the event" (360). I would dispute this latter statement because the binary of victim and perpetrator is too simplistic to accurately cognize the intricacies of historical consequence. While Germany was a victim during the bombings, it also participated in the Holocaust; similarly, the American empire's violent endeavors abroad prompted 9/11. Such dichotomies prove the nations both guilty and innocent. Classifying them one over the other jettisons the victims and revokes blame from the guilty parties. Therefore, I claim that the novel's treatment of this history of violence unexceptionalizes the events, scaling them down to domestic fixtures that show the consequences of macro history on micro families. Moreover, these acts of political violence furnish the domestic space, defining the Schells and manifesting as the objects that make up their homes. The maelstrom of history and time encircles Grandma and Grandpa with perpetual reminders of their histories and losses, despite their efforts to revise, rewrite, or reinvent the past.

Grandpa and Grandma Schell present national tragedy's encroachment into the family both linguistically and graphically.[79] To capture what is too intractable to transmit simply demands a breach of convention. Traditional narrative form unjustly represents the horrific

narrative of expansive national and familial tragedy because it cannot accurately convey or depict the effects of political victimization; instead, narrative is hyper-sensorial, a cacophony of forms and material representations. Grandpa and Grandma's chapters reflect the necessary power of fiction through formal innovation. The formal characteristics of these chapters depict disparate visualizations of trauma, ranging from excess to emptiness, variegating the materiality of loss. After immigrating to America, the grandparents confront their past and trauma through unsent letters that, as Ingersoll remarks, blur the line between epistles and memoirs (60). This muddying of genre, too, reifies the infringement of novelistic convention. That the letters are unsent emphasizes their introspective function; addressing epistles to Oskar and Thomas Jr, respectively, Grandma and Grandpa write confessionals, straining to put into words what they find indescribable.

These material reflections differ for each elder. Grandpa's chapters, for example, are visually cacophonous with long paragraphs and verbose prose on one page and a single sentence or an image on the next. Grandpa's aphasia forces him to depend on his hands and copious journals to communicate. Tattooing "YES" and "NO" on his palms, he turns his body into communicative material like the pages of his notebooks. The elderly man whittles down language to its two most basic words, reflecting in some sense the cards in Arthur Black's apartment that provide one-word biographies, which I examine below. I want to emphasize that Grandpa's hands and the single sentence pages testify to his linguistic range as representative of his trauma. Formally and metaphorically, the scalar project of macro historical violence appears on the micro intimate spheres of the page and the victim's body. As communicative mediums, page and body are objects that carry the leaden weight of historical, violent spectacle. This materially sparse economy of language contradicts Grandpa's struggle to stop writing. In his

final letter to Thomas, he pours so much of his history onto the page that he writes smaller and smaller, and eventually the words bleed together, creating a mass of black space. Atchison considers this huge coagulation of words a visualization of "the distortion of memory" (365). Yet, Grandpa does not distort memory; rather, he cannot escape it. He literalizes this in the painful loquaciousness illustrated on the page; we glimpse into the abyss of traumatized memory in the blackness of the pages. This palimpsest of loss reflects Grandpa's failure to suppress his memories: he literally cannot stop telling his story, writing over himself in a futile attempt to make sense of history, loss, and time. The elderly man exteriorizes the interiority of trauma, and the past and present jell in Grandpa's memories and writings. Subsequently, what manifests materially is a jumble of words as chaotic as the Dresden Bombing and the other scarring moments in his personal history.

Whereas Grandpa Schell finds it difficult to cease writing in his permanent silence, Grandma Schell struggles to give voice to her writing, filling much of her chapters with blank spaces. She isolates each sentence, flanking her words with emptiness— as if stringing the words together without the spatial buffers would be too close to touching the past. For instance, when meditating on her own heartaches, Grandma writes, " I have suffered so much more than I needed to. And the joys I have felt have not always been joyous I could have lived differently" (Foer 79). The emptiness crescendos when Grandpa learns what his wife has been writing in her autobiography entitled "My Life". Thousands of pages long, the book is a sheaf of blank pages. Grandma tells Grandpa, "'I just made it up to the present moment. Just now. I'm all caught up with myself. The last thing I wrote was 'I'm going to show him what I've written. I hope he loves it'" (120). Foer includes blank pages not only to illustrate Grandma's empty existence as a consequence of trauma, but also to convey the trauma itself. What seems like

pages of nothing are in fact pages of grief and loss too painful to put into words. Later, in her own words, Grandma reveals, “ I went to the guest room and pretended to write. I hit the space bar again and again and again. My life story was spaces” (176). It is important that she writes this story of spaces in the guest room; she is in the same room when the Twin Towers fall, when political violence yet again chisels space into her life. Her history repeats itself during 9/11, and the guest room, where she externalized the internal blankness she felt after the Bombings, bridges both moments. This material site of trauma proves that the break from the past is never clean. Grandma’s chapters are jarring to read because the spaces force the reader to slow down and bask in each sentence. The spaces illustrate an aesthetics of familial disunity; the blanks carve space for both Grandma and the reader to ruminate a lifetime of difficulties. Atchison posits that these blank instances of formal experimentation are spots “where the reader must take on the role of co-creator of the text by filling in the absent spaces usually found within the novel’s meta-textual representations of absence and presence” (360).[80] These spaces on the page, however, are more than just sites for readerly meaning making; they function to express the immutable trauma of Grandma’s life and literalize her attempt to gain distance from history’s mark on her family. But as the coincidence of the guest bedroom attests, history’s redundancies are inescapable.[81]

Foer amplifies this spatial materiality of trauma and familial despair when Grandma recalls 9/11. Grandma segregates each sentence in this climactic moment to its own line, kaleidoscopically fracturing the scene and painting a towering bricolage of repeated images:

> The same pictures over and over.
>
> Planes going into buildings.
>
> Bodies falling.

People waving shirts out of high windows.
…
Planes going into buildings.

Planes going into buildings.

Buildings falling.

People waving shirts out of high windows.

Bodies falling. (230)

The repeated sentences materially construct a tower on the page. From this tower, Grandma illustrates both the historical moment of 9/11 and the trauma Americans witnessed on television. The reverberating sentences echo the repeated images of the planes pulverizing the Towers; thus, the material on the page mirrors the events on the screens. In its construction, too, the tower of sentences keeps readers "oriented to our location within the story and the publication" (Drucker 123). Like Grandma, we cannot escape 9/11 or its material consequences whether on the page, within kindred, or within objects. Written retroactively to Oskar, the letter elucidates how history materializes for Grandma, especially as it relates to her family. Indeed, she even characterizes her dead son as material when Mom creates posters, a vain attempt to find Thomas: " Physical things. Forty years of loving someone becomes staples and tape" (Foer 230). Like geography marks destiny, history forms around space. Voids dominate Grandma's recollections, and she carves lacunas from which traumatic history nevertheless emerges. The tower represents the inescapability of history's murderous hands on the Schell family.

Massive calamities like the Dresden bombings and 9/11 destabilize intimate social formations, marking the macro-micro scalar registers the novel navigates through objects. The material weight of personal and national history, then, fuses past and present. As Brown notes, "…the history *in* things might be understood as the crystallization of the anxieties and aspirations

that linger there in the material object" (221). Both personal and global, history erases the dividing line between social spheres, and objects permeate the boundaries between past and present. The private-public purpose of things is evident in Arthur Black's apartment. Whereas Oskar fixates on a few items at a time (the key, the message machine, his tambourine, etc.), the cooky elderly upstairs neighbor Mr. Black obsesses over everything, collecting mementos from his life.[82] A former war correspondent, Mr. Black lives in a home that is dedicated to not only his own personal history, but world history as well: "His apartment was filled with the stuff he'd collected during *the wars of his life*" (Foer 154-156, emphasis mine). This final clause reveals both the personal and the public relationality of these things. Wars can be as personal as they are international. Mr. Black's multifarious collection preserves his participation in the world. Born on January 1, 1900, he embodies the 20th century, and his living space reflects that history. Thus, these objects express the porous bond between the public and the private spheres, demonstrating that they necessarily and inextricably merge through history. Perhaps history is also what is extremely loud and incredibly close, crashing into us and changing the course of our lives.[83]

Whereas Thomas's closet imbues a recent, intimate history and loss, Mr. Black's apartment steeps in the *long durée* of world history. The mainstay of his apartment is a massive card catalog with entries of "'the name of the person and a one-word biography'" (Foer 157). This biographical index highlights a person's consequential role in the world or their lasting contribution. For instance, Mr. Black's card for Mohammad Atta—one of the hijackers in the 9/11 attacks—simply says "War" (159). The contribution Atta made in the world makes sense, yet Oskar struggles to understand why Mr. Black gives Atta material importance in his catalog. "'It's just that why would have one for him and not one for my dad?'" the boy asks Mr. Black. The despair in Oskar's tone accentuates the dizzying monumental-miniscule consequences of

9/11. Why pay attention to the arbiter of chaos and national and familial disruption but not a good person? Oskar realizes that Thomas was not, in the grand scheme of things, "a Great Man... Dad was just someone who ran a family jewelry business. Just an ordinary dad. But I wished so much, then, that he *had* been Great. (159). Thomas has not left a lasting impact on the world; however, he has left his mark on *Oskar's* world. Objects, therefore, house the power of maturation for the boy, always imparting lessons to help him process the familial fracture. The cards also show how history dictates narrative, how those who make a bigger impact get to be the face of their historical moments, instead of those who are kind and good. Objects make history tangible, or, as Brown notes, "the history in things might be understood as the crystallization of the anxieties and aspirations that linger there in the material object" (221). The materiality of history in *Extremely Loud* rings with the anxiety-inducing consequences of political events like 9/11. The loudness and closeness appear in the Schell family's history too.

Familial and national history take material form in the answering machine that holds Thomas's final words. While Oskar centers 9/11 as the historical nucleus of his narrative, he refrains from recalling the event itself. The fracture between father and son is too great.[84] Smith remarks that because narrators of these fictions often abstain from depicting the attacks, 9/11 "…strangely never takes place. Instead of providing the focal point for the action of the novel, it therefore seems to bleed out into an indistinct nebula of metaphors…" (165). While I disagree that Oskar eschews 9/11 to the extent that it never occurs, I concur with Smith's claim that the tragedy shatters into a horde of metaphors.[85] Similar to the futile windows in *Exit West*, the domestic barricade collapses, and familial abandon embodies things. The horrors of the day center on the answering machine, which simultaneously represents the familial connection between father and son and the violent severing of that bond. Thomas leaves five messages on

the machine and Oskar hears all of them, never picking up to talk to his father one last time. In that way, Thomas's messages liken to his parents' unsent letters; Foer rhymes the two communicative methods to convey the isolation of trauma. Oskar mentions the answering machine from very early on, marking its contribution to his stifling trauma. But while the protagonist mentions the object often, he conceals its contents, scared to bring that part of the past into the present all at once, so instead he spaces each message apart in the book. Oskar reveals the final message only after completing his quest. Thomas's messages create an archive of memory, a final object for Oskar to hold onto, revealing "the urge to communicate during the traumatic event, ultimately leaving a trace of self through the recording, thereby creating an artifact for remembrance" (Atchison 361). In this way, the answering machine is akin to the archive of *Stuff That Happened to Me*: an auditory archive of a cohesive familial past and a fractured familial present. Like the pad or the imaginary teakettle, the answering machine is both a source of comfort—literally recalling Thomas's voice—and the material origin of his trauma.

Oskar's quest concludes when the key and machine work together to unlock the mystery of working through trauma. While the machine and its contents traumatically shelter the severing of paternal connection, it also offers solidarity with another fatherless son. Thus, Foer positions objects equivocally: on the one hand, they can convey and impart trauma, but on the other, they can pave a way through the pain. Oskar reveals the heartbreaking final message to William Black, the key's owner, because they both suffer from recent paternal loss; the key, therefore, binds the two sons through the mutability of family and the pain of loss. Oskar obsesses over the details of the fifth and final message, telling William,

> He needed me, and I couldn't pick up. … *Are you there?* He asked eleven times. I know, because I've counted. It's one more than I can count on my fingers. … Also, there was so much space between the times he asked. There are fifteen seconds between the third and fourth,

> which is the longest space. You can hear people in the background screaming and crying. And you can hear glass breaking, which is part of what makes me wonder if people were jumping. (301)

In telling William the contents of the last message—one that requires Oskar to ask the man to "'please put your hand on me so I can finish the rest?'"—Oskar begins to work through his trauma through a fellowship of shared loss (301). The boy asks William for forgiveness "'[f]or not being able to tell anyone'" about the message (302). Accordingly, the machine and key collate the themes of family, material, trauma, and history. Through the machine, the son traumatically hears his father's dying words at a moment of historical precedence. Oskar knows that his world has fundamentally changed. In other words, Foer domesticates 9/11 from the macro scale (the watershed moment of the attacks) to the micro scale (the impact on the Schells) through the answering machine. The domestic item also conveys that Oskar's trauma springs from a one-sidedness. Not picking up the phone, not answering the question "'Are you there?'", likens to his grandparents' unsent letters. Oskar, however, differs from Grandma and Grandpa in that he confesses the pain to someone. Familial loss, the novel reiterates, cannot be rectified through things, but communication can curtail—at least in part—its anguish.

History qua material in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* epitomizes the indelible relationship between the past and the present, between nation and family. Things, families, and nations find common ground in the simple truth that they contain histories. They have stories to tell. In looking at all three braided together, we recognize how difference is in fact far more familiar than we imagined. Materiality in the post-9/11 world navigates between scales of the macro and the micro, between nation and family, public and private. As Foer's novel shows, materiality exposes the ubiquity of trauma in intimate spheres: from a key to the graphic and metatextual representations of loss, materials carry both national and familial history, binding the

two into a Gordian knot of trauma. This reading of the novel emphasizes materiality and its relationship to history and family, and how political violence enters the domestic sphere in subtle, indeed more dangerous, ways. The overlaying of the public and the private uproots familial dynamics regardless of unexceptional national stances as victim or perpetrator, as the three narratives attest. The gaps in Grandma's testimony testify to what's lost at history's chopping block; and, on the other end of the spectrum, Grandpa's confessional reveals how traumatic history festers into an unintelligible, chaotic mass of pain. Material traces fill the void of physical loss, always reminding those remaining of history's residue. But to rectify that loss, to redo history as Oskar imaginatively attempts, is an abortive endeavor. Familial reunion does occur in a post-9/11 world, however. And as *Netherland* shows us next, the intimate, domestic objects and materials that convey these macro events and their aftermaths often put into relief an enduring politics of exceptionalist representative of post-9/11 America.

II. The Things of Aftermath: Family, Cricket, and Unity in Netherland

Marital intimacies are a cornerstone of American fiction; the institution of marriage is a heteronormative bedrock of American ideals, after all. Specifically, a subset of the 9/11 family novel presents marriages as an endangered species. Holy matrimony crashes and burns: *Falling Man* (Don DeLillo), *The Good Life* (Jay McInerney), *A Disorder Peculiar to the Country* (Ken Kalfus) all feature strained marriages that echo the despair of the post-9/11 American moment. These novels, and indeed almost all the novels I examine in this project, take place in New York City, the site of the most carnage and the most consequential rewriting of space and social order after 9/11. Too, these novels begin in *medias res*, with the marriage already wavering over a bleeding edge: September 11th delivers the definitive push that sends both parties into freefall.

However, while many of these 9/11 family novels recount the difficulties of marriage, some conclude with the reunion of the couple, reiterating the central marital and familial tenets of American social order. Such is the case with Joseph O'Neill's *Netherland*—a novel that initially uses the attacks in New York City as the decisive blow to the van den Broek marriage, uprooting the Danish immigrant protagonist-narrator Hans. It is in this way that scholars such as Richard Gray and Kathy Knapp deem 9/11 domesticated: the public enters the private as a conclusive blow to the stability of familiarity. Hans grapples with his familial fracture on the cricket pitch where a Trinidadian, Gatsby-esque man named Chuck Ramkisson metaphorically stands-in for Hans's mother and romantic partner. O'Neill undoes the queering of family dynamics in the novel, however, when Hans awakens from Chuck's seductive dream of stars and stripes and reunites with his wife Rachel and son Jake. The domestication of 9/11 is overpowered by the heteronormative, white picket fence ideal.

In this section, I contend that objects in *Netherland* carry the weight of aftermath: things and material ferry the national crisis in the wake of 9/11 into the domestic sphere, contributing to familial fracture. Because the marital split occurs immediately after the attacks, I consider how 9/11 limns the fault lines of intimacy within the central marriage and how a desire for unity subsequently manifests through various objects and systems, namely cricket. O'Neill, moreover, uses the space of the cricket pitch to bind the personal and the national; specifically, the grass on the field represents this merger. Using aftermath as a conceptual guide, I show how the materiality and objects of cricket engender a temporary, queer replacement family for Hans after his split with Rachel; these objects also reverberate with rhythms of colonial and exceptionalist endeavors seen after 9/11. The grass, plainly, is the consummate site of both family and nation, of interior and exterior. Furthermore, the materials of cricket bridge time and place to represent

familial and national unity that is lost in the aftermath of 9/11. In this way, ultimately, cricket comes to exemplify American exceptionalism through its resonances of colonialism and its picturesque ability to somehow achieve socio-racial harmony. This examination of material and family in *Netherland* highlights an ambiguity reflective of contemporary precarity, the now prosaically wayward feeling of instability emblematic of the post-9/11 moment.

Whereas *Extremely Loud* presents a family directly victimized by history and political violence, *Netherland* depicts a family that roils in history's aftershocks. Not torn apart by the attacks like the Schells, the van den Broeks are removed from brute force of history. O'Neill shows how history shifts domestic dynamics regardless of individual involvement. Like his other novels *The Breezes* and, especially, *The Dog*, *Netherland* is a slow, melancholic, and quiet novel. And it shows how the residual ash of history and politics settles in the nooks and crannies of our lives. While narratively it leans heavily on analepsis (flashback), it shies away from the kind of formal experimentation we see in *The Dog*, which incorporates emails and lists into the narrative (often between multiple layers of parentheticals) and in *Extremely Loud* with its postmodern generic and spatial play. Instead, O'Neill embraces "lyrically exact metaphor" in *Netherland*: a dependable style for an erratic moment difficult to put into words (Wood, *The New Yorker*).[86] Yet similar to Foer's book, *Netherland* grapples with an expansive view of American history, from the original Dutch colony in New York in the mid-17th century to the invasion of Iraq in 2003. O'Neill achieves this through flashback and through objects related to cricket. The stuff of narrative, both the stylistic features and the book's object world, intertwine family, nation, and history. These complicated braids, nonetheless, weave a tenuously tattered tapestry, similar to the threadbare family web we will see in *Burnt Shadows*. Both nation and family are at the whim of history and stand to fall. But against the tumultuous politics of post-9/11 America, in *Netherland*,

family splits and comes together again in London. This redemptive arc of despair and subsequent unity attempts to assuage a precarious post-America moment where the blighted grass of national promise bears the burns of exceptionalist politics. Here, I interrogate Hans's nuclear family and cricketing family against the asperity of personal and national history and examine how poisoned notions of nationalism destroy the verdant kinship structure cultivated on the field.

Like in almost all literature about 9/11, home mutates into an unfamiliar place in *Netherland*. After the Towers fall, the young van den Broek family is forced to move to the Chelsea Hotel, and despite receiving confirmation that they can move back to their former home in Tribeca, they "[stay] on in a kind of paralysis" that is indicative of not only of the fear and anxiety that filled the air but also the malaise that choked the city (O'Neill 19). The author utilizes the materiality of the building to channel this anxious paralysis. Take for instance Hans's obsession over the Chelsea Hotel's internal structure. He notes the fire escape's location and how the floors connect, and he finds himself "freshly eyeing the pipes and wires and alarm boxes and electrical devices and escape maps and sprinklers that cluttered the wall of each landing" (110). The building's constructive objects signal an anxiety of escape and mechanics in case another attack occurs.[87] September 11th's power lays in part, as my entire project shows, in its unmaking of home. O'Neill ironizes the Chelsea Hotel not as a transitory place of in-betweenness but as a place of permanence; this unmaking occurs in the shift to hotel as home: the domestic sphere functions in a space meant for transience.[88] The chaos 9/11 wrought operates as a kind of inertia keeping the family in place, but it is Rachel who flies out of the paralyzing orbit. A new domestic environment begets a re-dynamization of familial politics and organization, evidenced when Rachel repatriates to London. Thus, not only does physical space change, so does its

intimate and emotional nucleus. What constitutes a home ruptures, further displacing Hans and laying bare the domestic ramifications of political violence.

These reformulated politics of home and intimacy in the novel also reveal the inextricability of the personal and national. As Ilka Saal writes, "The fault lines of the attacks in New York and Washington, cracking the national narrative, extend well into the domain of the personal" (337-338). For Hans, this becomes alarmingly clear when Rachel defiantly tells him, "'I've made up my mind. I'm taking Jake to London'" (O'Neill 22). Staying after 9/11, she claims, is useless: "'For what? So we can have this great New York lifestyle? So I can keep risking my life every day to do a job that keeps me way from my son?'" (22). This anxiety pervades post-9/11 fiction, and within the domestic settings these novels take, it catalyzes a metamorphosis in the prosaic. If the nation is unsafe, surely the home is next, Rachel seems to believe. An unfamiliar terrain now awaits, and Rachel is not sticking around to acculturate to it: "the possibility that another New York calamity lay ahead and that London was probably safer" (25).[89] At the same time, however, she uses this anxiety as an excuse to leave; it is a circumstance that exposes the dissolution of the marriage that was present before the attacks. The traumatic fall of the Towers permits Rachel to lay bare the issues in their marriage. O'Neill lays the groundwork for Rachel's decision in a post-attack exhaustion—"a constant symptom of the disease in our lives at this time" (23). Yet, in tandem with a domestic tiredness is the constant, blaring silence of the marriage. For Rachel, 9/11 clarifies the unhappy silence that fills her domestic life with Hans; the narratives of the marriage and the city have changed. Not only has the familiar has altogether morphed into an unknowable dread heading towards entropy, but the pre-existing issues of communication and intimacy now cannot be ignored. In this way, 9/11 is domesticated: it throws back the curtain to expose the garish, extant condition of the home.

Hans and Rachel's marital fallout also works as a proxy to reflect the post-9/11 American condition: disrupted, precarious, and wayward. The scalar registers between the macro and micro here elaborate on the interior, intimate effects of the public, grandiose spectacle of the attacks. Moreover, the relationality between the attacks and their effects within the home is a crisis of communication and narrative. "Her speech arrived at its terminus: we had lost the ability to speak to each other," Hans states, "The attack on New York had removed any doubt about this. She'd never sensed herself so alone, so comfortless, so far from home, as during these last weeks. 'And that's bad, Hans. That's bad.'" (O'Neill 29). September 11th also reveals an unreliable narration in Hans and Rachel's history together. Rachel even deems narrative untrustworthy in her impassioned speech about their marriage. O'Neill plays with direct and indirect reporting to signal Hans's attempts to curb the blow of the painful conversation:

> She stated that she now questioned everything, included, as she put it, the narrative of our marriage.
>
> I said sharply, "'Narrative'?"
>
> "The whole story," she said. The story of her and me, for better and for worse, till death did us part, the story of our union to the exclusion of all others—the story. It just wasn't right anymore. It has somehow been falsified. (29) [90]

Even in its presentation on the page, the word "narrative" looks alien, flanked by direct and indirect quotation marks. Thrown into flux, story and existence become nebulous: "Life itself had become disembodied," Hans confesses, "My family, the spine of my days, had crumbled. I was lost in invertebrate time" (30).[91] I address this "invertebrate time" below, but for now I want to iterate that stability for Hans is contingent on family, providing purpose. Its loss, however, further disorders the chaos after the attacks. Through this intimate portrait of the post-9/11

American condition, O'Neill presents the family as a political body. Political violence is inescapable because it enters the domestic realm with dire consequences.

Yet *Netherland* concludes with the reconstitution of the family, an affirmation of heteronormativity that falls in line with most post-9/11 fiction about family. Hans leaves New York City and reunites with Rachel and Jake in London, reiterating that "the act of recuperation, as it happens, is also one of domestication" (Gray 51). Put differently, Hans "can now abdicate the dream of American exceptionalism while continuing to value the country's capacity for dreaming" (Saal 337). The novel's final pages offer an image of domestic bliss that echoes *Extremely Loud*'s ending. Of course, whereas Oskar's reversal of the falling man images is a materially futile act of imagination, Hans's description of "a scene of good cheer" is real, though fraught with the lingering aftermath of 9/11 and cricket (O'Neill 253). Set in summer 2006, the end finds the van den Broeks on Waterloo Bridge, looking over the River Thames in a post-America moment. Hans's narration dips into the waters of political fervor and its numerous associations. He begins the description innocently: "it's early evening, it's still very warm: this is, after all, the summer of the great heat wave" (O'Neill 252). But the emphasis on the present weather conditions is part and parcel of a larger "Russian doll of summers … of unambiguous disaster in Iraq, which immediately contains the summer of the destruction of Lebanon, which itself holds a series of ever-smaller summers that lead to the summer of Monty Panesar and, smallest of all perhaps, the summer of Wayne Rooney's foot" (252-253). The Russian doll of associations interconnects the political and the prosaic, reflecting the novel's scaled navigation of the national onto the domestic. Hans, however, largely stresses the present, jettisoning whatever takes focus away from his family as they all prepare to ride the London Eye at sunset. He even finds "something regretful in Big Ben's seven gongs," as if the passing of time in this

moment on this summer day in July is a crime.[92] Sarah Wasserman notes that the final pages are some of the few in the novel that are in present tense, denoting Hans's reluctance to enter the future, beyond this picture-perfect instance of unity (264). It is a scene of domestic bliss where the three "are all beaming," living far away from America, riding an object wholly representative of another nation (O'Neill 253). In this glowing moment of familial unity, nothing else matters. Thus, the van den Broek family returns to its heteronormative seat of white privilege, only slightly scathed by the terrorist attacks but influenced by their wake. But the aftermath of the attacks and the residue of American exception, as I show below, remain with Hans.

Familial reunion in *Netherland*, in a sense, reterritorializes Hans in the wake of 9/11; he realizes that he belongs with his wife and son and the familial narrative coheres once more. We see then how *Netherland* opposes Kathy Knapp's controversial claim that in post-9/11 fiction, the traditional home, the staple signifier of stability, "is irrecoverably lost, in part because the idealized sense of home we hold in our memories never existed in the first place" (127). Here, paradise is regained, and, as I will show, the vibrancy and sentimentality of the conclusion reflect that. Indeed, of the novels I examine in this project, only *Netherland* and *Sons and Other Flammable Objects* conclude with familial reunion; the others end with the invariable fracture of kinship groups, succumbing to the vicissitudes and ramifications of political violence. This contestation between disrepair and unity in contemporary fiction offers a reading of the family as being unable to pin down intimacy in definable forms, especially in the smokey haze of fallen Towers and drone warfare. Even in a cookie cutter family photo ending as in *Netherland*, the platitude remains true: everything changed after the attacks.

O'Neill's novel ends with Hans, Rachel, and Jakes safely nestled in the sky, away from America in their own egg that will carry them up to great heights. Hans notes as Rachel and Jake

meet up with him to board the Eye: "Reunions in unfamiliar places have this effect, and maybe the great wheel itself is infectious: the stupendous circle, freighted with circumferential eggs, is a glorious spray of radiuses" (O'Neill 253). Geometrically speaking, a circle has an innumerable number of radii; it is always able to connect at its center. These radii, moreover, echo the structure of the novel. From nuclear to chosen families, connections reach beyond the boundaries of race and culture to sustain Hans's post-9/11 life, as I explain below about cricket. Saal reads the London Eye as a vehicle toward civic responsibility in the post-9/11 world of familial reunion, positing that is "the primacy of the look toward the other, of ethical responsibility for each other … which ought to be the motivating and constructive principle of any sort of vision of the future and/or of utopia" (348). Indeed, Hans states as much when he notes the significance of the otherwise prosaic moment as he and his family slowly inch up the Eye to view the sunset:

> A self-evident and prefabricated symbolism attaches itself to this slow climb to the zenith, and we are not foolishly ironic, or confident, as to miss the opportunity to glimpse significantly into the eyes of the other and share the thought that occurs to all at this summit… (O'Neill 254)

Interestingly, Hans interprets the ride up the Eye for the reader, leaning on literary devices (symbolism and irony) to read a more or less cheesy scene. Hans is, as van del Ziel posits, "prone to looking at functional things meant to remain hidden or unseen when his eye is drawn" (210). It is a metafictional instance to ensure interpretation; the reader cannot muddle the irrevocable beauty and epiphanic potential of this climb for Hans: "There is to be no drifting out of this moment" (O'Neill 255). Hans recognizes the climb in the Eye as ferrying him and his family—the others he glimpses at—to the precipice of revelation á la Joyce. The sunset marks the promise of a new day, and for the van den Broeks, it means a new life in a post-9/11 world.

O'Neill, however, undercuts this moment of new horizons with a final instance of analepsis that yokes family and the Twin Towers. Such is the nature of memory—it disturbs the

present and lurches us back in time. As the van den Broeks reach the apex of the Eye, about to witness the majesty of a summer sunset, Hans drifts "to another sundown, to New York, to my mother. We were sailing on the Staten Island Ferry on a September day's end" (255). As the vessel makes it way toward the dock, Manhattan comes into view and Hans relays:

> A world was lighting up before us, its uprights putting me in mind, now that I'm adrift, of new pencils standing at attention in a Caran d'Ache box belonging in the deep of my childhood, in particular the purplish platoon of sticks that emerge by degrees from the reds and, turning bluer and bluer and bluer, faded out; a world concentrated … in the lilac acres of two amazingly high towers going up above all others, on one of which, as the boat drew us nearer, the sun began to make a brilliant yellow mess. (255)

I quote this luminous passage at length because it concretizes an image of the promise of America, family, and memory.[93] The boat ride, of course, echoes the journey immigrants took to enter Ellis Island; in that way, the memory pays a historical homage, highlighting a pristine, picturesque vision of American opportunity. The passage's emphasis on color, which prevails throughout O'Neill's oeuvre, transforms the scene of the towers into a painting, into a thing. To use Susan Stewart's helpful vocabulary, the gigantic becomes miniature when O'Neill (through Hans) transforms the pomp and majesty of the Twin Towers into a painting. This scalar project is one of order. To make the big small is to make it tangible within a framework that isn't contingent upon the abstract. O'Neill shows that we can convey the subliminal through lyrical style, while remaining with a domestic, or perhaps prosaic, mode. Hans, his mother, and the reader are transported into a kind of tableau vivant about which David James writes, "O'Neill tries to persuade us that we are each susceptible to a way of viewing 'our daily motions' that must aestheticize the very notion of everydayness in order for us to feel that those moments should be cherished" (866). There is no denying the beauty of the skyline, but it is prosaic in its ubiquity, so in order to make it more cherished, Hans materially scales it down to a domestic and

nostalgic thing that shapes his perception of the aftermath of 9/11 and marital strife. That is, the memory with the colored pencils and the sunset conveys the epiphanic value in the prosaic.

Moreover, the material connection between Towers and pencils from childhood recalls not only an innocence and vulnerability but a solace as well. While the material comparison miniaturizes and domesticates the Towers and its associated memories, scaling down the sublime to the picturesque, the majesty of the Towers is also a somber signifier of a peace and harmony that once was: familial unity and national peace.[94] The rainbowed city is painted in ironic colors, "rather, a moment in which a beautiful image connotes destruction" (Wasserman 266). The material link between the Towers and the pencils, between the past and present and between the public and private, reiterates the lingering nature of aftermath. The Towers, pencils, and mother are still present through material associations and memory. Perhaps this is the anxiety Zadie Smith calls attention to in her famous review of *Netherland*: the anxiety of impermanence, of deterritorialization to the realm of remembrance at any given moment.[95] Hans fixates on savoring the moment; to be adrift is to be unsettled and vulnerable. Therefore, flashbacks create an edge of deference to the past, similar to the time capsule closet preserving Thomas's possessions. Hans even notes, "We are in the realm not of logic but wistfulness, and I must maintain that wistfulness is a respectable, serious condition. How, otherwise, to account for much of one's life?" (179). As we see in *Extremely Loud*, the difficult past is inescapable, but in *Netherland*, analepsis doesn't harbor trauma. Rather, it holds memories of familial and national harmony.[96]

This emphasis on the singular image of the skyline, the majesty of the Twin Towers, "makes [Hans] remember [his] mother" (256). In another analytical moment, Hans states, "To speculate about the meaning of such a moment would be a stained, suspect business; but there is, I think, no need to speculate. Factual assertions can be made. … I can state that I wasn't the only

one of us [on the ferry] to make out and accept and extraordinary promise in what we saw—the tall approaching cape, a people risen in light. You only had to look at our faces" (255-256). Rather than concentrate on the tableau vivant of New York City, in other words, Hans turns to his mother who was "looking not at New York but at me, and smiling" (256). The layering of flashbacks here—what we might call deep analepsis—reverberates with the longing of familial and national coherence, before 9/11 destabilized it all.[97] Christopher Tayler, like Smith, deems moments like this evidentiary of *Netherland*'s winding, contorted temporality, emblematic of how it is "unwieldly organized" (*The Guardian*). In other words, anti-realist or un-realist. I take issue with this strict, perhaps even regressive, view of the realist novel. Memory in the post-9/11 novel especially, as I show above with *Extremely Loud*, works to comprehend the present. And family, particularly the figure of the mother, in *Netherland*, reminds Hans to concentrate on the domestic realm that survives the tribulations of political violence.

In other words, as Oskar's *Stuff That Happened To Me* book does, memory, manifested as flashbacks, orders the chaos for Hans. Stanley van der Ziel writes that Hans aims to resuscitate order through narrative organization: "Hans seeks to restore a sense of order … through a variety of other strategies for ordering events and experiences that might, in their own right, appear bewilderingly arbitrary" (216). That is, turbulent narrative order both reflects and organizes the disjointedness of the post-9/11 world. The reclamation of a pre-9/11 America through a nostalgic flashback befits "nationalist aims, since it works to foment a desire to return to the established order" (Knapp xxv). For the protagonist, "established order" signals familial unity and domestic stability; the flashbacks underscore the lacunas in his life too, reminding what was and now what isn't. Thus, style in *Netherland* is a way to make family, time, nation cohere. In this way, too, the *Netherland*'s ending begins to liken to the ending of *Extremely Loud*: both conclude with

longings for the past. But O'Neill's novel, however, catapults back to the present to see familial unity achieved.

The picturesque return to a pre-9/11 world ends as quickly as it begins, and *Netherland* concludes with a strange scene of both harmony and ambiguity:

> "Look!" Jake is saying, pointing wildly. "See, Daddy?"
>
> I see, I tell him, looking from him to Rachel and again to him. Then I turn to look for what it is we're supposed to be seeing. (O'Neill 256)

The present progressive tense leaves the van den Broek family suspended in air, reveling in the supposed limitless horizon that burgeons from their reunion. The closing phrase "supposed to be seeing" casts a net of ambiguity that takes the narrative back to its beginning and poses more questions than conclusive answers. Is Hans actually looking, remaining in the present with his reunited family? Is he content with this splendor of familial concord? As Wasserman notes, *Netherland* "leaves its readers in a state of literal and figurative suspension … cognizant that this story's end is also its beginning" (266).[98] If the end marks the start, launching the flashbacks that comprise the novel, then Hans has not yet embraced the post-America life as the sun sets. He oscillates between settled notions of family, home, and nation. Thus, the ouroboro novel's conflation of beginning and end keeps the protagonist suspended between past and present.

Objects spark the frequent temporal summersaults that keep Hans temporally dangling, and they construct a circular network of object relations bridging the past and present. Nowhere is that more evident in the novel's other central theme, cricket. Moments of déjà-vu "[contribute] to a certain coherence in [Hans's] personal life cartography" (Golimowska, "Cricket", 231). Or, more specifically, redundancies are the connected points in the circle of his life. After Rachel leaves, Hans is not only distraught about the state of his family, but he is unmoored, failing to fill his days meaningfully.[99] He, in other words, struggles to cherish the prosaic and find meaning to

his lonely days. This is exacerbated not only by the grandiosity of New York, but also by the post-9/11 malaise that now clogs and defines his domestic condition. But objects relating to cricket appear suddenly and launch a thousand memories about his past. We see how things carry remembrances that guide the present. Hans takes the opportunity of divine material intervention and joins the Staten Island Cricket Club. On the one hand, sport offers Hans community before he abdicates America altogether; on the other, it preoccupies in him "a longing for similar summer days in [his] youth, which were given over, at every opportunity, to cricket" (42).

This nostalgia for the sport, moreover, centers familial legacy. As he walks down Nineteenth Street to his first match with the Staten Island Cricket Club, memories of his personal history to the sport bubble up, and the narrative enters a moment of deep analepsis—a memory within a memory. Like with the colored pencils, the Twin Towers, and his mother, these picturesque scenes of the past orbit his parents. "For cricket is played in Holland," Hans begins as he strolls down memory lane, "The conservative, slightly stuck-up stratum of society in which I grew up, especially loves cricket, and the players are ghosts of sorts from an Anglophile past: I am from the Hague, where Dutch bourgeois snobbishness and Dutch cricket are, not unrelatedly, most concentrated" (O'Neill 42). So much resides in this sentence of socioeconomic and personal history—a testament to O'Neill's style and control. The meandering sentence is peppered by instances of chiasmus that depict the influential codependence of environment and upbringing on identity formation. In addition to the visible legacies of the Netherlands's imperial past and his economic beneficence, Hans's childhood is marked by the absence of his father (Marcel van den Broek dies in a car crash before Hans turns two); the missing patriarch can be read as a lost object desire that the analeptic moments of cricket also address. When, as a child, Hans joined the venerated Dutch football and cricket club, Houdt Braef Standt, he is warmly

received by established members; it is only when he is older, writing retroactively, that he realizes the members had "all known my father … and that it must have given them great pleasure to take his son under their wing" (43). Thus, cricket becomes a kind of kinship value, similar to the inquisitiveness Thomas passes to Oskar in *Extremely Loud*. This kinship value (or act) is bolstered by Hans's mother as a devoted spectator. Hans's wistful fondness of cricket sparks "a second memory, of my mother watching me play. It was her habit to unfold a portable chair by the western sightscreen and to sit there for hours…" (43). The mother's spectatorship informs the sport so much that for Hans, without her watching, "cricket was never quite the same again" (44). Circumnavigating family, cricket signifies not just youth and familial unity, but an uncomplicated moment in Hans's life when he is not burdened with "the feeling that life carries a taint of aftermath" (4). It is therefore imperative to note that the re-found love for cricket extends from the wake of familial fracture. Hans ruminates on cricket's tethers to remembrances of home and nostalgic longing, a "less reckonable kind of homesickness, … the communal, contractual phenomenon of New York cricket is underwritten… by the same agglomeration of unspeakable individual longing concern with horizons and potentials sighted or hallucinated and in any event lost long ago" (120). Nostalgia, Susan Stewart reminds us, "cannot be sustained without loss" (145). After the narrator reveals that his father died, he rediscovers his old cricketing gear and catalogs everything "in the old kit: the Slazenger Viv Richards batting pads with stuffing leaking from the seams; … an antierotic jockstrap; and my HVS sweater, moth eaten and shrunken…" (O'Neill 46). The intimate details given to the decaying objects represents the lingering material resonances of the past and the brand of time; these things narrate Hans's history with cricket and, most importantly, their association to family: traditions inherited from his father and approval

from his mother. The souvenirs of his sporting past, thus, are laden with the idyllic desire for familial cohesion—the objects are vehicles that carry the internal yearning.

Cricket, therefore, not only fills the void left after Rachel repatriates to England, but it also affords steadiness, structure, and solace to Hans's otherwise nebulous life, just as the analeptic moments order the chaos and anxiety after 9/11. The sport, as Golimowska compellingly postulates, "functions as a reassuring and transnationally relevant activity, bringing a constancy and coherence to the otherwise fragmented reality" (231). Even though "Walker Park was a very poor place for cricket," the players revel in the unifying beneficence the grassy pitch arouses (O'Neill 7). The team is comprised of immigrants, all of whom are Brown or Black except for Hans: "My own teammates," Hans explains, "variously originated from Trinidad, Guyana, Jamaica, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. That summer of 2002, when out of loneliness I played after years of not playing, and in the summer that followed, I was the only white man I saw on the cricket fields of New York" (10).[100] The team's dominating postcolonial subjectivities make clear the history of violence laden in the sport, as Hill argues. On the field, the men transcend racial and national boundaries in the name of the game; they depict a small American utopia against the pervasive anti-Brown sentiments in the immediate wake of 9/11.[101] Indeed, in an essay about C.L.R. James's famous book on cricket, *Beyond the Boundary*, O'Neill asks, "Are there more-consequential divisions of human personality than the ones currently imposed by religion and nationality?" ("Bowling Alone" 130). As it is formulated in *Netherland*, moreover, cricket bridges these social chasms. The team flattens "the 'us-and-them' logic common to terrorism and counterterrorism" (Rothberg 157). And while Hans's white point of view can certainly accent cricket's embedded racialized politics, it foremost deems the green

pitch as an "environment of justice," sites of democracy and unity (O'Neill 121). The pitch potentializes a mythological American space of order and harmony.

Thus, the materiality of the grass transmits how the cricket team is a kind of family for Hans. If cricket coheres his fractious reality, then the team's familial rapport is the glue that binds the pieces together. The team's cohesion mimics a familial support system that is missing from Hans's life.[102] For instance, when player Shiv reveals his wife left him, his teammates "made sure that someone was with him in his empty house that night and all the nights until the following Saturday" (O'Neill 173). The fraternal bond signals a utopian undercurrent to the team's benevolence and support, one that Hans initially fails to find in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 and Rachel's exodus. Indeed, his place within that Black and Brown sporting community even overpowers the damning familial abandon: "I strained the summer through a strainer that allowed only the collection of cricket," he muses, "Everything else ran away. I cut back on my trips to England, inventing excuses that were easily accepted by Rachel" (172). This desire to be away from Rachel, Jake, and England altogether conveys sport's draw on Hans and relates to its roots in his memories of an idyllic childhood. But even as an adult, Hans wonders why his teammates' respect weigh so heavily on him, and it is only after he participates in the communal system to support Shiv that he realizes, "[T]hese people … mattered because they happened to be the ones, should anything happen to me, whom I could prevail on to look after me as Shiv had been looked after" (174). A symbiotic relationship of caregiving and a politics of shared vulnerability is the team's lifeblood, and its place in Hans's life after the fall of his family and the Towers revitalizes him. Indeed, as the great unifier of Hans's brittle life, cricket goes as far as to redefine family for the protagonist.

Cricket upends visions of the heteronormative family in *Netherland* reflected through the central objects of the sport: bat and ball. The erotics of play make themselves plain throughout, and Hans even sees his memories of the sport in coital terms. Recollections of playing are "like sexual memories, forever available to me. … To reinvent myself in order to bat the American way, that baseball-like business of slugging and hoisting, involved more than the trivial abandonment of a hard-won style of hitting a ball. It meant snipping a fine white thread running, through years and years, to my mothered self" (O'Neill 49-50). Like sex, cricket is a mode of self-expression, and the Oedipal overtones hinder Hans's ability to "bat the American way." Thus, Americanized cricket requires a relinquishing of Hans's past—of his "mothered self"—, of accepting his mother's absence. Hans remarks that without his mother watching, cricket fundamentally changed, and the abandon of the maternal figure parallels the failure to bat. To redress this batting issue, as I show below, Chuck "figuratively assumes the position formerly occupied by Hans's mother" and teaches Hans to bat the American way (Duvall 351). I extend Duvall's compelling claim here to say that Chuck also occupies a spousal role too, queering the kinship group engendered on the green. The fruits of batting "the American way" blossom most prominently in Hans's final match. Read as a familial act, the match conjoins the novel's values of unity and nation.

The harmony of ball and bat externalizes the interiority of Hans's "self-measurement" within kinship structures and nation (O'Neill 175). These objects relay Hans's perception of himself within a new family after the disorienting dissolution of his marriage. The bat and ball, moreover, not only provoke homoerotic ejaculations— "'Go deep, Hans! Go deep!'" Chuck exclaims throughout the novel's climax— but they also provide Hans internal clarity about himself and what role cricket (and Chuck) play in his life (O'Neill 175). The green of the field,

the verdant vision of American vitality, is achievable through bat and ball. Just like his teammates whom he describes as "no better or worse than average," Hans is a mediocre player, struggling to hit the ball through the outfield (174). As a stand-in for the maternal and spousal spectator, Chuck, however, remedies the lackluster hits: "'Hans, you've got to hit the thing in the air. How else are you going to get runs? This is America. Hit the ball in the air, man'" (174). But to deviate from the normative gameplay is a tough habit to break. Hans never finds himself "in that numinous state of efficiency we evoke with a single casual word, 'form' (174). The narrative of cricket depends on form; he has been raised by the Danish masters of cricket after all, but to queer the narrative by batting like an American baseball player is the only way to narrow the score. Against Chuck's "homoerotic resonances" during this climactic final game, the protagonist eschews cricket's normativity of form and hits the ball out of the park (Duvall 351). Hans's team's ultimate loss does not matter; instead

> …what counted was that I'd done it. I'd hit the ball in the air like an American cricketer; and I'd done so without injury to my sense of myself. On the contrary, I felt great. And Chuck had seen it happen and, as much as he could have had prompted it. (O'Neill 176)

In tandem with the queered family dynamics with Chuck as mother and partner, importantly, is the metaphorical acquisition of an American identity. In his post-game/post-coital bliss, Hans begins to earnestly consider Chuck's plans to Americanize cricket. When first introduced to the plan, the protagonist thinks, "Not for a second did I take [Chuck] seriously" (83). Indeed, *Netherland* itself doesn't seem to take Chuck's idea very seriously either, only returning to Chuck's field after dozens of pages; the idea often sits on the fringes of the novel. But after the consummation of their relationship through bat and ball, Hans "began to dream in all seriousness of a stadium, and black and brown and even a few white faces crowded in bleachers, and Chuck and me laughing over drinks … there is a roar as the cricket stars trot down the pavilion steps

onto this impossible grass field in America, and everything is suddenly clear, and I am at last naturalized" (176).[103] This American vision promises a field of dreams that is utopian in its racial politics and queer familiarity. It is the consummate vision of American naturalization, achieved through the material erotics of cricket and the simple desire to find stability after 9/11. To take from Ronak Kapadia as I do in my reading of *Exit West*, it is all very queer indeed!

In this way, O'Neill combines national trauma and personal connection through cricket to redefine the sport's ethos. *Netherland*, as Wasserman posits, "scrambles the sport's complicated legacy of colonizer and colonized, a legacy which the novel suggests is relevant in the wake of 9/11" (259). The relevancy of this reshuffling expands from the grass, the material that aligns the sport with American exceptionalism, a familiar form of colonial enterprise particularly rampant after 9/11. Chuck gets the inspiration for his American cricket project, Bald Eagle Field, from the collectivity seen in the aftermath of 9/11. He tells Hans that the site of the stadium is "'where the Humane Society of New York started up an emergency triage'" and where he befriended people from around the world (O'Neill 77). It was the quintessential space of democracy. Chuck's job at the triage center was "to work 're-homing' the pets" indigenous to the land (77). In other words, Chuck worked to clear the Virgin Land to make way for a democratic response to national trauma and affront. It is Mullins's idea of traumatic solidarity in action. But the metaphor of the Virgin Land displaces, or altogether erases, indigenous narratives and the colonial endeavors that make up American history.[104] As Wood writes about Chuck and the plan, "[t]he colonial has successfully colonized his green breast of America" (*The New Yorker*). The grass in *Netherland* flattens racial divisions with historical romanticization and objects of feigned democracy.

In its revised form, cricket papers over the horrors of America's settler colonial history, taking root rather in the glory of a nostalgic image of America where the figure of the self-made

man first rose to prominence. "'Cricket has a long history in the United States, actually," Chuck waxes poetic early in the novel, "Benjamin Franklin himself was a cricket man'" (O'Neill 16). Therefore, cricket becomes a material representation of American exception, recalling the glory days of the Founding Fathers: it is "NOT AN IMMIGRANT SPORT," as one of Chuck's loquacious and bumbling emails exclaims (101). It is, rather, "a bona fide American pastime and should be regarded as such. … Cricket is already in the American DNA" (102). Elsewhere, O'Neill contextualizes cricket within American history by claiming it is "the first modern American team sport—which to say, a sport properly organized and monitored," thereby proving an irony about Americans ignoring the game altogether ("Bowling Alone", 128). Chuck's vision of Americanized cricket endeavors to remedy that historical erasure and irony. Indeed, Chuck's catch phrase, "Think fantastic," also reflects this romanticization of sport and nation; in thinking fantastic, we jettison the painful history that positions America as the world's hyperpower, a subject I take up in Part III with *Burnt Shadows*. Chuck's evocation of Franklin hints at a larger American legacy, a multi-generational tradition.

As a metaphorical act of American exception, the sport whitewashes colonial history and racial tensions through clothing and the expanse of the pitch. This material allows its lone white player (Hans) to somehow understand what it is to be the vilified racial Other, dismantling the "us versus them" binary that defines War on Terror culture. As Chuck patriotically declares to his teammates, "'You want a taste of how it feels to be a black man in this country? Put on the white clothes of the cricketer. Put on white to feel black'" (O'Neill 16). White skin, black mask. Chuck ambitiously (and foolishly) believes cricket, specifically the objects worn during gameplay, can flatten a white-dominated racial calculus in the nation. According to this faulty logic, cricket corroborates America's exceptional position because the grass is a material site of

racial equality; the immigrant players, therefore, are de facto Americans by virtue of game play, part of a great white American tradition. Of course, metaphorically, cricket nostalgizes America's vertiginous and inhumane Manifest Destiny project, but Hans and Chuck fail to see it as such, instead blinded by the pioneering light of familial and communal harmony the game offers. Elizabeth Anker writes that *Netherland* utilizes race as a means to bolster the reductive "melting pot" narrative pervasive in discourse following 9/11. She claims that in the novel, "[t]his elision of racial struggle largely emerges from a romanticization of the sport of cricket, which O'Neill amnesiacally uncouples from the cartography of the British Empire. Cleansed of its imperial legacies, cricket is instead heralded to vindicate O'Neill's vision of cosmopolitanism" (468). Tinged with the neocolonial and exceptionalist Iraq War raging abroad, which Rachel cites as a factor in not returning to the US, Han's summers playing with the Staten Island Cricket Team are ironic. As Katherine V. Snyder postulates, "Cricket as an emblem of the idealized level playing field stands here in explicit tension with the realities of racial inequality and discrimination in the U.S. and around the globe" (469). Indeed, as I claim in Part III, the US's erasure and sidestepping of racist and colonial history is an aspect of maintaining its "exceptional" self-image. In *Netherland,* Americanized cricket does the same, establishing a flippantly fantastical field of racial harmony while the Iraq War ramps up. Unlike C.L.R. James who famously writes that cricket often reifies racial politics on the pitch—"plung[ing] [him] into politics long before [he] was aware of it"—Hans paints a uniquely magnanimous, communal image of the sport (65). *Netherland* reworks the nation's racial dynamics as a means to locate the intersections of family and nation; it attempts to revive an America set on emerging from the fires of 9/11. The stakes of this racial deodorizing, however, threaten to disservice and disavow

the narratives of victims who are subject to racial violence and vilification. The nostalgic ecstasy of the American Dream tempers the violence inherent to exceptionalism.

Hans witnesses this violence through a baseball bat, an object that sports another, more accepted American pastime. The baseball bat turns the blissful dream of queer family dynamics and racial harmony in a cricket-loving America into a living nightmare. Hans discovers that Chuck uses *Godfather*-esc intimidation tactics to accrue wealth and power. In one of the final scenes with Chuck, Hans sees that with a baseball bat, "Chuck and Abelsky [his partner] had terrorized some unfortunate, smashed up his office, shoved his face in the dirt of a flowerpot, threatened him with worse for all I knew… I almost threw up then and there … Violence produces reactions of this kind, apparently" (O'Neill 215). Duvall writes that the bat itself triggers Hans's disgust, claiming, "This image is what truly shatters Hans's view of Chuck because … what he and Abelsky do with the bat is 'not cricket'" (353). I wish to expand Duvall's point here. It is the inherent difference between a violent baseball bat and a queer-loving cricket bat that shakes Hans awake from his American Dream. O'Neill complicates object and use in this scene: both bats communicate intimate relationships. Whereas the cricket bat is a phallic symbol that sows the seeds of love between Chuck and Hans and recalls the majesty of youth and family, the baseball bat communicates a perverse violence characteristic of the US. After all, as 9/11 and other political unrest attest, violence is a form of intimacy, tethering parties through harmful intent. While not a horse head in a bed, the violence in the office sends Hans swinging in shock. The familiar air between the two men dissipates, and Hans realizes the emptiness of their friendship. Rachel tells him, "'I mean you were valuable to him. He wasn't interested in you. … Not really. Not in *you*'" (249). If Changez wakes from his American Dream because of the exilic nature of War on Terror culture, then Hans rouses himself from the flawed

logic of the Dream because of a violence that unveils the danger of exceptionalist schemes. And it is Chuck who pays the price for opening Pandora's Box of American exceptionalist enterprise.

In death, Chuck comes to echo the treatment of the immigrant, Brown subject within a white American hegemony, reminiscent of the characters in Hamid's novels. Chuck's murder is shrouded in mystery; all we know is that his shady business dealings are responsible. The *Times* reporter who breaks the news to Hans about his Gatsby-like friend's death says that Chuck's "'remains' have been found in the Gowanus Canal" (O'Neill 5). Here, Chuck's body becomes an object: from human to remains, it scales down to the nether land of transient thing. This transformation from person to object, moreover, rhymes with the American exceptionalist project of dehumanizing the Brown subject in the post-9/11 era. In order for Hans, the white subject, to regain his heteronormative, upper-class, protected (recall: the novel ends with Hans and his family encased in a protective shell) life, the Brown subject must perish. And not simply die. Chuck is brutalized, bound, and dumped in the canal named after the inaugural site of New Netherland, the Dutch settler colony in the 17th century. It is the ultimate example and reinforcement of the post-9/11 racial politics that undergird social order.

Grass as an extension of Chuck himself and as the material representation of American exception and promise also extinguishes into an American death, a reflection of the scorched earth of Ground Zero. Looking through Google Maps after Chuck's death, Hans finds Bald Eagle Field burnt, once verdant and green with the labor and hopes of Chuck's dream. Through the digital medium, Hans "fall[s] again, as low as [he] can," only to find that the field is "brown—the grass has burned—but it is still there. There's no trace of a batting square. The equipment shed is gone. I'm just seeing a field" (252). The use of "fall" here is imperative to the larger contexts of the novel: towers falling, Chuck's tragic demise, the fallout of love and family, the

collapse of nation. Indeed, the desiccated field is placeless, an ambiguous space that acts as a barometer of the post-9/11 American condition. The green promise of possibility is ephemeral, a charred indictment of not only America but also its deceptive allure to think fantastic. As Hans notes, in the field "[t]here is no sign of nations, no sense of the work of man. The USA as such is nowhere to be seen" (252). The gigantic, vacuous field outside the confines of nation "presents a physical world of disorder and disproportion" that both reflects and recalls the futility of American dreaming (Stuart 74).

This moment of post-nationhood is exacerbated by the discovery of Hans's cricket bat caked in New York City dirt in the attic after he reunites with his family. Unlike X, the mysterious neoliberal, expat narrator-protagonist of *The Dog* who says, "I have nothing physical I'm attached to, and because to eliminate stuff is a dark, strong joy," Hans cannot relinquish the glowing symbol of America and his time there (O'Neill, *The Dog*, 234). If cricket represents a somewhat ironic American pastime, then in London the sport works as "essentially a game of the former British Empire, an abiding legacy of political and ideological traditions with which Americans should not wish to associate themselves" (Hill 220). Americanized cricket is wholly illegible in England, and Hans considers it strange to play there: "It would feel unnatural," he observes, "is my feeling, to separate myself from my family in order to spend an afternoon with understated teammates and cups of tea and something essentially nostalgic at stake" (O'Neill, *Netherland*, 186). The bat is now a souvenir of Hans's cricketing days in America, nothing more than a repository of memories that "envelop the present within the past" (Stewart 151). Indeed, the space of the attic reflects that: it is where old things are left to accrue life and historical resonance. As an object that houses memories of the national and personal tribulations of post-9/11 America, the bat links a more recent past to the present, and the protagonist cannot find it in

himself to throw it out. The dirt covering it echoes the dirt under Oskar's fingernails after he exhumes Thomas's grave in *Extremely Loud*. Both materially recall a foregone unity: for Hans it is a queer unity with Chuck and the team, and for Oskar it is his family, unmarred by the trauma and pain of 9/11. Hans cannot fully quit Chuck or cricket—the material American signifiers that defined his time away from his nuclear family in exchange for another.

Therefore, by way of conclusion, we must return briefly to the moment when Hans "almost threw up" after he learns of Chuck's nefarious ways. Vomiting represents his desire to rid himself of the American experience and Chuck altogether, but he cannot make it come to fruition. Similar to Changez's inability to quit (Am)Erica in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Hans still latches onto the nation, even after he joins his family abroad. America's exceptional grasp on the Dutch protagonist paints *Netherland*'s conclusion about the post-9/11 moment in an ambivalent light, similar to cricket. We, like Hans, are not sure what we are supposed to see. On the one hand, the fiery wake of the attacks sears the family and sparks a craving for peace and harmony—a glimmering sunset on the water. But on the other, the newly dawned era of American military might, the Iraq War demonstrates, compels a necessary distance from the nation. As *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* and *Netherland* indicate, the 9/11 family novel often conflates national and familial history as a means to reflect the shards of disunity after political violence. Through objects and material within the home or that construct family, I show how these books domesticate the attacks, destroying the border between the public and the private and making political violence a permanent fixture within domestic, affective spheres. These two novels, moreover, largely bolster a white, American perspective, and they depict the domestic aftershocks of 9/11 and the War on Terror as tame political counters to the havoc wreaked across time outside the US. As I show next, the merger of the national and familial

spheres is part of the long *durée* of history and operates on cruel ideologies that also splinter families beyond the shores of the nation and beat on ceaselessly.

CHAPTER IV: FAMILIAL SAGAS:

9/11 AND A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE

In *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, the Fire Nation rules with a blistering iron fist, destroying every facet of society to maintain its fiery grip on the world. But anti-imperial factions spearheaded by a small chosen family of element benders resist the Fire Nation's choking grasp. As the Fire Nation retaliates and threatens to kidnap both her nuclear family and chosen family, water-bender Katara fears the empire will tear apart her intimate circles again. The Fire Nation's legacy is inherently violent, as is the case with every empire; in its wake lays the scorched bodies of any resistor, including Katara's mother. Empire is an unfeeling enterprise, numb to its brutal vice grip on people and nations. Despite a fantastical premise, narratives such as *Avatar* provide necessary insight into the machinations of empire and its human consequences. Moreover, a thematic emphasis on familial and intimate crises, carefully cultivated around political upheaval, compels audiences to recognize the stakes of imperial powerplays. In literature, similarly, historical fiction often takes up the mantle of depicting empire's cruelty. Yet, particularly in America, where the nation's neocolonial endeavors in the Greater Middle East after 9/11 are deceptively presented as counterterrorist methods, literature often paints over the Forever War and its cultural ecology of hate. As mentioned above, novels such as *Extremely Loud* and *Netherland* conveniently ignore the conflict altogether or flatten the nation's role in contributing to exilic and racist praxes that subjugate Brown people when they concentrate largely on the ramifications of 9/11 on decidedly white domestic spheres.

Whereas in Part II I examined through a materialist lens the intimate, domestic reaches of 9/11 in novels primarily set in America by interrogating the things that construct home and

family, in this present chapter, I widen the scope to probe empire's role in shaping the treatment of Brown people and how that in turn affects familial networks. In going global, so to speak, I contextualize American empire's role in post-9/11 fiction within a larger historical framework, thereby resisting discourses that largely fail to consider the influences of the attacks and their racist responses. I argue that in Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* and Porochista Khakpour's *Sons and Other Flammable Objects* (*Sons*), September 11th and the subsequent racialized vilification of Brown people are encoded within a larger historical anti-Brownness that sprouts from imperial dogmas hellbent on maintaining a white, American supremacy. My global approach here reveals how racial historical trauma within the long timeline of imperial and state-sponsored violence infiltrate the home and deterritorialize its inhabitants.

Through this critique of America, both *Burnt Shadows* and *Sons* necessarily decenter the nation from September 11th; these novels unsettle the notion that pinpoints the U.S. as the nucleus of the attacks. Likely because the attacks occurred on American soil, writers set their works in the nation. However, to accurately understand and depict the tragedy, authors must consider the origins and upshots of 9/11. Plainly, it was not an isolated incident. To even consider it as such erases the lost lives of innocent noncombatants in American military projects prior to and following 9/11: the Cold War, mid-century involvement in Iran, the Iran Hostage Crisis, and the War on Terror. Moreover, these prevailing narratives that claim the attacks were unprovoked amplify an exceptionalist perceptions of the nation. In this way, writers such as John Updike and Martin Amis—both of whom rightly receive criticisms for their regressive characterizations of Muslims after 9/11—engage in a kind of literary American exceptionalism that eschews the causes and consequences of September 11th. Non-white authors such as Shamsie and Khakpour in particular examine this imperial phenomenon and take up the literary

mantle to condemn the U.S. for these masqueraded attempts to "liberate" the Middle East. Literature about these counterfeit freedom missions decries the U.S.'s neocolonial and "exceptional" ventures by highlighting the debilitation of both the macro, federal sphere and the micro, domestic sphere.

I begin by tracing how *Burnt Shadows* puts the onus of familial destruction on American neocolonial and exceptionalist policies that originate with the bombing of Nagasaki in 1945. The novel, I posit, underscores how exceptionalism drives the violence perfuse throughout the Eastern world and in the perceptions of Brown people after 9/11 to unmake units of belonging like the Ashraf-Tanaka and Weiss-Burton family at the heart of the book. This notion of familial fallout takes centerstage in many of the novels I study in this project. But not all relations fall through the chasms cast by exceptionalist and neocolonial hammers. As I show next with Khakpour's *Sons*, familial demise caused by cultural and racial differences and by historical violence sometimes leads to a rebirth of kinship structures. I argue that Khakpour's novel parallels familial and national histories through metaphorical and literal falling to indicate a constant negotiation of identity politics for the Adam family, especially protagonist Xerxes. Destabilizing encounters with orientalists further complicate this balancing act of Iranian and American, behaving as interactions of moral falling that reveal a fractured social and familial order after political turmoil. Both sprawling familial sagas told in a traditional realist mode, *Burnt Shadows* and *Sons* importantly depart from the white, liberal, upper-class framework of *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* and *Netherland*; Shamsie and Khakpour provide necessary perspectives about the sociopolitical strictures bound in not only post-9/11 Brown subjectivity and collectivity, but also how those constraints operate within a context of consequential, repeated violence and trauma that make history inextricable with identity, family, and home.

I. The Spider and Its Shadow: Family, Neocolonialism, and American Exceptionalism in *Burnt Shadows*

Through the sinuous matrix of the Ashraf-Tanakas and Weiss-Burton family, *Burnt Shadows* collapses history and binaries demarcated as East and West, and its historical span and dedication to the interrelations between countries stress the variegated ways the globe operates as a network. The novel evaluates how different branches and generations of the chosen family react to political upheavals, and the webbed narratives inform each other of empire's overbearing hand in familial formation and destruction. The novel begins in 1945 Nagasaki where two lovers have just said their goodbyes, not knowing they will never meet again. Hiroko Tanaka, a young Japanese teacher, watches as Konrad Weiss, a German man, disappears from eyesight; the moment he is out of sight but not out of mind, the atomic bomb falls. Konrad is obliterated, a burnt shadow on a rock, while Hiroko sustains burns on her back in the shape of cranes. The trauma of survival takes Hiroko to India—on the brink of decolonization and partition—where she befriends Elizabeth and James Burton, Konrad's half sister and brother-in-law. There, she marries Sajjad Ashraf (James' protégée) and together they have a son named Raza years after the India-Pakistan split. The small family lives in Pakistan where Sajjad is killed at the end of the Cold War and Raza learns under Harry Burton, Elizabeth's brother. Harry trains Raza to be a translator during the War on Terror. Meanwhile, as Raza's career shoots upward, Hiroko lives with Kim, Harry's daughter, in New York City, where a post-9/11 racist anxiety chokes the air. As fighting abroad escalates, this central family tears itself apart, despite surviving other calamities. The novel's climax depicts the beginning of the end of this intricate web of relations. Kim, determined to avenge Harry's murder and 9/11, calls the police to arrest Raza's friend Abdullah; instead, however, the cops arrest Raza and detain him in Guantanamo Bay where his

future remains in flux. The novel's conclusion is a bleak final blow to the family that strove to fight any and all state-imposed forms of violence, be it war or empire. Political strife, Shamsie's novel argues, does not respect borders or hemispheres, nor does it pay deference to the division of the public and private. This thematic emphasis, furthermore, on state-imposed violence toward family speaks to other contemporary works such as *The Wasted Vigil* (Nadeem Aslam), *Shalimar the Clown* (Salman Rushdie), *So Far from God* (Ana Castillo), or *Riding the Trail of Tears* (Blake Hausman), undergirding a literary concern with historical reckoning. These novels aim to rectify history by holding America's feet to the fire. *Burnt Shadows* in particular underscores how American neocolonialism and exceptionalism dissolve familial intimacies.

Burnt Shadows presents the family as one that is ultimately destroyed because of counterwar and counterterror measures, thereby reenacting an imperial tendency to enter both the public sphere of social sites and the domestic sphere of the family. I posit, consequently, that the novel's historical span along a historical horizontal timeline—ranging from the bombing of Nagasaki in 1945 to the beginning of the War on Terror—emphasizes this imperial reflex by repeating familial displacements seen during the colonial era and then once again in the post-9/11 era of counterterror warfare.

If post-9/11 fiction finds solace in "the old sureties" of home, hearth, and family, then Shamsie's novel iterates that not even the private sphere is safe from the ravages of terrorism and state-imparted militarized violence across history (Gray 16). It makes sense, therefore, that *Burnt Shadows* spotlights a long historical horizontal line of violence. I opt here for the phrase "historical horizontal line" rather than the more common "arc" because the latter suggests an apex of historical violence—a crescendo and eventual decline in militaristic violence. Rather, a horizontal line lacks peaks and valleys and accurately depicts the successive and immutable

nature of the violence. The geometry of historical violence does not ironically privilege any one event as the most devastating, demanding instead an examination of the consequences on the intimate circles. The long durée of historical violence in *Burnt Shadows* does just this: the kinship saga spotlights different political upheavals to convey the intensity and velocity of trauma along a timeline of repeated terroristic acts. As history continues, the novel suggests, state violence accelerates, hurtling toward intimate circles. This kind of post-9/11 novel resists the dominant works in the new literary era, underscoring that what is unexceptional is in fact the history of violence that ushered in 9/11 and what followed.

To that end, I present the War on Terror as a neocolonial project that rehashes a similar destructive quality seen during the pre-contemporary, pre-"decolonized" era. In illustrating the bombing of Nagasaki and the War on Terror as mirrored historical moments, Shamsie bookends *Burnt Shadows* with U.S.-led militaristic responses that perpetuate familial displacement and destruction. These historical parallels, furthermore, attenuate how neocolonial projects regenerate issues seen during the colonial era. Neocolonial projects unravel bit by bit the intricate web of relations at the novel's center. Unlike Foer's novel, however, Shamsie's addresses the imperative racist ideologies that defines the post-9/11 era.

After twenty years of fighting in the Middle East, it is common knowledge that the War on Terror is an American neocolonial endeavor.[105] My interrogation of family in *Burnt Shadows* considers how ideas of American exception trickle into the home and unmake the familial center from within. This ideology assumes America's superior global power and sway: the nation's "government and citizenry [is] more enlightened, morally and politically, than any other. From within this singularly insular cultural perspective, it 'goes without saying' that, by virtue of its unique, liberal-democratic heritage, the United States is destined to lead the rest of the world

toward social, economic and spiritual redemption" (Ramazani 194). After 9/11, the War on Terror roots itself in the feigned notion that America's anti-colonial stance and status as a hyperpower grant it the moral imperative to aid other countries in removing the terrorist threat by any means possible. Exceptionalism, moreover, bridges "the past and the present between an imperial–colonial rationale and the neo-colonial influence on the current war on terrorism" (Alzubairi 34). In other words, exceptionalism not only justifies the American-imposed Forever War, but it also reifies the same ideology nations asserted to colonize. Yet, these definitions of neocolonialism and exceptionalism remain broad. Taking from these scholars, I wish to extend the definitions to also include the micro effects. I zoom in on the intimate, familial ramifications of neocolonial enterprises. Profound asymmetrical power poises American operations abroad to infiltrate the domestic sphere and devastate intimacies. This supposition of superiority and the self-righteous need to lead the charge works in *Burnt Shadows* as a hereditary trait of sorts; as I explain below, Harry Burton, the novel's neocolonial figure, passes this ideology down to Kim. Thus, states of exception are "glocal", both globally and locally affective, because they scale down from the War on Terror's governing ideology to the kinship network's connective sinews (Kiczkowski 126). In this way, Shamsie's novel iterates that American-imposed military violence shatters and redefines familial relations and the domestic sphere.

These familial displacements, indeed, bind the characters into a chosen family in *Burnt Shadows*. Caused by various traumas and terroristic acts ranging from bombings to colonial subjectivity, displacement looms largely. Through the flash of the nuclear blast that physically mars Hiroko, Shamsie's novel foregrounds the horror of nuclear warfare through irony: the picturesque image of three cranes becomes grotesque when seared into Hiroko's body in such a way that silk and skin fuse together, an amalgamation that "is neither flesh nor silk" (Shamsie

27).[106] More terrifying than the combination of fabric and flesh, however, is Hiroko's father's physical transformation because of the blast. Mr. Tanaka devolves into a reptile "crawling up the path" in this vision of earth as a "disgorged hell" (28). Yet, Shamsie does not stop there; humans not only transfigure, but they completely disappear in the explosion. Such is the case with Konrad, who is literally obliterated when the bomb lands in Nagasaki, leaving only a shadow on a rock. Thus, the author escalates the calamities of the bombing, highlighting a scale of different physical ramifications: burns, disfigurement, annihilation. Shamsie makes her point clear: through the bombing, *Burnt Shadows* shows how atomic warfare unmakes the earth and its inhabitants, leaving instead a hellish landscape of marred figures, destroyed bodies, and burnt shadows. The American hyper-destructive retaliation measure to end World War II inflicted an unbearable element of terror—one that, as I explain below, repeats during the War on Terror.[107]

Importantly, and most relevant for my purposes in this project, the portrait of the atomic bomb shows that violent countermeasures of such awesome power undo every component of society, especially family. Without family, characters lose their sense of home and enter into a state of displacement. Hiroko, whose memories of Nagasaki are like "rosary beads," struggles to find kinship and a home for herself (Shamsie 97). The protagonist's position leaves her placeless and futureless: "Hiroko could not find a place for herself in any talk of tomorrow—so instead she found herself, for the first time in her life, looking back and further back" (98). Thus, Shamsie presents the localized, subjective ramifications of the Nagasaki bomb as the abandon of time and place. With nowhere else to turn, Hiroko is forced to remember the terror enacted by the U.S. on Nagasaki three days after the bombing of Hiroshima. She confides in Elizabeth Weiss who has told the Japanese woman that worlds cannot collide harmoniously:

> I don't belong in your world either. … All I've been doing all this while is thinking of losses. So much lost. I keep thinking of Nagasaki. You

> said to me once that Delhi must seem so strange and unfamiliar, but nothing in the world could ever be more unfamiliar than my home that day. That unspeakable day. Literally unspeakable. I don't know the words in any language. (100). [108]

Hiroko's feelings of loss and displacement harbor no nostalgia; instead, her entire perception of Nagasaki is disfigured similar to the flesh on her back.[109] What was once beautiful is now tainted by the haunting image of her father: "'I saw him in the last seconds of his life, and I thought he as something unhuman. He was covered in scales'" (100). The memory of the bombing and its catastrophic ravaging of her life and family also revokes Hiroko's national identity. She is ostracized in Japan as a "hibakusha" because of the scars she bears: "To the Japanese she was nothing but beyond an explosion-affected person; that was her defining feature" (50). Or, as Sachi Nakachi claims, "The memory of war and the burns on her back have estranged [Hiroko] from her own people" (135). Displaced from both family and nation because of American violence, the protagonist wonders why the U.S. terrorized Nagasaki, divulging to Elizabeth, "'Why did they have to do it? Why a second bomb? Even the first is beyond anything I can . . . but a second. You do that, and see what you've done, and then you do it again. How is that . . . ?'" (Shamsie 100). This question is not answered until the end of the novel when Elizabeth's granddaughter Kim Burton reveals it to Hiroko through an exceptionalist outlook which I elucidate below. Hiroko's question of intent catenates *Burnt Shadow*'s familial focus; she latches on to those who identify with this understanding of estrangement and loss, creating a web of connections. The Ashraf-Tanaka and Weiss-Burton family, in other words, is defined by a shared experience of lost homes and distressed kinships at the hands of political upheaval.[110] The traumatic solidarity we see in *Extremely Loud* goes global in *Burnt Shadows*; people are bound by the vicissitudes of American-imposed violence.

Thus, the novel offers an example of how lost homes and political strife engender intimacy—how shared trauma, like objects, necessitates an ordering of the chaos through intimate bonds. To metaphorize the familial relationship defined by political contentions like the Forever War, Shamsie depends on the image of a spider and its web, communicating the delicate yet stubborn ties that transcend history and borders. Before he dies, Konrad teaches Hiroko why Muslims revere the spider. She in turn teaches Elizabeth: "'Have I told you about the spider? How it wove its web—quick as lightning—over the mouth of the cave where Mohammed and his friend were hiding when they fled from Mecca, and so convinced their pursuers that no one had entered the cave in a long time'" (Shamsie 110). The story recurs in distressing moments and characters comfort themselves with it. For example, as Raza nervously awaits safe passage to North America, he ruminates on the thread that connects the families. He recalls, "Harry asking him about the story of the spider in Islam which Sajjad had told Konrad and Konrad had told Hiroko and Hiroko had told Ilse who told Harry" (324). The connective fibers between characters span generations and catastrophes, clasping every link in the horizontal historical chronology of violence. In another telling example at the end of the novel, Raza is mistakenly arrested because Kim racially profiles his Afghan friend Abdullah. During this climax, the spider appears again:

> There was the spider, and there was its shadow. Two families, two versions of the spider dance. The Ashraf-Tanakas, the Weiss-Burtons—their story together, the story of a bomb, the story of a lost homeland, the story of a man shot dead by the docks, the story of body armour ignored, of running alone from the world's greatest power. (362)

Here, Raza acknowledges the importance of the kinship, marking how history and numerous terroristic acts in the name of war and empire yoke everyone. This insistence on familial relations, moreover, merges the historical and the personal; the bombing of Nagasaki and the

War on Terror are within a catalog of historical acts that reap devastating familial and subjective ramifications on affective realms. Shamsie situates a history of terrorism and family side-by-side to accentuate the inherent connections between the two; moreover, she places the global and the local on the same playing field, narratively democratizing them in a way that demystifies how historical acts of violence infiltrate the domestic sphere. The reader, in other words, sees how the spider dances on both the world stage and the domestic stage. This coupling of the global and local—what Adriana Kiczkowski deems as "glocalization" in the novel—ultimately makes the political domestic and the domestic political (126). In so doing, Shamsie unveils how terroristic acts and terroristic governments detrimentally impact noncombatants. The family and its intimate relationship to the state and various histories underscore that the domestic sphere is indeed a political arena that demands and requires consideration in the global picture.

On top of the emphasis on the domestic sphere's political charge, the extended metaphor of the spider's web incriminates the most dangerous and precarious sinew that connects the Ashraf-Tanakas and the Weiss-Burtons: the U.S. The novel's historical range starts and stops with the same nation engaging in destruction. In an interview with *ARIEL*, Shamsie asserts that *Burnt Shadows* "ends with the War on Terror. That's an important distinction. It begins and ends with nation-states, and what they'll do in the name of self-defense" (159).[111] Accordingly, *Burnt Shadows*' historical bookends rewrite the dominate narrative in post-9/11 literature; that is, the novel de-exceptionalizes and pulls back the curtain on motives and understandings of American military power by depicting the human consequences of military "self- defense" tactics. Aforementioned, post-9/11 literature often fails to consider the other side, the non-American ramifications of the War on Terror and 9/11. This is glaringly evident in light of the PATRIOT Act and other policing techniques employed by the U.S. government; many popular post-9/11

works don't mention these legal methods to ostracize and endanger Brown people. It is often up to writers of color, specifically Brown authors like those whose works I investigate in this project, to rectify the narrative discourses about 9/11. Writing just after the ten-year anniversary of September 11th, Martin Randall acknowledges this glaring bias toward America in the newest fiction about terrorism. As he writes,

> …Hamid exposes what has hitherto been largely absent from other 9/11 fictions: namely that 9/11 was not an isolated, irrational act aimed at an 'innocent' nation but rather a direct result of American colonial, economic and military power. … many American and British writers have largely failed to reimagine the mind-set of the 'other'… (143)

Through the taut spider's string that defines and connects the families, Shamsie proves America guilty: 9/11 and anti-American sentiment originate from the pages of imperial history. Shamsie focuses on America's justifications for terroristic acts, typifying them as the nation's desires to maintain a hyperpower status; she holds the West accountable through a characterological study of family.[112] The spider's web connects the families at the center of the narrative, but it also weaves an incriminating portrait of American empire.

While the novel certainly highlights how American-sanctioned violence ruptures families (Konrad's horrific death in the bomb blast, Harry's death in Afghanistan), it also stresses the importance of this family enduring through times of political upheaval. As they initially do in *Exit West* with Nadia and Saeed's relationship, intimacies combat the disruptive violence throughout *Burnt Shadows*. Shamsie illustrates this in the final instance of the spider and its web. After Kim's xenophobic and racist views toward Afghans incite Raza's false arrest, she has the opportunity to amend her mistake and even attempts to do so. However, Raza—in order to protect Abdullah—instructs her to stop talking: "Raza raised his head and bellowed, 'Chup!' the end of the word half-strangled with pain as the policeman's hands pressed down on his head,

forced him to his knees" (362). Raza's use of the Urdu word for "be quiet" solidifies his acquiescence to the police, and it signals a linguistic connection between the Ashraf-Tanakas and the Weiss-Burtons. One of the strongest of the spider's threads that connects the families is shared language, and Raza, in this intense climax, capitalizes on it because he knows that Kim understands "chup," a word "with which Harry most liberally seasoned his language" (363). In telling Kim to stand down, Raza martyrs himself for his entire family; he sacrifices himself to the novel's antagonist—the West—to protect Hiroko and Kim from the police for helping Abdullah earlier. The third-person narrator provides a glimpse into Raza's mind as the police bind him: "…what a surprising gift, to be able to say the moment when freedom ended had counted for something. Finally, he counted for something" (363). Raza's sacrifice in the name of family matters more than anything; his martyrdom concretizes his worth in a nexus of people who have died for their relations.

Whereas Shamsie condemns Western nations such as Britain and America as terrorist factions that seek to globally dominate, she lionizes family as an organizational entity that tries its damnedest to combat global political tumult. The climax's concluding lines underscore the mercy of family and forgiveness. In the final moments of his sacrifice, Raza forgives Kim for the error of her racist ways: "If it were in his power he would have taken her mistake from her and flung all the points of its gleaming sharpness into the heavens. But he knew it didn't work that way. He could only try to convey, in that final instant before they dragged him away—in the dip of his head, the sorrow of his smile—that he still saw the spider as well as its shadow" (Shamsie 364). For Raza, the spider maintains its web even as the family rips apart because of the "gleaming sharpness" of Kim's razor-like bigotry. Shamsie's portrait of family dichotomizes the

scathing critique of states, but forgiveness only goes so far, and a racialized perception of American exception jeopardizes the family's future.

Importantly, the novel not only domestically situates exceptionalist beliefs, bringing the heart of the Forever War that should stay "over there" within the nation, but it also scales the dogma of American dominance from the macroscopic nation to the microscopic individual. This winnowing down from the macro to the micro tracks through family. When she informs the police of Abdullah's whereabouts, Kim channels a prejudiced anger against Afghans for killing her father Harry and aspires to wipe out the "terrorist threat" by having Abdullah arrested. Donald E. Pease writes that U.S. citizens "envisioned the United States as an ideal nation whose model the state propagated across the globe" or "they understood themselves to be responsible to do the work necessary to achieve that ideal" (33). Kim, seething with rage after 9/11 and Harry's death, combines these notions of self-aggrandizing prestige and patriotic responsibility when she calls for Abdullah's arrest. On the one hand, she seeks revenge for 9/11 and wants the world to "'be as it was,'" reviling at calculating how much a building can withstand at her job as a structural engineer; on the other hand, Kim is "just…you know? Angry'" (Shamsie 270, 331). And while her anger at Harry's unjust and untimely death is warranted, her stereotyping of Afghan men's maleficence is not. Assuming that Abdullah played a part in killing Harry suggests her proclivity to generalize Afghans as terrorists and her obsession with vengeance for 9/11. After spending "[t]hirty minutes in the car with an Afghan" who critiques the U.S. as "'[understanding] war least of all'" because of its commitment to fight abroad, Kim unleashes a barrage of Islamophobic insults toward Abdullah (Shamsie 347, 350). These attacks, furthermore, uncover Kim's inability to empathize with the other side of the War on Terror—that America invaded the Middle East and killed thousands to ensure global dominance, which, as I

addressed, frustrates Changez in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Kim asks Abdullah, "'If an Afghan dies in the act of killing infidels in his country does he go straight to heaven?'" (352). His response reverberates with anti-colonial resistance: "'If the people he kills come as invader or occupiers, yes'" (352). This difficult conversation prompts Kim to call the police, despite Abdullah innocence. Hiroko chastises Kim for Kim's vendetta against Afghans, and she connects the contemporary moment to 1945:

> You have just put them in a little corner of the big picture. In the big picture of the Second World War, what was seventy-five thousand more Japanese dead? Acceptable, that's what it was. In the big picture of threats to America, what is one Afghan? Expendable. Maybe he's guilty, maybe not. Why risk it? Kim, you are the kindest, most generous woman I know. But right now, because of you, I understand for the first time how nations can applaud when their governments drop a second nuclear bomb. (370)

Hiroko argues that U.S. military involvement in the Middle East following 9/11 stems from the same rotted root as the bombing of Nagasaki. The expendability of Afghans or Japanese signals the heart of American counterwar and counterterror efforts. We learn the answer to the question Hiroko posed early in the novel: why a second bomb? Because the nation knew it could do it, so it did it, like the invasion of Afghanistan.

Therefore, it is tragic for Hiroko that Kim's political orientation infiltrates the familial network and dissolves the spider's threads spun with a silk of shared trauma that spans the length of the latter half of the 20th century. She has encountered it before: Kim's penchant for revenge in 2001 echoes with the boom of the atomic bomb. Nakachi suggests that the connection Shamsie forges between the War on Terror and the bombing of Nagasaki makes *Burnt Shadows* "a new type of 9/11 literature" because it highlights "the American experience of the terrorist violence in the stream of the world history since World War II." (139). I concur that the book's novelty comes from a kind of historicizing of 9/11 through other world events thus implicating

the U.S.'s history of violence, but I resist the temptation to classify the dropping of the A-bomb as "the American experience." Certainly, the atomic bomb concretized Allied victory, but the bombing of Nagasaki is decidedly not an American experience; it is an American act and a Japanese experience. The trauma and violence it imparted defined Japanese life as Hiroko's narrative demonstrates. Her passing statistic of 75,000 Japanese people dying means 75,000 American lives saved. The deaths in Japan should not be in vain; Americanizing the experience trivializes the national and domestic ramifications of American-enforced terror. *Burnt Shadows*'s novelty burgeons from its critique of American-imposed terror along a long historical line of violence as it relates to the Ashraf-Tanaka and Weiss-Burton family. Unlike, for example, Claire Messud's novel *The Emperor's Children* or *Netherland*, *Burnt Shadows* takes the attacks into foreign territory. The novel provides a still underexamined look at the intimate effects of American violence abroad. The 9/11 novel falls into the trap of sticking close to home, emphasizing New York City especially; Shamsie's novel undoes this situationally and temporally. Simply, by taking the narrative overseas and locating the intimacies of family, Shamsie emphasizes the *longue durée* of American violence—a theme as obviously missing from 9/11 literature as the Towers are from the city skyline. The calculus of America's hyperpower, *Burnt Shadows* tells us, is an imbalanced equation that justifies the erasure of nation, families, and lives, and it continues through the Forever War.

The "counterterror" response in Afghanistan, moreover, recalls the colonial era's inimical maiming of family. Indeed, Singh suggest that post-9/11 neocolonial rationales ground themselves in history, "mirroring nineteenth-century European notions of colonialism, [and] popular western perception tends to view the conflicts generated by 9/11 as similarly benevolent endeavors" (25). Thus, Shamsie creates a mosaic of historical moments throughout *Burnt*

Shadows that not only build off each other but evoke pre-contemporary and pre-decolonial world views. In the immediate wake of 9/11, Kim grapples with the gravity of the terrorist attacks; she and Hiroko butt heads about the importance of September 11th. Whereas Kim sees it as an existential event that has changed everything, Hiroko sees it as another historical turn, claiming that the looming and empty site of the Twin Towers where the embers are dying is "'not the world, it's just the neighbourhood'" (254). Kim's understanding of 9/11 and its impact brims with privilege, because she has not experienced other moments in history like Hiroko has. Hiroko—who has suffered the bombing of Nagasaki, the decolonization of India, the Indo-Pak split, and the Cold War's presence in Pakistan—is familiar with global catastrophes of a larger scale. The confluence of political and social upheavals that dictate Hiroko's life displace her, forcing her to re-root herself and adjust her understanding of home.

September 11th, however, does not unsettle Hiroko's sense of home like those events; rather, Kim's intimate desire for expedient American retribution does. Devon Campbell-Hall suggests that in post-millennium anglophone fiction, narratives of migrants and their displacements treat the idea of "home" as "an emotional space in which the domestic community offers an antidote to the 'otherness' the migrant feels when confronted with the alien host society" (172). This, very obviously, does not happen to Hiroko in New York City after 9/11. Instead, her home with Kim amplifies racial and xenophobic stereotyping. As we see above, Kim's emblematic fear of Afghans after 9/11 builds on racist and xenophobic stereotypes.[113] Kim is willfully ignorant of her hypocritical statement, though Hiroko reprimands her for typecasting when she lumps together all Afghans as terrorists. Kim fails to recognize the hand American neocolonial terrorism plays in the big picture. In this way, national pride and vengeance nourish anger and frustration toward non-Americans after 9/11, especially when

members of the military die overseas. Kim is not in the army, nor does she work for government-adjacent enterprises like her father and Raza, but her vindictive anti-Afghan stance still revamps a colonial creed. Her sentiments echo President Bush's when he accepted the Republican National Convention's nomination in 2004: "We are staying on the offensive, striking terrorists abroad so we do not have to face them here at home" ("Bush's Acceptance Speech"). But keeping the fighting "over there" is volatile. This neocolonial view of the world unspools the spider's thread that connects the Ashraf-Tanakas and Weiss-Burtons. This undoing, furthermore, calls back how "colonialism violently intruded upon, broke up and appropriated families of colonised subjects" (Loomba 182). Shamsie attempts to subvert projects like the War on Terror and their impasse on familial or social harmony, focusing on what a character in her 2005 book *Broken Verses* calls "humanity in repose" (139). This idea of humanity relaxing is integral to *Burnt Shadows* as well, emblematized by the family. The relationships that traverse borders within the Ashraf-Tanaka and Weiss-Burton nexus idealize a kind of pax mundi that opposes the global tribulations that ironically unites everyone.

Nevertheless, as American projections of power demonstrate, world peace is futile, and these global catastrophes collimate to familial histories, forecasting how American military operations devastate the family. Like the parallels between the atomic bomb and the War on Terror, characters' fates align to hint at history's redundancies. For example, Sajjad's death and Raza's detainment are both at the hands of the CIA, and the murder and arrest undeniably hold the American government complicit in the fractures of family. Part three of the novel is set in 1980s Karachi where Hiroko and Sajjad's life has settled down; Harry is a CIA operative who comes to Pakistan to ensure a working relationship between America and Pakistan-backed mujahideen, "[r]esistance fighters … [who] made protracted war on the Soviet-backed state"

(Immerwahr 374). In a fundamental sense, the mujahideen were anti-colonialists fighting the occupation of their land. When a teenage Raza runs away to join this resistance movement in Afghanistan at the tail end of the Cold War, Sajjad searches for him and is shot by Sher Mohammed, "one of the CIA's local assets" in Pakistan (Shamsie 242). Shamsie draws a complicated picture, sketching the trans-national relationships formed during the Cold War to combat occupational presence in Afghanistan. America, Afghanistan, and Pakistan join forces to resist Soviet occupation, an alliance that collapses after the Cold War. Emily Horton rightly compares Raza's desire to be in Afghanistan fighting the Soviets as "a form of summer camp" (200). [114] And this idealism to join the mujahideen comes from the kindred relationship Raza has with Harry, which in turn escalates the fall of the family.

As a neocolonialist, Harry, a father figure to Raza, brings an exceptionalist worldview into the family unit. He tells "the men who interviewed him that he wanted to join because he believed fervently that Communism had to be crushed so that the U.S. could be the world's only superpower" (Shamsie 175). The Cold War and Harry's ambition allow him to be an opportunist; he is "determined to be a part" of the fall of communism and the maintenance of the U.S. as *the* supreme world power by any means necessary (Shamsie 175). Yet, this ache for supremacy is a cruel gift that he bestows to Raza and Kim; it is a kinship value. Like the trauma Hiroko passes down to Raza from the Nagasaki bombing, Harry passes down notions of American exception to exemplify "how the American home constructs a domestic support system for an exceptionalist ideology" (Strehle 420). As a hereditary trait, an exceptionalist view of America undergirds the domestic sphere; it is an ideological parasite that putrefies from the inside out.

To that effect, the familial role this credence of dominance plays in the novel parallels Raza's arrest and his father's murder. Both are misunderstandings, and, more importantly, both

moments of family tragedy typify how the detrimental effects of American power leak into intimate circles. Raza's detainment harkens *Burnt Shadows* to its brief prologue in which a man in a cell is told to strip. By the end of the book, the reader learns that the novel begins with what happens after Raza's arrest: he is shackled and contained in a Guantanamo Bay-like prison. The prologue's temporal displacement likens itself to the historical and familial displacement throughout the novel and in other novels I address in this project. And like the inundation of familial breakups that span *Burnt Shadows*, the temporal slippage here works to illustrate the reconciliation of how moments like this come to be; the reader and Raza wonder the same question: "How did it come to this" (Shamsie 1). Pascal Zinck argues that this unsettling of time in the mysterious prologue forces the reader "to deconstruct the events and fathom the reasons why Raza 'comes home' to Guantanamo almost literally, and by way of a complex exfiltration process" (52).[115] I agree with Zinck's claim that the narrative positioning of the prologue ignites readerly intrigue, but I dispute the notion that Raza 'comes home' to the prison. The entire novel, as I claim above, features displaced people. Raza is not excluded from that group; he is, in fact, displaced from Pakistan for a majority of the novel. Guantanamo Bay is decidedly not his home, nor should it be considered anyone's home, even in fiction. It is an American penal colony and the hallmark of the neocolonial Forever War.

Carceral sites like Gitmo are neocolonial spaces of exception that express colonial repetition with difference. While Shamsie refrains from explicitly stating it is in fact Gitmo, she alludes to the containment facility in *Burnt Shadows*, allowing the reader to safely assume that Raza is there. When Kim oversees the clearing out of Harry's apartment in Miami, she chats with a mover whom she mistakes to be Middle Eastern. He is Italian. The dialogue between the two reveals a xenophobic and racist ideology that is informed by 9/11 and Miami's proximity to

Guantanamo Bay. The mover frankly declares that "'No one else had better make that mistake'" (332). Kim's response is equally racist: "'There's nothing wrong with most Arabs,' she found herself saying, and then wondered how that 'most' had slipped into the sentence" (Shamsie 332). The conversation concludes with a telling comment about mistaken identities and their connotations. The man says to Kim, "'Hey, I'm not being racist. It's crazy enough being mistaken for a Cuban, but Arab! God help me. And Gitmo just across the water" (333). This moment of mis-racializing reverberates with when the U.S.' decolonizing mission after WWII "gave way to frustration and a renewed belief in the inherent savagery of some parts of the globe" (Hoberek 210-211).[116] This assertion, moreover, about the Orientalist trope characterizing the East as savage and the West as a city on the hill subsequently hints at the racist and xenophobic focal point of Kim and the mover's conversation; these Americans in post-9/11 America fear "savagery" coming from the Middle East. The culture of the War on Terror, as I showed in Part I, is one of exile and misinformation, of putting people "in a little corner of a big picture." Therefore, not only does *Burnt Shadows* unveil how the War on Terror harkens back to the colonial era's routine destruction of family and invasion of nation, it also shines a light on the regenerated racist ideologies that fuel colonial enterprises. Orientalist, these American characters view Guantanamo Bay as not just a containment facility for suspected terrorists; for them, it also institutionally represents the differences between the Orient and the West.

The reference to Gitmo keys the reader into American xenophobic fears of Middle Eastern men supposedly infiltrating the nation and wreaking havoc. The mover and Kim both fear that the terrorist threat is within the borders of the U.S., perhaps attempting to reenact 9/11. Technically, however, the prison across the Straits of Florida is within the U.S.; Guantanamo Bay, though situated on the sovereign island nation of Cuba, is part of what Daniel Immerwahr

calls America's pointillist empire. It is a tiny colony within the lands of another nation, similar to the Panama Canal Zone. Gitmo is the quintessential neocolony because "it is controlled and exploited by outside financial interests—where necessary supplemented by covert or overt military force—while maintaining official, internationally recognized sovereignty" (Belletto and Keith 2).[117] The description of Gitmo as "*in* the United States without being of *it*" is apt, resonant with the treatment of Muslim immigrants and Middle Eastern people in the nation immediately following 9/11 (Immerwahr 390). To be clear, Raza is mistakenly detained on a U.S. neocolony, suspected of terrorism though he works for an American agency as a translator. Thus, as a prisoner in the nation's penal colony, he is *in* the U.S. without being part *of* the U.S.

This exclusionary practice of being *in* and *out* can be seen as terroristic in its own right; as dehumanizing branches of the Forever War, Gitmo and other carceral sites of "counterterrorism" ablate prisoners of their identities. Rahul Mahajan offers a horrifying glimpse of the American penal colony's terroristic qualities, claiming the brutal torturing tactics "and also the televising of the prisoners, are violations of the Geneva Convention, but the U.S. government has claimed that the Geneva Convention does not apply to them. The reasoning given is that the Geneva Convention applies to prisoners of war, but these people are terrorists, not soldiers" (53). Mahajan provides critical insight into how Guantanamo Bay and the U.S.'s actions affront human rights and typify exceptionalist behavior. These illegal acts are inherently terroristic in their disavowal of international law regarding the treatment of war prisoners. Raza's place in Gitmo is a form of trauma that, on the one hand, reflects the trauma Hiroko experienced in 1945 by virtue of its being state-imposed; on the other hand, however, Raza's detainment reveals how the face of state-driven militarized practice changed during the War on Terror. As opposed to the Nagasaki bombing, which revoked personhood via a large-scale attack, this carceral subdivision

of War on Terror hones in on the individual and strips the victim of their personhood through a surfeit of terroristic devices. The might of American military power looks past Raza's family and his transnational and transcultural heritage. Instead, as Mahajan claims, in their treatment of the prisoners in Guantanamo, the U.S. officials considered victims as "terrorists, not soldiers." Terrorist equates to non-human, someone deserving of abhorrent treatment.[118] Debjani Ganguly posits, "Terrorist and counterterrorist networks are often mirror images of each other. The security functions of the state themselves proliferate through privatized networks that are only loosely connected and are by no means fully accountable to a state-controlled center of command" (231). Such is the case with Guantanamo Bay. The American carceral facility is an arm of the neocolonial project and is therefore deemed exceptional, excluded from the laws and regulations put in place to protect prisoners.

To that effect, the prologue depicts Raza's incarceration in such a way that communicates the dehumanizing and terroristic qualities of the Forever War, and the abstinence from using Raza's name deprives him of an identity. In this sense, son parallels mother in a similar loss of identity because of American violence; Raza's identity is marked as "terrorist" in the same way Hiroko's is labeled "hibakusha" in Japan. As neither solider nor civilian and solely a terrorist, Raza is ironically bereft of his identity as someone who in fact embodies transnationalism and transcultural harmony. The prologue begins, "Once he is in the cell they unshackle him and instruct him to strip" (Shamsie 1). The narrative distance mirrors the displacement Raza feels physically and emotionally, shifting from "brisk efficiency" to movements that are "slow, fear turning his fingers clumsy" (1). Horton avers that Shamsie silences Raza and avoids naming him in the prologue "as a way of exploring post-9/11 American state injustice and its authorization, or rather proto authorization, within the discourse of the 'War on Terror'" (191). The prologue

does depict American injustice after September 11th, but Shamsie also incorporates, I would argue, such historical and characterological parallels throughout *Burnt Shadows* to express America's injustice domestically (Gitmo) and internationally (Japan and Afghanistan). The American counterterror, identity-revoking carceral system in the post-9/11 era echoes the violent and grotesque maiming of the victims in Nagasaki. In this way, Raza's erasure of identity likens to Mr. Tanaka's unrecognizable form after the bomb falls on Nagasaki: they become abject, identity-less figures—specters who bespeak the violence of American-imparted terror. Though decades apart, the bombing of Nagasaki and the War on Terror serve as reminders of America's dominating and inimical presence on the world stage.

Burnt Shadows begins with an ending. The prologue's final line marks a fatal blow to the Ashraf-Tanakas and Weiss-Burtons. The prologue concludes with Raza's thoughts: "*How did it come to this*, he wonders" (Shamsie 1). Shamsie's rejection of punctuation in this final sentence uncovers a violent carceral grammar that betrays convention, and we see the political enter the narrative, entwining the two to convey how the War on Terror's neocolonial pursuits divest prisoners of their agency. Ultimately, this indirect discourse indicates that Raza's martyrdom to save his family is in vain. America revokes his identity and his relationships, severing ties between the Ashraf-Tanaka and Weiss-Burton family. Thus Shamsie's book ominously concludes with the obliteration of the spider's web because of American terroristic enterprises.

The end of *Burnt Shadows* is bleak and conclusive about the fall of the extended family. The police officer who arrests Raza calls Kim, and the woman tries to turn herself in: "'No,' she said. 'No, he did nothing wrong. I'm the one who broke the law" (Shamsie 370). Attempting to right her wrong, Kim aligns herself with Raza as a sacrificial figure. Shamsie's narrator underlines this in a quick switch to the conditional mood to indicate a future in which certain

possibilities may occur: “She would turn herself in. She would say the man she reported was a man she had smuggled across the border. … She would say she could speak to the arrested man and apologise in person (370). The brief turn to the possible bright future gestures toward Kim’s desire to atone for her sins to the family.[119] Shamsie’s use of the conditional mood, in effect, provides an almost hopeful tone to the novel’s conclusion. But the author ironizes Kim’s vision with a final insertion of the police officer’s voice, informing her that the U.S. government had been searching for Raza, and regardless of her confession, he remains detained. The officer’s final words—and the last dialogue in the novel—are prickly with irony. He tells Kim, “‘Miss, your father would be proud of you’” (370).[120] Kim’s attempts to rescue Raza are in vain, and the spider’s web of relations collapses in the final pages of the book. “The dark birds were between them,” Shamsie’s narrator states, “their burnt feathers everywhere” (370). The final evocation of Hiroko’s burns ties the historical strands of the narrative together, reminding the reader what is at stake in the long historical line of American military violence. The intimacies at the heart of the novel—what was once beautiful and soaring— are now grotesque reminders of the traumatic past and the painful inevitability of the future. The birds are palimpsestic signifiers of the decades of historical and political violence that cleave the family. History repeats itself.

Therefore, through the scene of subjection and Kim and Hiroko’s final scene, Shamsie underscores how the Forever War, framed as a counterterrorist mission, unsettles the domestic sphere. To enhance the way American power abroad deterritorializes affective realms, Shamsie bookends her novel with two moments of familial threads snapping. The bombing of Nagasaki three days after the bombing of Hiroshima literally destroys Hiroko’s home and family. At the end of the novel, the War on Terror unspools the thread connecting the Ashraf-Tanakas and the Weiss-Burtons when Kim’s racist American superiority complex incites Raza’s arrest. The

novel's conclusion leaves Hiroko and Kim's relationship permanently damaged, and similar to Raza in the prologue, the two women are forced to confront the question, "How did it come to this?" This question, accordingly, ties together once again the War on Terror and the Nagasaki bombing. Hiroko spends her life questioning the rationale for the bombing and its torturous consequences on the body and mind. How did the world come to this moment where a lover can be reduced to a shadow on a rock? The same question mushrooms with Raza's erroneous arrest: what lead to this moment of crisis?

Familial crisis in *Burnt Shadows* is a direct response of American exception. Be it in the name of counter warfare or counterterrorism or in 1945 or 2001, the historical militarized terror Shamsie depicts claws at the seams holding family together. Shamsie's family saga reveals the human cost of American-imposed violence, and emphasizing the Ashraf-Tanaka and Weiss-Burton kinship unit exposes the far-reaching consequences of militarized calamities. The novel's central familial unit, furthermore, speaks to the global implications of this violence. Counterterrorist methods in Afghanistan and on penal colonies like Guantanamo Bay start at the highest levels of the state and scale their way down into the base levels of social spheres, enacted under a façade of good-will. As Harry states about Afghanistan shortly before his death, "'We make a desolation and call it peace,'" (Shamsie 284). Raza's dramatically ironic arrest and subsequent imprisonment emblematizes this devastating peace. The contemporary neocolonial project, in this way, behaves like its colonial predecessor during the Age of Empire. By the end of the novel, the spider's web flutters and collapses. Recognizing counterterrorist efforts as neocolonial ventures fortifies a reading of contemporary politics as both globally and locally effecting. The state devolves into a mishmash of chaos under the weight of Empire and the violence it imparts; to that end, state orchestrated terror enters the domestic sphere and

recalibrates familial dynamics. Accordingly, the family saga set against a transhistorical, transracial, and transnational backdrop in *Burnt Shadows* reveals that the macro cannot function without the micro, working within a synergetic circuit of mutual benefit and harm. As I show next with *Sons*, this interrelation of the macro and the micro and the complex nexus of sociopolitical and historical relations is embedded in the image of falling, the quintessential reminder of historical calamity.

II. "Post-fall new man": Family, Falling, and Orientalism in *Sons and Other Flammable Objects*

As he tumbles from his Manhattan high-rise office building in the opening credits of *Mad Men*, Don Draper falls past his vices: womanizing, alcohol, and the advertising industry. He also cascades past the bright iconology of the nuclear family—the white picket fence, picturesque American Dream. When Icarus falls, it is because of his youthful hubris; nature reminds him of his place, melts his wings, and lets him plummet to the sea. All Dedalus can do is watch in horror as his son drops like a weight. Pervasive in narrative, falling reveals a truth; it is a painful pedagogy that instructs us of our own limitations and ignorance. And its ubiquity is in language as well: we fall in love, fall out of grace, fall apart. More specifically, the omniscience of plummeting often refers to the end of things. For instance, the fall of a dynasty or the fall of towers. Scholars and journalists have addressed the phenomenon of falling as it relates to 9/11 in particular.[121] Perhaps most (in)famously, Richard Drew's photograph "Falling Man" depicts an unidentified man plunging from the North Tower before it collapses. The image hauntingly captures the tragedy of September 11th. The power of Drew's photo and the sway of political upheaval is not only in the capacity to recall calamity; the power is also in its ability to redefine and rewrite how we understand the inescapability of an idea. Aimee Pozorski claims that "we

have possibly reached a limit point or crisis in our attempts to represent traumatic experience as exemplified by the image of the man falling" (18). Falling, Pozorski argues, will now always recall 9/11. If scholars recognize how the inherent bond between collapsing and 9/11 alters how we approach concepts, images, history, and politics, then they can also use descent to distinguish changes in character and intimacies. Falling, in other words, can transform identity. To that extent, beyond marking change in individual subjectivity, falling also offers a methodology to understand moral depravity in the shadows of political furor. To be sure, scholars have addressed the literal and metaphorical significances of falling in post-9/11 art, but none have examined the idea in relation to family, identity, and amoral, racialized targeting after political turmoil. Therefore, I aim to show how falling can signal both a crisis of self and society—of the body and body politic—in the post-9/11, post-fall era.

While many writers inundate their works with falling, a few go beyond its obvious post-9/11 connotations. Porochista Khakpour is one such author who imparts falling in her novel *Sons and Other Flammable Objects* (*Sons*) to convey not just the political connotations of collapse. Rather, Khakpour wields falling as a three-pronged trident to communicate the political fall of the Pahlavi dynasty in Iran and the collapse of the Twin Towers, the moral falling of Orientalism that those political events sparked, and the subjective fall of the nuclear family. The harmony (or disharmony) of political, moral, and subjective falling engender within the novel's central Adam family a labyrinthine hyphenated identity that straddles Iran and America. Iranian diasporic literature in the U.S. latches onto this combative stance to denotate how the political interferes with the personal. The difficulty of navigating a hyphenated identity, of which either side culturally and politically clash, anchors Iranian-American literature in particular, and *Sons* proffers this contestation through recurring references to falling.[122]

In *Sons*, Adam family must constantly negotiate their newfound Americanness and their Iranian heritage within a politically fraught environment that considers them as harbingers of national trauma. I assert that destabilizing encounters about race incur for the Adams a sense of unbelonging within the U.S.; these interactions, moreover, thrive on Orientalist logics that pervade the nation, especially in the wake of the Iranian Revolution and 9/11. I posit, therefore, that the repeated instances of tumbling signify the fall of the Pahlavi dynasty, the fall of the Twin Towers, *and* the fall of the nuclear family. This representation of falling, furthermore, can be seen as the public and private's reflection of each other, highlighting how the political spills into the realm of the domestic. But the domestic sphere rises again, and the familial restoration process takes flight after Xerxes is racially and ethnically profiled at the airport; moreover, this and other destabilizing encounters unveil how social sites change meaning in the wake of political upheaval. Ultimately, I show that Orientalist sentiment in a post-9/11 world teaches Xerxes that identity formation is contingent upon one's heritage and nationality, encouraging him to mend ties with his family. Unlike in *Burnt Shadows*, the familial mending project succeeds in *Sons and Other Flammable Objects* to urge an ordering of history's chaos by way of kinship and intimacy. The familial regeneration, consequently, serves as political resistance against the racist ideologies that power the West's perceptions of Iran and the Middle East at large.[123]

Sons traces the Adam family's journey from a divided revolutionary Iran to the suburbs of Los Angeles. In 1979, the Ayatollah Khomeini returns to Iran, and Darius and Lala Adam flee their homes as the Islamic Revolution amps up to dangerous and explosive heights. With their young son Xerxes, they seek refuge in Europe and inch their way to America. Once in sunny California, financial and cultural pressures cloud their domestic life. Khakpour chronicles each

member's individual struggle with culture shock, a phenomenon she experienced herself as a refugee during the Iranian Revolution. Darius, Lala, and especially Xerxes butt heads about the hyphen between Iranian American; to boot, Darius's heavy-handed parenting and traditional practices and Lala's unquestioned acceptance to of American culture alienate Xerxes from both his parents, Darius in particular. Xerxes escapes L.A. and moves to New York City where he meets Suzanne. Both witnesses to 9/11, Suzanne and Xerxes mirror Darius and Lala, sharing a similarly intimate experience of political and national trauma. The young couple's relationship is forged by the fiery fall of the Towers. Following 9/11, Xerxes stands at odds with his Iranian-American subjectivity more than ever and attributes this difficulty to his father's parenting. In an attempt to patch things up between father and son, Suzanne and Darius plan to meet at the Frankfurt airport before their trips to Iran. Xerxes arrives at this juncture between America and Iran where he faces the pressures of the impending family reunion and the anxieties of being a Brown man in a post-9/11 world. The precarious combination of family and nation sparks an anxiety attack and he is charged with suspicious behavior. *Sons*, though morose and unpalatable because the Adams are often dislikeable, ends on a happy note. Lala rescues her son from a holding facility in New York City meant for "suspicious" figures, and father and son reconcile their differences, recalibrating familial dynamics.

The Iranian Revolution's impact on families and migration has been richly examined in works such as *The Saffron Kitchen* (Yasmin Crowther), *Disoriental* (Négar Djavadi), *Refuge* (Dina Nayeri), *Man of My Time* (Dalia Sofer), *Reading Lolita in Tehran* (Azar Nafisi), and *Persepolis* (Marjane Satrapi), to list just a few. Khakpour's novel contributes to this chorus of contemporary Iranian diasporic work by bridging the Revolution and 9/11, two defining political calamities that signal the instability of their respective decades. Iranian-diasporic works like

Sons, *Disoriental*, and *Man of My Time* interrogate how 9/11 speaks to the Revolution, and how both events spawned anti-Iranian and anti-Middle Eastern sentiments. More specifically, instances of falling—a motif that peppers the post-9/11 literary scene— positions the novel in direct conversation with *Falling Man* (Don DeLillo), *Encouragement for a Man Falling to His Death* (Christopher Kennedy), "Steel" and "Searching Ground" (Allison Hedge Coke), and others about the jarring and intimate effects of falling on the family and the individual.

As in *Burnt Shadows*, *Sons* relies on echoes between moments of political and historical crises to define family and fate; the shared strife of the Iranian Revolution and 9/11 defines and cleaves the family, and the relationship between Darius and Xerxes is in flux for the entirety of the novel. We see then how Khakpour emphasizes the generational differences in understanding history and its reconciliation. In fact, for Xerxes, mediating memories of political discord or jettisoning their generative powers of identity formation is a hallmark of adulthood; in so doing proves for the young man that "the key to happiness was learning to detach yourself from its many machinations. It was the reason humans were more ghost than mammal" (121). The novel's ultimate irony is that no character can eschew memory as a means to achieve happiness; like Lot's wife or Orpheus, the characters always look back. Plainly, the Adam family depends on memory to understand their contemporary situations. Hence, we see how political and historical paroxysms, such as the fall of the Pahlavi dynasty and the fall of the Twin Towers, create hyphenated identities that in turn induce internal and external conflicts contingent upon national and international politics.

Prior to my analysis of falling in the novel, I wish to clarify my use of Orientalism. Contemporary scholars extend Edward Said's classic definition, using the prefix "neo" to connote its difference from the classic understanding; however, because of its nascency, neo-

Orientalism is difficult to define.[124] Ali Behdad and Juliet Williams are two scholars who attempt to define the term. They claim, "Though predominantly a North American and Western European phenomenon, Neo-Orientalism is neither limited to these regions, nor is it merely produced by Western subjects. On the contrary, not only do Middle Eastern writers, scholars, and so-called 'experts' participate in its production, but they actually play an active and significant role in propagating it" (http://www.entekhabi.org/).[125] While I agree with Behdad and Williams that some authors participate in damaging and regressive projects that reinforce Orientalist stereotypes or tropes, I do not think Khakpour does so. *Sons* refrains from positing monoliths about the East; instead, its main concern is balancing the East and the West's influence on the Adams's dual nationalities. The novel forces the reader to consider the nuances and deliberations of Iran and America amid the disarray of history and geopolitics.

Ironically, images of flying beget notions of falling, and, in particular, planes suggest the collapse of national and familial comfort. That is, planes, which once signified the heights of modern technology and global interconnectivity, now also connote the fall of political and social order. Aircrafts appear in *Sons* as connected points on a grid marking the slippery slope of the past and the present and their consequences on identity. In this way, flying to note falling ironically and violently carves space for the hyphen suspended between Iranian and American and unfurls a complex historical tapestry for Iranian-Americans that begins with the Revolution and tumbles past 9/11. Flying machines define Xerxes, whose first memory is of anti-warcraft missiles, inaugurating the fall of the Pahlavi dynasty. In 1979 Iran, Xerxes, Lala (then Laleh), Darius, and "the whole city of Tehran [were] outside their homes, patiently gazing at the sky" in anticipation of the future (Khakpour 123). As their eyes search, "suddenly the sound of choppers and their respective artificially created initial breeze, and moments later a circle of pink lights,

spiraling around themselves, in perfect formation" cause mayhem and commence the Revolution (124). And while "the existence of himself as proof that things went all right that night, in the end" is a source of comfort for Xerxes, the flight of the choppers haunts him (124). When he asks his parents to clarify the memory, Darius responds defensively, shocked (and perhaps hurt) that his son's first memory is of the drumbeats of war. Lala, on the other hand, encourages delving into the memory. This difference between husband and wife underscores how political tumult foments familial discord in the Adam household. Darius and Lala's dichotomous treatments of traumatic and identity-forming memory, particularly as it relates to the Iranian Revolution and their son, is worth noting:

> "You can't remember that," Darius Adam *decided*.
>
> "How else would he know?" Lala Adam *reminded* him.
>
> "Somebody told him," Darius *snapped*.
>
> "Nobody could, not here," Lala *snapped* back. (124, my emphasis)

This brief but integral exchange illustrates the couple's antipodal treatments of history and memory. The push and pull of jettisoning and embracing memory defines Lala and Darius's relationship and ignites the political charge of the home. The verbs here show the family's dysfunction as it relates inherently to a traumatic past. The repetition of "snapped" not only presents Darius and Lala as equally strong sparring partners, but it also suggests a violent undercurrent to the familial dynamic that parallels the violent sky in 1979 Iran. We see then how flying elicits falling and makes itself known to the Adam family from the get-go. The politically charged family builds itself on the foundations of a fallen and unstable nation.

This trauma of political cataclysm and subsequent kinship displacement, therefore, pushes the Adam family to the edge of fallout, underscoring that precarious national dynamics

encroach and reflect within the domestic sphere. Khakpour's narrative skirts around the fall of the Pahlavi dynasty, never providing a first-hand account through Darius and Lala's eyes. Instead, the book offers quick glosses of the political and religious upheaval: "Like much of their class, alarmed by the dark wave of new 'R' words—reform, revolution, religion—they felt their old lives turn unrecognizable overnight … Action dethroned thought—all their people knew to do was to move and move fast" (Khakpour 55-56). While not stated explicitly, the collapse of the Pahlavi dynasty and the rise of the Islamic Republic stay with Darius and Lala. Their past "was something beyond them, beyond TV, beyond any American imagination" (114). Accordingly, their wartime trauma differentiates their identity; it is the hyphen between their nationalities. The war uproots the young family, and they settle in a brave new world: Eden Gardens, an animal-ridden, gaudy, and peaceful apartment complex in Los Angeles.[126] The displaced Adams echo Hiroko and Sajjad in *Burnt Shadows* and Nadia and Saeed in *Exit West*, moving from place to place after political upheaval and beginning afresh. Eden Gardens is home to people from everywhere: "the Mexicans" with an "ancient pit bull," "the Weird Old Chinese Man with guinea pigs," and even a "lanky Jesus-looking man that Xerxes's mother and father knew only as The Drug Dealer" (5).[127] Yet, the name "Eden Gardens" hints at the fall that awaits the Adam family. It is an inversion of the Garden of Eden after all, and times are by no means peaceful. The national fighting—now far away— ironically enters the Adam home through a difference in cultural assimilation.[128] The competing cultural acceptances, moreover, define the marriage. Whereas Darius continues to embrace his Iranian heritage and culture, Laleh foregoes it entirely, living under the auspices of an American brand of freedom. She has "no comment on her old homeland" and goes to great lengths to burgeon as a new woman in the New World (61).[129] From legally changing her name, losing her accent, and never speaking Farsi, Lala tries to

eschew her Iranian-ness and become wholly American. She believes that "this was what freedom in America really meant: *being rid of things*" (Khakpour 79). The differences between husband and wife crack family and signals how falls invade homes that not only politically charge the domestic space but also arouse a miniature reflection of national political tumult.

This difference in cultural adoption and assimilation between Darius and the rest of his family also specifically echoes the unstable political and cultural environments between Iran and America in the late 1970s. Khakpour amalgamates the loss of homeland and the difficulty of assimilation—themes that anchor Iranian-American literature. As Persis Karim notes, "The theme of emotional and cultural loss that accompanied exile, migration, and the subsequent demonization of Iran and Iranian culture beginning in 1979, has reoccurred and even intensified since September 11" (112, "Charting the Past"). The differences between nations and cultures is clear through jabs at the family and their heritage, namely the mispronunciation of the Adam family name. Indeed, a source for irritation for Darius only, the mispronunciation of and refusal to recognize "Adam" (pronounced Odd-damn) outside of a Judeo-Christian context indicates an anti-Middle Eastern sentiment at work that surfaces after the regime's fall and the Iran Hostage Crisis; in this way, the destabilizing encounter forces assimilation by erasing Iranian ethno-national identity markers.[130] These moments of unsettling exclusion, furthermore, often occur in political spaces, overlaying the difficult assimilative process with a legal permanence. In the pre-9/11 era, a clerk at the INS (Immigration and Naturalization Service) office harasses Darius, who has to "come up with a spelling for their Green Cards" (Khakpour 41). He must, in other words, rename his family and heritage. "Adam" as opposed to the Farsi spelling accents the legal Americanization of his family's hyphenated identity. Daniel Grassian notes that in trying to maintain his last name's original and "secular nature … from its Judeo-Christian Western

allusions and implications," Darius encounters America's desire and insistence on the erasure of non-Western culture and identity (68). Hence, Darius deems America a thief and resents it for its transgression and the stealing of his name, claiming that it is "perhaps another way in which the West had robbed his East, taken his Adam as their Adam" (Khakpour 41). As a hyperpower, especially after the Iranian Hostage Crisis, America snaked into the immigrant's home and forcibly altered their identity and severed their ties to homelands.[131] Ironically, enveloping identity does not necessitate a welcoming environment. By 1978, tensions peaked in Iran, and Revolution was in the air; to make matters worse, the Iranian Hostage Crisis in November 1979 amplified fraught affairs with America.[132] Yet, this political strife between nations still encouraged large numbers of Iranians to immigrate to the U.S., which, concomitantly, "engendered and fomented new levels of racialized hostility, discriminations, and bias" (Maghbouleh 26). This historical context is critical to understanding the Adam family's cultural divisions with the nation and within the microcosm of the domestic sphere, especially as it shapes Xerxes, who also struggles to assimilate and combat dueling nationalities following the Iranian Revolution.[133]

The moral falling these disorienting encounters represent in *Sons* appears most tragically through children. Like the fervent belief in American dominance Harry passes to Kim, anti-Iranian, anti-Brown sentiments are bestowed to children, garishly spotlighting the racially charged political space of the schoolyard. Whereas Darius's woes with his name come from the INS office, Xerxes's come from school. His childhood friend, comically named Adam, finds it strange that Xerxes Adam does not pronounce his name in the Western manner, the American way. Adam questions Xerxes's inability to or aversion to fully assimilate to America—to abate his Iranian roots. Xerxes ignores the overtly racial brushstrokes of Adam's comment. In fact, "In

spite of looking at who his parents were—their foul-smelling past, his hodgepodge nightmare heritage, his unclear place in this world or any world—Xerxes back then *did* like himself" (69). Instead, Xerxes is only troubled when Adam gives him a card emblazoned with a camel. He recognizes the Orientalist signifier: "What haunted the future adult Xerxes the most about this was how clearly he understood, as just a young kid, what the camel symbolized" (70).[134] Adam's camel metonymizes Xerxes; that is, Middle Eastern equates to camel. Thus, we see that in the post-Iran Hostage Crisis and pre-9/11 era, this destabilizing racist encounter with Adam serves as a basis of perpetually wobbly understanding of his place in America. The censure of Middle Eastern people was as rampant in the 1980s as it was following 9/11 in the early 21st century and as it is today; ironically, Middle Eastern people are lambasted in social sites that claim equality and freedom.[135] The INS office—where people literally go to become American—and the school are spaces that encourage foundational American values of acceptance. Khakpour shows the all-too-often ulterior motive rooted in those spaces of feigned inclusivity. Within those sites, Middle Easterners are further displaced as unbelonging, as alien, as dangerous.

The corrosive power of these disquieting encounters leaks into the privacy and the sanctity of the domestic sphere. The mortar upholding the already-tenuous dynamics of the Adam household disintegrates, and the bricks of the nuclear family begin to tumble. Darius refuses to accept that the camel on the card is racist gesture, downplaying it as "'nothing to do with us'" (Khakpour 71). Darius only registers the damaging response to his son's victimhood years later when he and Xerxes do not speak at all. Incidents like the camel card and Darius's failure to comfort act as an identity double punch for Xerxes. After all, family has the largest hand in shaping a child's perceptions and understandings of the world. The sequence of left and right hooks Xerxes takes to his identity destabilize him, forcing him to struggle to understand his

parents and himself as Iranian *and* American. His hyphenated existence, therefore, is as delicate as the relationship he has with his family. Like Gogol Ganguli in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*, Xerxes walks the bleeding edge of ethnicity and nationality. He resists Iranian culture desiring to be "like all the other kids" like his mother, but like his father, he probes his past, questioning his earliest memories of anti-aircraft missiles (Khakpour 8).[136] As Xerxes exhibits in his life-long struggle with family and culture, identity in the stifling air of national instability becomes even more complicated, especially for those who are already displaced. Similar to the Tanaka-Ashraf and Weiss-Burton's pluralistic nationalities, Xerxes's dueling nationalities forces him to confront the traumas they spawn. In so doing, he is keenly aware of the separate national and cultural orbits Iran and America prescribe him. Within the domestic sphere, he is Iranian; outside, in public, he is American. But identity's instabilities and slippages often trip up Xerxes. His acute awareness of both orbits engenders an "old phobia" of them colliding (38).

A language of disaster and falling conveys the brutal ramifications of combining cultures and forecasts the downfall of the nuclear family. Xerxes fears Orientalist attacks like the camel card, and his anxieties about his Iranian-American subjectivity initially resist the urge to conjoin either side of the hyphen. He believes as a child that "he lived in two worlds and part of the dual-citizenship agreement was that he could not allow those worlds to mix" (Khakpour 136). Doing so severely infringes on the serious work of cultivating different personas for either side of his identity. Xerxes's worlds mix fatally when his best friend Sam visits while Darius and Lala are out. The boy's guard is up from the moment Sam enters the Eden Gardens apartment. Khakpour's narration deftly shifts from disclosing Xerxes's intimate worries about these worlds colliding to a panned-out depiction of Sam moving through the space inspecting everything. Like a tracking shot, the narration follows her around as "[s]he admired the Iranian flag posted on one

wall, cooed at the alien Arabic script on the book spines, took extensive note of the Persian carpets and old Eastern china on display in the cabinet … but she stopped dead in her tracks for just one object: a framed family photo on a shelf by the hall entrance (138). The catalog of items—the flag, books, carpets, china—embody the Iranian half of Xerxes's identity, and Khakpour arranges the objects innocuously and with no rhyme or reason, offering them as stable signifiers of the Adam family's heritage. The catalog suddenly changes, however, after the ellipsis, polarizing the family photo to the other Iranian objects. The picture depicts the Adams at Disney Land where Lala and Darius grin in the "phony way adults act happy for their kids' sake" (139). While his parents put on fake smiles, Xerxes looks as alien as the "Arabic script on the book spines" and does not smile at all. The narrator describes the photo: "The only being that was smileless in the whole mess was the kid all the smiles were supposedly in honor of, ol' X himself. Xerxes recognized the look on his younger self's face: it was sheer anxiety. He looked completely out of place, claustrophobic…" (139). The anxiety apparent in Disney Land is the same that teenage Xerxes carries when he allows for his worlds to mix. "'Look at you,'" Sam says to Xerxes, "and he thought that she meant the 'you' he used to be, the one in the portrait, but she was looking dead into his eyes" (139). In this pivotal scene, Xerxes recognizes the weight of carrying both worlds on his back. The photo of the Adams in the Happiest Place on Earth—a beacon of Americanness—literally captures and externalizes Xerxes's struggle with the anxiety of clashing nationalities.

The photo, moreover, functions as a Chekhov's gun in the novel, setting off a sequence of events that allow the identity-driven familial dynamics to crash and burn. After they kiss, Xerxes and Sam panic as Lala and Darius pull up to the apartment. Flurrying to get Sam out, the protagonist slips on the Persian rugs and trips onto the shelf holding the photo of counterfeit

American happiness. In a moment of personification to indicate that everything was out of Xerxes's control when his worlds met, "the shelf, also panicked, let itself go and tipped just enough for the frame to fall flat on their faces, everyone of them, mouse and duck and Adams" (Khakpour 141). The language of falling conveys the allegorical fall of the family: "And the fall was fatal: the frame lay cracked in two pieces, barely maintaining the integrity of the photo it was meant to protect" (141). Free indirect discourse further communicates this fall when Darius begins to beat Xerxes for breaking the family photo. Xerxes thinks, "You did not let the worlds mix, you never let the worlds mix, or else-else-else-else—," (144). The difference between the personification of the shelf and the momentary lapse into Xerxes's head is jarring, but it beckons a watershed moment for the teen. Falling, in other words, acts as a vehicle of truth. Like the blast of a gun that has been waiting to go off, the fall of the family photo reveals Darius's brutality to Xerxes. This truth in turn uncovers his desire to escape, to "run as he did when he was a kid … into the playground where he could lose himself, lose them as well—but this time he would run farther, run as far as the stretch of land that created the length of the country made possible" (146). To Xerxes, the fall of the family is a direct consequence of the combination of the worlds.

Nevertheless, this forced divorce of his Iranian and American worlds is futile, because the fall of the Twin Towers brings them together again through a shared intimacy of witnessing and through a forced confrontation with his Iranian roots. September 11th and the collapsing towers muddy Xerxes's ability to pinpoint where he stands between the two nations. Moreover, similar to her depiction of the Iranian Revolution, Khakpour complicates the attacks by blatantly passing over the them.[137] When it finally reaches 9/11—the event it alludes to with images of falls and flight—the narrative emphasizes the evening. Jumping over 9/11 "encourages readers to move forward and, in whatever way possible, to progress" (Boudakin and Henry 13). While I

agree that passing over 9/11 is hopeful and uplifting, I would like to extend that claim. The narrative skips the attacks to emphasize what progress specifically *looks like*: a coalition built on a shared trauma of witnessing the fall. Khakpour offers the reader a way to understand the trauma, not move past it. Moving past 9/11 disservices the lost lives and the severed families and doing so also jettisons the detrimental political consequences in the aftermath. Peppered with the slightest hope of progress, thus, the section set the evening of 9/11 introduces the theme of shared witnessing as solidarity, which preoccupies the second half of the novel: "[T]hey said sometimes it took a tragedy to bring people together, and so, suddenly, there she was, as if concocted from a deep delirium, her head on his pillow…" (Khakpour 176). Xerxes meets Suzanne when he "finally dared to face the unfiltered skyline" the evening of the attacks (177). Instead of depicting the event itself, Khakpour focuses on a glimmer of hope in its immediate wake.[138] Khakpour articulates that the tiniest instances of goodness, ranging from jubilance to the comfort of a stranger, oppose and withstand the extreme trauma and gravity of 9/11. Xerxes, who as mentioned above, has now lived through two moments of national trauma, does not have much going for him at this point in the novel: his employment is unstable; his finances are in tatters; and his relationship with Darius and Lala is threadbare. But Suzanne—with her "two outrageously large dark eyes" and "dramatically unkempt hair"—seems to cure his tribulations (Khakpour, *Sons* 178). In skipping over 9/11 and instead introducing Suzanne, Khakpour depends on another character to process the calamity of September 11th. The fall of the Towers proclaims a truth about connection in the wake of political trauma. Suzanne stabilizes and helps Xerxes process the fall, and even though he recognizes that 9/11 changes his self-perception and identity, Suzanne helps denude those altered effects.[139]

Therefore, we see that ordering the chaos after trauma is vital, and oftentimes other people offer the solace of clarity. As Chuck does for Hans in *Netherland*, Suzanne helps Xerxes understand the existential ramifications of 9/11, and she also helps him begin to reconcile his Iranian-American identity in the new era of American history by teaching him how to let his worlds meet without everything collapsing like the ill-fated photograph. Initially, he worries about telling her his name, preoccupied with its complicated history: "He wondered what she would think—in this era, in this time, who knew what a Suzanne might think of it—but he said the only truth that was his, his goddamn name after all, his goddamn appellation of his goddamn homeland: 'Xerxes is Persian—Iran—Iranian'" (Khakpour 182). This awkward introduction of himself is imperative to understanding the novel's attention to racial and cultural dynamics. This moment of free indirect discourse unveils Xerxes's preoccupation with what "*a* Suzanne" might think, noting how "September 11 represented a watershed moment in [Iranian-Americans'] sense of public identity" (Karim 121, "Charting the Past"). Xerxes's thoughts unveil his preoccupation with what "*a* Suzanne" might think, noting how "September 11 represented a watershed moment in [Iranian-Americans'] sense of public identity" (Karim 121, "Charting the Past"). Though she is three-eighths Persian, Suzanne registers to Xerxes as white. In fact, her entire family—even though her father Al (Ali) is half Persian—identifies as white. [140] Xerxes's use of "a" before Suzanne typifies her as a potentially racist woman who could equate his race and name as synonymous to terrorist. To be frank, he fears that she will orientalize him in the same way Adam did with the camel card and the way hundreds of Middle Eastern men were (and still are) stereotyped after 9/11.

Nonetheless, Suzanne in actuality represents the paranoia rampant in the city after September 11th, and Xerxes's fear, though emblematic of the post-9/11 Iranian-American state of

mind, turns out to be incorrect. Whereas Kim Burton's paranoia in *Burnt Shadows* sprouts from racist stereotypes about Afghans, Suzanne's comes to the fore as an existential and perpetual feeling of danger, similar to Rachel in *Netherland* or Oskar in *Extremely Loud,* as I address in Part II. Khakpour, moreover, grammatically illustrates Suzanne's paranoia through a series of em-dashes that break up her stuttered speech to Xerxes after she falls on the floor:

> …and shit, it just hit me, for the first time really—can you believe it—it's only been a a couple of weeks—it happened—here—my God—I guess that's all, that it just hit me—and the sound of the planes, these days you'd think they'd know better, instead they get so close—so I don't know, I got scared—that's normal, I would think, but then again I don't know what *is* normal these days. … (Khakpour 184)

This exasperated extended dialogue exhibits the grammar of 9/11; the em-dashes metaphorize how the event interrupted everything, turning linear moments into fragments that are chaotically stitched together. That is, the inundation of the punctuation mark literalizes on the page the interruptions 9/11 had on the lives of these young New Yorkers. Ultimately, then, the dashes merge the political and the subjective, showing how the event altered any sense of normalcy for the individual, likening to the new normal the Iranian Revolution ushered. The novel pairs 9/11 and the Islamic Revolution to emphasize (inter)national politics penetrating the domestic sphere. This coupling of historical moments in *Sons* recalls the intentional pairing of national histories in *Burnt Shadows*. These post-9/11 historical fictions, therefore, mark the important repetition of political violence unmaking or, in this case, rearticulating the domestic sphere.

This reinvention of prosaic domesticity after the fall conveys how political upheaval restructures interpersonal and domestic dynamics. Khakpour constructs a network of commonalities between the past and the present through familial and domestic organization: the Iranian Revolution disturbed the Adam family's way of life, and 9/11 similarly reworks Xerxes's domestic sphere. Suzanne enters out of the blue and changes his life, and their relationship

revolves entirely around 9/11 and its reeling aftershocks. For example, in a scene reminiscent of Darius hitting Xerxes and Lala after the family photo falls, Xerxes slaps Suzanne during an argument about her surprise trip to Iran. Suzanne "[replays] their first meeting on the rooftop on that epochal evening over and over again. *You could not throw away a thing like that,* she told herself. *If you did, you might as well pretend, say, 9/11 never happened*" (Khakpour 299). The italicized moments of free-indirect discourse concretize the lasting impressions of the terrorist attack on their courtship. They met staring at the absence of the towers, taking in the new normal, and learning to lean on each other for support. Suzanne, Xerxes, and 9/11 are a kind of *ménage à trois,* like Darius and Lala who always carry the Iranian Revolution on their shoulders. In another telling example, when the two argue about the trip yet again, Suzanne reveals that Darius will join them. Xerxes responds by turning on the tv "[j]ust in time for them to hear the voices of foreign men, jadedly accented, over a radio speaker talking of bombs aboard … [Suzanne] wanted to run, run out and away from *it* and *him* and *everything*" (326-327, my emphasis). The attacks, Suzanne, and Xerxes all appear in this tense moment of decision making and romantic strife; the young couple literally can never escape the fall of the Twin Towers because it doctors their domestic sphere.

In that way, the fall of the Towers circumscribes Xerxes's relationships and interactions and emblematizes what Iranian-Americans and other people of color routinely negotiate in the 21st century. Particularly for those of Iranian descent, post-9/11 America was rife with a sense of danger and unease that goes beyond the potential of another terrorist attack. Neda Maghbouleh addresses many examples in which Iranian-Americans dealt with legal and social difficulties after September 11th: "Although no Iranian nationals were involved in the planning or execution of the September 11th terrorist attacks, from 2002 through 2011 a special migrant National

Security Entry Exit Registration System (NSEERS) required all Iranian and Iranian American men to present themselves for registration with the Department of Homeland Security" (30). Thus, we see that Xerxes, who has kept his struggle with identity following the fall of the photograph insular and internal, now also fights an external battle with ethno-nationalist concerns. For him, it is a battle of the body and the body politic. To that end, the fall of the Towers marks a narrative shift; the terrorist attacks pivot Xerxes's difficulties with a hyphenated identity outward once again. This is a major aspect of the Brown writer's response to 9/11: the turn from an internal racial struggle to an external one occurs in part because of the onslaught of targeted racial violence and absolutes drawn after the WTC collapsed. [141]

These political tensions, moreover, converge with their personal counterparts in the novel's climax, which occurs in an airport. Khakpour locates the intimacies of the Adam family and post-9/11 social sites by situating the climax in the Frankfurt airport.[142] Xerxes plans to join Suzanne and Darius before they visit Iran together, but the familial reunion with his father sparks a familiar anxiety in the protagonist. Darius is the figure of Xerxes's Iranian world, and Suzanne represents his American; the meeting of the worlds—that all too familiar calamity—only leads to fallouts in his experience. In addition, as the site of familial reunion and post-9/11 racialized targeting, the airport merges the personal and the political. Upon leaving a bathroom where he sought solace, Xerxes sees on the television Barbara Eden, his ironic and Orientalist childhood love, in her eponymous role in *I Dream of Jeannie*. Xerxes latches onto this "sign of signs, beautiful, beaming, and blonde" and aligns himself with the fictional character in her genie's bottle where she opines, "'All I do is think and blink,'" (378). This is exactly how Xerxes feels, beholden to what master bids him, so he tries to "shatter the sign" and leave his family and identity (379). The liminality of the Frankfurt airport encourages a freedom that neither Iran nor

the U.S. provide. This German social site of in-betweenness, Xerxes incorrectly believes, will not affect his identity.

The airport is a palimpsestic space that simultaneously affords Xerxes the abandon of identity (he sees himself as "*missing*" and without a nationality in the airport) and forces him to discern his Iranian-ness through falling (Khakpour 377). The Frankfurt airport gives him a ticket to fly out of the genie's bottle he sees himself trapped in, but the body politics that fuel the site in the post-9/11 world draw attention to his identity. To escape, Xerxes lies to an airport employee, hysterically telling her that he must return to New York City because, "'My father has … died!'" (384). Fictionally killing Darius, Xerxes severs all ties with his family and believes he has safe passage back to the U.S. Yet, this lie exacerbates and Xerxes soon enough begins to have a nervous breakdown, denoted by images of falling: Xerxes clutches the ticket counter as if his life depends on it, "dangling from [it]… he was falling, he had no choice, he needed help—and that there was something, some very real truth at the very least, to the very big deal he was making…" (386). Xerxes falls, grasping at a concrete and inescapable truth: that to escape one's identity and past is a futile endeavor. Consequently, it is of import that a racially-charged question catches Xerxes's fall. An official at the airport asks him, "'Sir, where, may I ask, are you *from*?'" (386). This question—one that is perfuse in post-9/11 social discourse and uncovers an embedded skepticism of Middle Eastern people—encompasses Xerxes's entire life. Displaced in the world and ethnically and racially "missing" in the airport, Xerxes realizes that the question he himself has spent his life asking is being used against him. Echoing Kim Burton's suspicion of Middle Eastern people with a War on Terror cultural logic that reiterates colonial creeds, the airport official's question about origin orientalizes Xerxes's experiences and how they shape him. It is a destabilizing encounter that epitomizes the Brown man's experience in a post-9/11

world. The question and its racist overtones are ubiquitous across the world, but it prevails especially in Western social identity-driven discourse. David Simpson argues that the post-9/11 subject is "being invited to imagine itself as a collective (national) subject that can and must be defended —a sort of solidarity of liquids" (8). The question posed to Xerxes in relation to Simpson's point provokes an intriguing question in response: what happens when a subject is cast out of the nation? Xerxes, even though he witnesses the fall of the towers and feels the existential weight of the post-9/11 moment, is shut out from the (inter)national collective. "Where are you from?" carries an onus of exclusivity akin to the exilic treatment Changez receives in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.

Plummeting alone after the Iranian Revolution and 9/11, Xerxes finally hits the ground and stabilizes the encounter by depending on his national, and by extension familial, heritage. In response to the man's question,

> He was about to say he had flown from JFK, he was a resident of New York City, he was raised in Los Angeles, he was a United States citizen, a Californian, a Manhattainite—when suddenly out of his mouth came a truth, a desperate suicidal truth perhaps more lethal than the hour's desperate suicidal lies: "I was born in Iran." (386-387)

A string of clauses and fragments lead to the simple sentence of individual and familial identity confirmation. We see at once how various places shape Xerxes, but only Iran matters in relation to his family, especially Darius, and in post-9/11 social sites. The scene that begins with a lie about his father concludes in a dramatic admission of heritage and nationality. "Suicidal truth" trumps "suicidal lies," and Xerxes recognizes how ethno-national concerns dictate his past, present, and future. Orientalist ideology configures and transfigures Xerxes engagement with public and private spheres. His past experiences with the fall of the Pahlavi dynasty and the fall of the Twin Towers continue to depend on his Iranian-ness, not the American half of his identity.

Racially precarious encounters, in effect, teach a painful lesson about the hyphenated subject's experience in public after political plummets like the Iranian Revolution or 9/11. Identity markers such as race and nationality can plague public reception in a world constructed by and dependent on forms of Othering as I show in Part I with Mohsin Hamid's novels. In admitting his private truth in the public airport, Xerxes pays the price in the cruel post-9/11 world and is charged with suspicious activity. Khakpour depends on catalog once again to escalate the ethno-national tensions of the scene:

> 1) X-E-R-X-E-S A-D-A-M. His name spelled out not once, but twice. Then pronounced almost perfect.
> 2) Iran.
> 3) Suspicious Activity. (Khakpour 388)

This laundry list of identity markers ranges from the simple and straightforward to the absurd and racist. In so doing, Khakpour illustrates the conclusionary leaps and bounds people make about Middle Eastern men in particular after 9/11. Or, as Maghbouleh states, "Easy characterizations of a Middle Eastern 'them' that threatened an American 'us' [provide] fertile ground for the othering of Iranian-heritaged youth" (85). This destabilizing encounter at the airport recalls the school scene between Xerxes and Adam. The setting and time have changed, but the sentiment remains. After all these years, Xerxes is still boxed in by cultural tropes and assumptions; even more dangerously, he is framed as the supreme Other, a suspicious figure/terrorist.[143] This meeting importantly brings up one of the final instances of falling in the novel: the stress of racist subjugation and detainment makes Xerxes collapse (Khakpour 388). He unwillingly submits to the Orientalist attitudes informing the airport official and the larger anti-Iranian and anti-Middle Eastern culture after the Hostage Crisis and 9/11.

Nonetheless, the dramatic and unnerving sequence of events that comprise the climax leads to a hopeful conclusion that has more to do with flight than with falling. Although the

novel could have ended more tenuously as many of the other novels I look at in this project, *Sons* instead concludes with the Adam family atoning for their fallout. Government officials interrogate Xerxes in New York City, but with Lala's help, he comes home. The brief reference to Xerxes's arrest opposes Raza's in *Burnt Shadows,* namely in that Hiroko cannot save her son like Lala can. Incarceration threatens to permanently dismantle the Adams, but familial relations save the day. Thus, the person in the middle of Darius and Xerxes's contention—and the woman who is a blend of both of their identities—reconnects the disparate family. The conclusion highlights a victory over the attempts to stymie Xerxes's newfound truth; he does need his family, though he jettisons them. The novel's conclusion diametrically opposes its first lines: "*Another in the long line of misunderstanding in their shared history, what caused Xerxes and Darius Adam to vow never to speak again, really began with a misplaced anecdote…"* (Khakpour 1). Khakpour plays with the reader's expectations to uncover those qualities of life, those truths that matter more than Western-created perceptions of the Middle East.[144] Lala coaxes Xerxes to call his father who vainly searches for him in Europe: "On the other end, in another world altogether, Xerxes Adam—a different Xerxes Adam …[a] post-fall new man—found it in himself to sit back in his mother's arms and listen to her whispers, *… let's move forward, let's come to peace*…" (395). The Adam family begins its curative process after an affecting, post-9/11, anti-Iranian crucible. Unlike the Ashraf-Tanaka and Weiss-Burton nexus and the Schell family, which fall victim to the never-ending line of historical violence on domestic spheres and private intimacies, the Adam family in *Sons* flies above Western strictures designed to master the East without losing sight of its Iranian-ness.

Khakpour writes the small nuclear family's victory in distinctly postlapsarian language to convey the watershed achievement of familial reunion and to hint at the transfiguration of the

idea of falling itself. Xerxes is a "post-fall new man." Of course, "to fall" still stands for attained knowledge: the protagonist learns to pride his heritage and his desire to reconnect with the person who "never left him alone," his father (Khakpour 396). But, the description of the protagonist as a "post-fall new man" also signifies the mobilizing powers of 9/11 as an event that catalyzes a new way of seeing himself and the world. Falling communicates a subjective and a global change. Khakpour's fallen man symbolizes "a particular and literal truth of 9/11": that a post-fall world still does not shy away from a targeted racism of the pre-decolonial era, of the time when the West shaped its understanding of the East in pure "us" versus "them" binaries (Pozorski 25). Perhaps the original sin of the postlapsarian world order after September 11th is in fact the survival of these binaries.

In this way, falling in Khakpour's novel encourages a sustained interrogation of imperial tendencies that remain amid the chaos of terrorism and its effectual ethno-national politics. Through its critique of family in this post-9/11 era, *Sons and Other Flammable Objects* exposes continued Orientalist logic at work.[145] It is imperative to recognize that Middle Easterners have always been scrutinized, even in the ante-lapsarian world. Therefore, it is also necessary that the Adam family's story begins at the Iranian Revolution, when much American anti-Iranian and anti-Middle Eastern sentiment arose. The chain between the Iranian Revolution and 9/11 is not just familial; it is also cultural, made up of links of a sustained global opposition of Middle Eastern, specifically Iranian, people. Writing for the *Times* nine years after September 11th, Khakpour laments that "before 9/11 and just after, was not a picnic for brown people. And there's no need to cast 2001 to 2008 in an ideal light. None of us breathed easy. It's just that we expected to breathe easier as time went on," ("My Nine Years").

Brownness as a categorizing element in global politics has been ignored against the context of historical and imperial violence; a dangerous Orientalist dogma continues to determine the social fabric of the world, and it must be historicized for the post-Said era by taking into account the narratives of Brown victims. As a response to 9/11 and other acts of terror, Brown people, particularly those hailing from the greater Middle East, have been unfairly blamed for the upheavals in these first two decades of the 21st century. Destabilizing encounters that occur in public sites like airports force the victim to consider or reconsider their place within a space, nation, or family. I aimed to show in this chapter, *Burnt Shadows* and *Sons and Other Flammable Objects* stresses this deterritorializing power and complicated matrix of social relations and identity formation, both denuding the larger implications of racial ostracization through imperial and Orientalist projects and calling for a more localized reading of the post-fall era through a distinctly non-whites viewpoints. Most importantly, however, the chapter suggests that perhaps a way to catch the fall and fly above such purported hate is a coalition of intimate relations.

CHAPTER V: DOMESTIC HORROR:

THE SPECTER OF 9/11 AND THE FUTURE OF FAMILY

She is known as The Dust Lady. Marcy Borders walked out of the World Trade Center on September 11th, 2001, covered from head to toe in the cinders of catastrophe and was immortalized in Stan Honda's haunting photograph. Borders's shocked face reflects the horror and tragedy of the day, and the photo is a dystopian signifier of how 9/11 "usher[ed] in an era of new seriousness" (Versluys 16). Authors have thematized the apocalyptic nature of the attacks. Don DeLillo, for instance, uses ash and dust as charnel confetti to welcome this new epoch in his 2007 novel *Falling Man*: "It was not a street anymore but a world, a time and space of falling ash and near night" (3). The raining powder transforms the micro street into the macro world and inaugurates a living nightmare. This new age of terror, moreover, would go on to see the decimation of more than the New York City skyline. As the previous parts showed, the Forever War destroys nations, homes, and families, and the conflict underscores how imperial, militaristic response goes hand-in-hand with the end of the world, or the end of *a* world.

Apocalypse has been ubiquitous throughout this project, a looming menace of catastrophe that characterizes the present age. *Burnt Shadows* sees Hiroko survive the utter decimation of Nagasaki where her father transforms into a hellish creature. And in *Exit West* Nadia and Saeed witness the razing of their home city that inaugurates their refugee, dystopian subjectivities. Extensive destruction doesn't necessitate apocalypse, though. What we could term individualized apocalypse signals the end of the world for a person, an affective position that shouts, "For *me* this is the end of the world." The world continues to spin, yet a character remains suspended in an inertia of trauma. This is how Oskar feels when Thomas dies in the attacks in *Extremely Loud*;

his world turns upside down, in a seemingly never-ending flux, where constant reminders about his earth-shattering loss reside in the objects surround him.

In this final part, I treat apocalypse as not only a material event that has distinct physical attributes (ash, desolation, and the like), but I also consider it a condition of being that limns political relations. As Jessica Hurley and Dan Sinykin argue, "apocalypse mediates the unevenly distributed risks of the contemporary, social, political, and geophysical world. Race, gender, sexuality, disability, indigeneity, citizenship, and class determine our vulnerability to cataclysmic violence, whether fast or slow" (451). In other words, millions of people exist in apocalyptic realities. Here, I take this reality at face value and examine the family at the world's end and inspect how the specter of 9/11 haunts contemporary zombie narratives. Whereas Parts II and III linger in the past to show how 9/11 and the War on Terror should be contextualized within a great historical timeline, this final part jumps into a speculative hereafter and looks at how family functions in post-9/11, post-capitalist zombie dystopias. Fiction of the undead rose in popularity after the attacks because the genre acts as a vessel for political anxieties and tribulations. The zombie's cultural history narrates the chaos and trauma of capitalist projects, namely imperialism and slavery, and they more recently illuminate racism's role after 9/11. As Cassie Ozog and Kyle Bishop have argued, images of mass calamity and pervasive fear that chokes the air recall 9/11.[146] Post-9/11 zombie fiction elucidates the interconnections between and among global capital, family, and mass calamity.

Looking at Colson Whitehead's *Zone One* (2011) and Ling Ma's *Severance* (2018), I show how these apocalyptic futures utilize kinship to critique nationhood and capitalist projects after societal break down.[147] Of the traditional structures that delimited national ethics, family falls the farthest at the end of the world. In these novels, family acts as political prism through

which authors critique American exception and the nation's capitalist projects. In *Zone One*, various failed familial formations dichotomize the white, heteronormative formulations of kinship that the nation deems representative of itself. And in *Severance*, the family reveals the horrors of global capital-colonial projects and how they significantly impact domestic and familial dynamics. *Severance* concludes with a vision of the post-family, a condition that explicates the need to move beyond the capitalist and colonial strictures that enforce traditional visions of the nuclear family. Furthermore, in both novels, zombies carry a historical weight that further speaks to the dangerous national politics that family scrutinizes. The monster historically embodies the legacies of colonialism and slavery, and it also ferries more contemporary racialized worries about post-September 11th re-attack and invasion. Together, then, zombies metaphorize history and signal in *Zone One* and *Severance* how political violence in 9/11 family novels creeps and crawls its way into intimate realms.

I begin with a reading of *Zone One* that considers how family and home teeter on the precipice of ruin because of the roaming undead in a necro-New York. I argue that the zombies and various reminders of 9/11 recall long-dead domestic dynamics, and I specifically examine analeptic moments that divulge how family struggles to remain standing in the wake of disaster. Despite the perpetual death of the family, the American government uses the white nuclear family to bolster its exceptionalist image to scaffold the national rebuilding project. This familial ethos to undergird American values and hyperpower after 9/11 fails in Whitehead's zombified world, and its pervasive loss both induces a ubiquitous trauma and signals history's ability to create apocalypse in both macro and micro spheres. I next examine *Severance*, in which the nation is uncomfortably glorifies white, nuclear family dynamics. I argue that Ma unmasks the contours of capitalist control on familial and work life by depicting how capital holds sway over

micro and macro kinship organizations. The varying familial spaces, moreover, reveal the micro (interpersonal and nuclear) and macro (national) attempts to whitewash and fetishize nuclear family patterns. Ma pairs 9/11 with the zombie pandemic to underscore their relation to global capital and, in turn, the violent role both play in presenting a particular version of family. Ultimately, though, alternate forms of kinship—the post-family— becomes a beacon of hope in *Severance*, unlike in *Zone One*. Ma uses the zombie apocalypse as a generative historical moment that heralds alternative modes of living and togetherness, determined by a new social order that repels and withstands capitalism.

Both *Zone One* and *Severance* begin with the family structure already in tatters; both envision worlds in which kinship structures, by virtue of the zombie apocalypse, cannot sustain themselves and remain in flux; and both narratives utilize analepsis to connotate and denotate how family and home have altogether warped in the wake of the familial fall. In all, various scenes of family and home demonstrate how Whitehead and Ma speculate forms of togetherness following disaster. In that way, both authors fall in line with the generic trope that centers family in zombie fiction, underscoring how the institution's downfall presages larger social collapse. David M. Higgins notes that many zombie narratives "utilize the threat of catastrophe in order to attempt to dramatize a reconstitution of the nuclear family and threatened paternal authority. … Families must come together, and estranged parents can (or should) reconcile their differences under paternal guidance for the sake of protecting their children" (47-48). Conversely, Fred Botting notes that "the family is no longer viable" in zombie fiction (208). I am concerned with neither the reconciliation of nuclear family nor the viability of family; rather, what I show below is that in *Zone One* and *Severance*, family mediates the very political ideologies that encouraged 9/11.

I. The Walking Dead in a Dead New York: *Zone One* and Familial Contestation

Family perpetually crumbles in *Zone One,* and Whitehead thematizes it to politicize the end of the world. The novel's hero is Mark Spitz, a survivor whom the provisional government, the American Phoenix, charges to sweep the eponymous region for any remaining skels (zombies) with his Omega Unit-mates Kaitlyn and Gary. Ash rains in Zone One, a few blocks of New York City demarcated by a massive barricade along Canal Street designed to keep skels out. Ostensibly set across three days, the tryptic novel details the final weekend of Mark Spitz's life, but frequent flashbacks throughout provide critical details about his lost families and homes. These past moments, moreover, detail the origins of the post-apocalyptic stress disorder (PASD) that plagues every survivor. As the novel progresses, the worsening zombie uprising destroys Mark Spitz's makeshift families, and the novel concludes with the protagonist wading into a sea of skels. Whitehead throws a wrench in the narrative, however: the narrator reveals that Mark Spitz is Black. *Zone One,* we learn near its conclusion, is an allegory for a postrace nation, and Mark Spitz forces us to consider whether social upheaval will teach us to start anew, to be devoid of "that particular bramble of animosities, fears, and envies" of hate that mark our present and past (288).

In this first section, I argue that against a post-9/11 and zombie-strewn world, Whitehead dichotomizes desired forms of kinship and government-fortified formulations of heteronormative family. Whereas the found, cultivated families Mark Spitz joins throughout *Zone One* provide genuine comfort after his nuclear family becomes zombified, the exceptionalized and politicized family that the American Phoenix utilizes is used to rescue the U.S.'s faltering image and status as a hyperpower. Furthermore, I claim that Whitehead aestheticizes these family matters with analepsis, constructing a novel whose architecture reflects the very contestations it narrativizes.

These flashbacks amplify the narrative present's looming zombie threat, and the monsters embody not only the trauma of perpetual familial loss and historical trauma but also the threat of an Other informed by post-9/11 racialized rhetorics of terror.

As figurative shadows of 9/11, zombies register the defamiliarizing effects history and violence have on family. Curiously, scholars have yet to interrogate *Zone One* for its familial concerns. Staples in Whitehead's oeuvre, family and home convey how intimate realms are microcosms of larger arenas like the nation, and they accentuate the interstitial juncture of other political concerns such as race and history. Criticism about *Zone One* principally focuses on its treatment of race. Scholars such as Grace Heneks, Ricardo A. Wilson II, and Rochelle Spencer take up the post-racial allegory and pair it to the racial discourse surrounding *Zone One* goes hand in hand with zombies.[148] Mitchum Huehels, Jessica Hurley and Ramón Saldívar have written about how the undead stands for a post-racial society, and they offer political readings of a novel that blatantly denounces state-sponsored control tactics.[149] Overall, however, scholars fail to consider how the intimate spheres of home and family structure the macro. I show here that kinship and home operate proximately to the zombie's sociocultural and historical connotations, and that these interrelations uncover 9/11's continuous influence on interpersonal spheres.

Zone One proffers a familial environment that speaks to what I have argued is central to the 9/11 family novel: an affective uprooting that reverberates with the booms of the attacks. As I show below, the apocalyptic condition (PASD) is particularly characterized by the discovery of zombified family members, and Mark Spitz cautiously navigates the end of the world for fear of repetition. Pillars of social order, in other words, routinely fall, demonstrating how apocalypse deterritorializes affective realms to unmake quotidian familiarities. In this way, the disturbance

of order aligns *Zone One* to the other novels in this project, though Whitehead's book does not centralize 9/11 or the War on Terror. Even so, the novel reads like a response to September 11th where the missing towers manifest in descriptions of a marred skyline. For instance, "[Mark Spitz] remembered how things used to be, the customs of the skyline… Time chiseled at elegant stonework, which swirled or plummeted to the sidewalk in dust and chips and chunks" (Whitehead 6). This faint recollection of a pre-9/11 city articulates the Towers' presence in absence. *Zone One* exemplifies how the past shapes culture in quiet ways, expecting readers to simply recognize the history's timbres in an image. Or, as Whitehead articulates, "I wasn't directly writing about 9/11 in *Zone One*. I think it is in there within a larger notion of disaster. Our disasters are communal sometimes, felt by our whole communities, or private, a death in the family or losing your job. So the heart of *Zone One* is really about Mark Spitz finding that new self in the aftermath of a catastrophe" (*Tin House*). This "larger notion of disaster" registers both social disorders where nations and cities flail between the teeth of the undead and personal disorientation, revoking semblances of community and sites of belonging that lend purpose and meaning to our lives.

Zone One also offers a historical prolepsis that presages the reconciliation efforts after disaster. Indeed, history features heavily throughout the Whitehead's oeuvre, and, as Alexander Manshel rightly contends, "[i]t seems clear that Whitehead is not only a writer of genre fiction but a prolific writer of one genre in particular: historical fiction" (23). Manshel's compelling point here forgets Whitehead's nonfiction work *The Colossus of New York* (*Colossus).* A pseudo love letter *Baedecker* to Whitehead's home written after 9/11, *Colossus* traces history's affective reaches and shows the interrelation between subject and place: "When the buildings fall," Whitehead notes, "we topple, too" (*Colossus* 9). *Zone One* feels like a companion to *Colossus,*

namely in the way Whitehead purports belonging and renewal as inherent to the city after September 11th.

But the city Whitehead describes in *Zone One* is far removed from the luminous New York that lets us "be cowed by [its] magnificent skyline" in *Colossus* (101). Instead, the deathscape languishes with the curse of a dour present where ash rains from the sky because an incinerator burns skel corpses. This is a monochromatic New York City where history has ceased. Whitehead ironically commemorates history's death with a birthday cake. When Kaitlyn celebrates her final birthday, the narrator notes, "…as [Kaitlyn] cut into the first slice of cake at her final, perfect birthday party, history had come to an end. She had blown out the candles on the old era, blotted out the dinosaurs' heavens, sent the great ice sheet scraping forth, the blood counts zooming up into madness" (Whitehead 58). While the image of innumerable blood counts violently papers over the past, the communal scene is one of the few of harmony in the novel, and it suggests that for those left at the end of the world, family is not only imperative but their only solace. The birthday party scene, however, foreshadows the outcome of the characters, all of whom succumb to the voracious appetites of the zombies that lurk in the shadows. In other words, with the end of history comes the end of family: kinship structures, both nuclear and chosen, cannot survive in this monstrous present. As the narrator bleakly states, "Normal was the unbroken idyll of life before. The present was a series of intervals differentiated from each other only by the degree of dread they contained. The future? The future was the clay in their hands" (81). But this malleable clay, we see as the novel progresses, hardens before it can be shaped.

History materially manifests in *Zone One* in two distinct ways: in the looming city itself and in the zombies that populate the city, and both entities, importantly, are related to Mark Spitz's memories and treatment of family. For now, I want to address the former. Through New

York City, and the eponymous Zone One (echoing Ground Zero), Whitehead amalgamates national and personal history to underscore the codependent relationship between macro and micro social groups. The protagonist characterizes New York City not only as emblematic of success and ambition but also as an idyllic space defined by family. Whitehead begins his novel with a long analeptic scene that divulges what the city means for Mark Spitz, especially what his Uncle Lloyd's apartment represents. Beginning with an analeptic moment demonstrates how the past lingers in the present, especially as it relates to home and family. The novel ferries a ruptured past, envisioning the pre-9/11, pre-apocalypse halcyon days of New York City and family. The book's first line conveys the stuff of dreams that the city embodies: "He always wanted to live in New York" (Whitehead 3). Akin to Changez's vision of New York City in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Mark Spitz's pre-9/11 view of the city withstands destruction, able to regenerate and regain its pomp and majesty: "The new buildings in wave upon wave drew themselves out of rubble, shaking off the past like immigrants. … It wasn't anyplace else. It was New York City" (7). That Mark Spitz's perceptions of New York City are shaped by its relation to his Uncle Lloyd cannot go unnoticed. The narrator notes that for Mark Spitz, "[h]is uncle's apartment resembled the future, a brand of manhood waiting on the other side of the river" (8). Whitehead makes clear that family fundamentally configures our perceptions of home, and this kindred influence carries into the apocalyptic narrative present where the shining future Mark Spitz once imagined is a grayscale dystopia. Whitehead suddenly ironizes the scene of youthful aspiration when he thrusts the narrative into the present: "When [Mark Spitz's] unit finally started sweeping beyond the wall—whenever that was—he knew he had to visit Uncle Lloyd's apartment, to sit on the sectional one last time…" (8). This abrupt temporal shift breaks the seductive allure of the past. Thus, the dystopian, speculative present in New York City reveals

the affective and material changes after the attacks; Whitehead utilizes temporality to bear the extent of catastrophe, allowing both reader and character to negotiate the before and after of historical rupture. Historical fracture sits at the front of the novel and despite 9/11 being "a long time ago," Mark Spitz still "remembered" the day (264).

Moreover, family and the domestic sphere most clearly clarify this negotiation of and difference between past and present in *Zone One*. That is, family in the novel reconciles history's role in domestic dynamics, similar to *Burnt Shadows* and *Sons*. Just as in those two albeit globally attuned narratives, *Zone One* concentrates on how history and a particular kind of violence (the zombie threat that echoes 9/11 and terrorism/invasion anxiety) unsettles and disturbs the American home. If *Sons* ends with the reclamation of the nuclear family unit, *Zone One* concludes with a shattering and definitive blow to that sentimental and nostalgic realm. Whitehead makes clear that family cannot and will not survive in *Zone One*'s disastrous present. And to drive the point home, so to speak, familial scenes in the past demonstrate how quickly lifelong foundations go awry. This is most evident in scenes between Mark Spitz's mother and father, two underdeveloped yet imperative figures who haunt his past (and the text) as symbols of how history uproots family in the riven world. The loss of Mark Spitz's family and home tangentially ropes in 9/11 and triggers his PASD.

Whitehead upholds the family home as a beacon of comfort for Mark Spitz, illuminating the protagonist's bond to intimate spheres. And in this way, the author presents a conservative picture of home and family. Early in the novel, we learn what Mark Spitz did before Last Night, the day when the plague reached an apex. He and his childhood friend Kyle have spent a few nights in Atlantic City where "[t]hey did not watch the news or receive news from the outside" (Whitehead 83). Immediately there is a distinction between the zombie nightmare and 9/11.

Whereas the latter was hypermediated, unmissable because of its central location in New York City, the former is quiet, and, in that way, a bigger shock to Mark Spitz when he enters his childhood home and finds his mother eating his father.[150] Despite the reader knowing what will happen, Whitehead nonetheless structures the scene with agonizing tension. The scene is reminiscent of a tracking shot in a horror movie, and the cinematic narration addresses almost every detail: "The house looked normal from the outside. The shades were pulled and the lights were out save for the aforementioned glow of the floor lamp by the media center in the living room, that dependable illumination that had greeted him for years" (85).[151] As Mark Spitz walks through his home for the last time, we learn about the family's dynamics: how his mom and dad "often retreated to their old honeymoon nest after dinner, ceding to their son the living room" (85), or how his parents "worked on the house constantly" (86), making their house more and more into a home of their own designs. These details highlight the meaningful care Mark Spitz's family put into creating space for themselves and speak to their tight-knit bond.

Like most American families, furthermore, Mark Spitz's family gathers around the television. Whitehead fixates on the TVs in this scene, doubly signaling the domestic dynamics of Mark Spitz's family and hinting at the collective national trauma witnessed during 9/11: "[The television's] sorry conjurations gave the family an excuse to enjoy the big television spectacles together upstairs, the ones that periodically reunited the riven nation, albeit it staggered broadcasts in the cascade of time zones" (Whitehead 86). Mark Spitz's family and the domestic space, in this brief allusion to watching 9/11 unfold together, metonymizes the entire U.S., reiterating Susan Strehle when she asserts that "Home reflects and resembles nation: not a retreat from the public and political, home expresses the same ideological pressures that contend within the nation" (1). In peripherally referring to the attacks through the television, Whitehead

positions the attacks as a traumatizing social binder. Thus, the zombie plague and the PASD liken to 9/11; both morph national, familial, and individual conditions through forms of violence by external perpetrators. And to that end, both September 11th and the zombie apocalypse abet Douglas Lain's compelling notion that the stuff of speculative fiction is also the stuff of realism, and vice-versa. Genre barriers in the post-9/11 literary imagination are porous. Lain suggests writers who take realist approaches to 9/11 are "coming to terms with how the real world was already science fiction, already a horror, and perhaps also a mere fantasy. … 9/11 made the old apocalypse seem mundane" (2-3). Skels and stragglers affords a way to understand the aftereffects of such monumental trauma, and the zombie genre is "freer of the conventions of literary realism," which in turn limns the state of a post-disaster world, permitting us to look anew at our own present (Scanlon 143). As a post-9/11 novel that only hints at the attacks, *Zone One* shows how even when it lurks in the glow of a TV, September 11th interferes in household and interpersonal dynamics. This national trauma mediated through the quintessential domestic object does not need describing: the falling towers are so immutably engrained in national consciousness that they sway familial and domestic setups.[152]

But national trauma cannot be the only defining element in a family; intimate details about Mark Spitz's parents also speak to their relationship. Whitehead constructs familial identity as multi-faceted, showing the interrelations between macro and micro determinants. In tandem with the nation, family falls too. An instance of deep analepsis—a flashback within a flashback— follows the descriptions of the TV, expresses the parents' relationship, and ultimately makes ironic and uncanny their fates. "When he was six," the narrator relates, "[Mark Spitz] had walked in on his mother giving his father a blow job. … He opened the door to the master bedroom and there she was, gobbling up his father. … [The incident] became the first

occupant of the corner in his brain's attic that he reserved for the great mortifications. The first occupant, but not the last" (Whitehead 87). This moment of deep analepsis is a less gruesome, though still mortifying, parallel to another moment in the deepest recesses of his memory:

> It was, naturally, to that night his thoughts fled when…he opened the door of his parents' bedroom and witnessed his mother's grisly ministrations to his father. She was hunched over him, gnawing away with ecstatic fervor on a flap of his intestine, which, in the crepuscular flicker of the television, adopted a phallic aspect. He thought immediately of when he was six, not only because of the similar tableau before him but because of that tendency of the human mind, in periods of duress, to seek refuge in more peaceful times, such as a childhood experience, as a barricade against horror. (88)

I quote this paragraph at length because it accentuates the painful effects of history on Mark Spitz's family and on his memory. Presented as a narrative equivalent to oral sex, intestine eating ironizes the marital relationship and unravels the threads of domestic life Mark Spitz cherishes. Whereas the blow job signifies the consummation of mutual attraction and pleasure, the literal consumption represents a perverse human condition that altogether rewrites the familial dynamics that define Mark Spitz's life. In addition, the scene testifies to Whitehead's ability to create a grammar of gory terror: the sentences are long (perhaps like intestines) and resist caesuras whenever possible, creating an unceasing, uncanny, and unsettling marital moment that ushers in a newfound harsh reality.[153] The word "ministration" too suggests assistance and care and ironically affords the parallels between two very different kinds of intimacy, one sexual and one violent. In this way, ultimately, skels embody the collapse of the nuclear family and home. They are affectless, uncaring to the past and the relationships so lovingly cultivated and renovated. Indeed, part of what horrifies Mark Spitz in this integral scene with his mother consuming his father is that it occurs *inside* the home. That act of perverse consumption has thus adulterated the home physically by not only transforming the space into a danger zone, but the act of marital cannibalism also marks the end of the relationships that sanctified the home. The

zombie invasion destroys the notion that homes are paradigmatic American places of protection and security. Suburbia has fallen, concretized by the discovery of his zombified parents.

Whitehead relegates the collapse analeptically in the "before times" to deem the domestic sphere as integral as the Canal Street wall for narrative development and "reiterate simple traditional agrarian family life" (Cady and Oates 316).[154] The oscillation between the pastoral, suburban, and New York City democratizes all spaces as equally likely to suffer from detrimental violence and apocalypse. In other words, areas beyond the city limits no longer offer safety and sanctity from the city; rather they "tell a story of American decline" and "suggest instead that the world has come to the suburbs" (Knapp xvi). Of course, as Whitehead's title suggests, the cityscape remains central to the most detrimental effects of the apocalypse, especially in its physical desolation and its affectively desolate undead populous. New York City feels uncanny in *Zone One* because it is bereft of its defining characteristics: people and a complete skyline. Scholars heavily scrutinize this element, and indeed I do as well. But I want to argue that to fully grasp the blistering ramifications of the apocalypse—and how to reconcile its inevitability and metaphorical resonances with 9/11—scholars must consider how home and family contribute to the conditions of the future, even those in spaces not typically associated with disaster.

Zone One makes clear that these future circumstances are as bleak outside the city as they are inside it, evidenced by the continuous dismantling of domestic barricades and familial failures. Indeed, they don't even function as appropriate blockades. Carl Joseph Swanson argues that the various barricades throughout *Zone One* operate as structures to not only keep characters alive but also to give space "in which plot and character can develop," and breaching the barricade, he continues, destabilizes "narrative, character, and meaning" (383, 392). *Zone One*'s

main barricade demarcates the titular area. Such a barrier is typical in zombie narratives, physically barring the external zombie threat from entering more populated areas.[155] Yet, barricades in *Zone One* are also often homes themselves, cherished spaces that allow for kinship structures to flourish. When he stumbles across a farmhouse cum "sedulously executed bunker" in Northampton, Massachusetts, Mark Spitz quickly puts down roots and becomes familial with fellow survivors (Whitehead 210). The narrator once again goes to great lengths to set up the domestic scene. The kitchen, for instance, is "immaculate and decked out with appliances" and is like the set of "that cooking show his mother used to like" (212-213). Immediately, Mark Spitz's characterizes this space in relation to his mother. Another telling description of the fortification details the use of refuse to create a sharp, metal moat of "cans and rusting metal strips twisted on a wire that snaked around wood stakes, encircling the house. A line of magic powder that kept out evil spirits" (210). Thus, the house perfectly balances a quality of hominess and practical protection.

This combination of cozy domesticity and reinforcement from the skels evokes a semblance of grounded normalcy at the end of the world. For the time being, of course. The residents of this makeshift home even eat together at a candlelit dining-room table where they share stories of their Last Nights. As Mark Spitz affectionately notes,

> They were a family. … This is our house. … As before, home was a beloved barricade. When school, work, the many-headed beast of strangers and villains comprising the world threatened to destroy, home remained, family remained, and the locks would hold, the lullabies would ward off all bogeymen. He was trapped in this house and he couldn't think of where else he'd rather be. (224)

The domestic details where Mark Spitz ruminates on this newfound home and bliss in the company of a motley gang of fellow survivors convey the metaphorical power of family and home (as all the other books I interrogate in this project do); furthermore, they impart how the

home has been renovated as a protective barricade against the zombie threat. Tantamount to Nadia and Saeed repurposing their domiciles to combat the surge of domestic terrorism in their city and their attempts to combat state-driven exilic practices toward refugees in *Exit West*, the home and the objects inside in *Zone One* function beyond their material prescriptions to adapt to the ongoing catastrophe. These pathos-driven characteristics of the house in Northampton necessarily make this inexorable domestic failure even more ironic and painful. And fail it does. Spectacularly.

Whitehead seems to suggest that the home is breached not only because the zombies multiply but also because the tethers of familial relation break. Like the gruesome discovery of his mother eating his father, the demise of this domicile builds slowly, the tension ebbing and flowing within the abode as a wave of skels surrounding the property rises. The zombie takeover on the farm occurs in part because members of the makeshift family "were fashioned of less durable alloys" and what follows is an action-packed scene where it is every man for himself, marking the disillusion of the family (Whitehead 225). The protective magic wears off, and "One part of the barricade failed, and then it was as if the refuge sighed and everything disintegrated at once. The spell of protection puttered, all out of eldritch juice, and the mighty stronghold was made of straw once again" (225). One by one, each family member snaps and futilely fights the undead themselves. Bereft of its defining unity, moreover, the home loses its aura of togetherness, and Mark Spitz is "[o]nce again in a stranger's house, the next residence in the endless neighborhood that snared him his first night on the run" (227). Swanson suggests that Whitehead deliberately places such scenes throughout *Zone One* to "punctuate the novel with some excitement" and to transform "the barricade into an analeptic motif and explicit metaphor" (393). As a flashback, the scene of domestic terror and subsequent downfall presages the fall of

the city at the end of the novel, and it provides more heartbreaking clarity to Mark Spitz's PASD/past. The explicit metaphor is the conclusive disillusion of intimate social formations and collectives of hope. No longer do familiar practices and solaces provide the beneficent barricade from external threats. Akin to the way objects harbor histories of familial loss, as I showed in Part II, these breaches at the end of the world revoke any semblance of comfort, altogether making perverse the image and purpose of home and family.

This perversion of family becomes fully realized in the months after the Fall when Mark Spitz projects familiar faces from his past to skels he must destroy. In this way, the past hurtles to the present in the grayish pallor of the undead, making inescapable the remnants of the "beforetimes" and subsequently posing a question that plagues post-9/11 literature: how did we get here? This history-bound question underscores how conditions of the environment determine character, and it forcibly reconciles the alterations in identity and "who they were and what they used to do" (Sky). In other words, long-departed, zombified familiars provide dimension and definitions of self in *Zone One*. Whitehead even attributes the zombie condition to family: "I see the zombie as your family, your spouse, your mom, your brother, your neighbors down the street, the bus driver, being transformed into the monsters you always suspected they were" (Sky). This is evident in the first action scene where we learn that the protagonist characterizes stragglers with memories of people from his past. The narrator describes Mark Spitz's tendency to project familiarity onto the unfamiliar as emblematic of the times, a reminder that this postlapsarian world requires a renovation of self: "He'd made a host of necessary recalibrations but the old self made noises from time to time. Then that new self stepped in. He had to put them down" (Whitehead 17). Take for instance how one of the skels reminds Mark Spitz of "his sixth-grade English teacher, Miss Alcott, who had diagrammed sentences in a soupy Bronx accent … He'd

always had a soft spot for Miss Alcott" (17-18). Seeing skels as both terrifyingly murderous and humanly pitiable, "[Mark Spitz] hadn't decided if conjuring an acquaintance or loved one into these creatures was an advantage or not" (19).[156] This ambiguity about familiarizing the unfamiliar reiterates the position of family at the end of the world: comforting yet fleeting.

Families, it turns out, are so precarious in this zombified world that their loss become pessimistic historical burdens that connotate the past. When Mark Spitz joins the Omega Unit, his Lieutenant brazenly asserts, "'What do [volunteers] have to lose, right? But who has a family anymore? Everybody's dead. All those vacation pictures floating in the cloud. Zip. Been thinking about that. Now we're all batshit killing machines, could be a motherfucking granny wielding knitting needles'" (Whitehead 123). The Lieutenant's angry and frustrated quip underscores the transformative qualities of the apocalypse from the top down; that is, in its earth-shattering consequences to the macro structures of the world (nation, cities, etc.), the micro-level, quotidian elements too inexorably transform into something new. It is in this way that speculative fiction and post-9/11 novels help us see anew the present. In *Zone One*, as the Lieutenant attests, the family values that spearheaded the nation and undergirded social structures have transfigured into an ethos of violence and death. Not only is to kill is to survive, but the very definition of family has morphed into an afterthought because of its very transient nature. Rather, as many post-9/11 apocalypse narratives like Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* and Max Brooks's *World War Z* evidence, formulations of kinship are reminders of the pre-Fall era. Family demarcates the before and after, and subjective conditions periodize the age of terror. To take from *Zone One*'s useful pun cum acronym, family is a thing of the PASD. In the vein of Oskar or Hiroko wistfully recalling their families, the characters in *Zone One* can only recall their families and familiars as remnants of what once was.

Nevertheless, the new American government intervenes to revive the virtues of the white family, aiming to revitalize the nation in turn; family is a significant building block in the American nation-building (or in this case, re-building) project. Social order hangs on by a fraying thread: the American Phoenix attempts to salvage national unity and image by means of exceptionalizing family and the city. If, by their logic, New York City is rejuvenated and renewed to its former glory, then perhaps the rest of the nation and, by extension the world, will follow suite. As the narrator remarks, "If they could reboot Manhattan, why not the entire country? These were the contours of the new optimism" (Whitehead 43). The new government's attempt to affectively rebrand the city echoes familiar emphatic descriptions of New York City's resilience and solidarity following the attacks. For example, speaking at an event commemorating the 10-year anniversary of 9/11, President Obama says that Suzanne Swaine, a woman who lost her husband and son in the Twin Towers, exhibits a resilience and "spirit [that] typifies our American family" (*whitehouse.gov*). Here, not only does the city stand for the entire nation, but Obama's appeal of family as emblematic of American unity expounds how the government treats such virtues as markers of a stable future free of attacks.

The American Phoenix similarly deploys family as a beacon of hope, as the colors that contour "the new optimism." The Tromanhauser Triplets are premature babies born in the middle of the apocalypse and blatantly represent the future. Queer theorist Lee Edelman's work on futurity and the child proves helpful in understanding the Triplets' symbolic role in *Zone One*. Edelman offers a vocabulary about this trope of the child as a symbol of the future, calling it "reproductive futurism." He argues that the "image of the Child invariably shapes the logic within which the political itself must be thought" and that this political framework is composed of "terms that impose an ideological limit on political discourse as such, preserving in the

process the absolute privilege of heteronormativity by rendering unthinkable…the possibility of a queer resistance to this organizing principle of communal relations" (2). Reproductive futurity, in other words, suggests that the centering of children (and thereby family) in political discourse bolsters heteronormative infrastructures that construct social order.

The American Phoenix aims to do just that: to revitalize the nation means returning to the very same ideals that shaped the nation prior to collapse, namely the heteronormative family. The Triplets embody reproductive futurism, as Leif Sorensen points out: the babies "are more vitally important to the survivors' efforts to restore a functional social order than any adult could be" (582). They symbolize "[n]ew life in the midst of devastation" and "localized hope" to pheenies, people who have faith in the provisional American government (Whitehead 51, 52). The American Phoenix's understanding of the nation as family and family as nation follows a centuries old logic that takes root in the settler colonial origins of the nation, as Mark Rifkin has argued. The endurance of this heteropatriarchal and imperial ideology signals the central position family takes in nation building. As Melani McAlister adroitly maintains, "[T]he family is imagined as continuously imperiled, under threat from within and without. Thus the 'private' world of the marriage, home, and family is necessary to constructing the 'inside' of national community; that 'inside' is then mobilized to represent the nation itself in its public mode" (12). In the eyes of the new government, the Triplets stand for what's at stake in international relations as the unhuman (foreign) terror threatens to snip the last threads of the country. The ultimate fear is hegemonic collapse in the world order.

That the American Phoenix is deemed "provisional," moreover, hints at the temporariness of these social infrastructures: both are on parallel tracks heading toward a nonexistent future (53). But the American Phoenix tries to stave off any misgivings about this

foreclosed future by exceptionalizing family and the city. The government's desire to interrelate these two social sites is represented in Ms. Macy, an official "'from Buffalo doing some recon'" around the city (202). Ms. Macy's form of reconstruction revolves around optics; she remakes the city's image to repopulate it. To do this, Ms. Macy imagines artwork in proposed housing sites that emphasizes regular childhood activities: "'I'm thinking kids…'" she wishfully announces, "'No machetes—kid stuff. Smiling and laughing and doing kid stuff. They're the future, after all. That's what this whole thing is about, the future'" (207). As the government's preferred image of a hopeful future, family presents a futile logic that the American Phoenix leans on to regain control over the survivors. It presents a familiar ideology as a lodestar to guide survivors out of the unfamiliarity of the apocalypse. Through family, Ms. Macy claims, America will once again sit atop the global hierarchy: "'New York City is the greatest city in the world. Imagine what all those heads of state and ambassadors will feel when they see what we've accomplished. … The symbolism alone.'" (208). Here, Mark Spitz learns the true meaning of the American Phoenix; rather than rise out of apocalyptic ash in service of citizens, the nation serves to maintain an exceptionalist self-image. It's a political PR scheme at the end of the world. The protagonist remains skeptical of futurity and hope throughout the novel, especially as it relates to familial formations because of his reoccurring trauma of loss.

Mark Spitz's wariness of hope and future—indicated his determined and forced self-reminders that "[t]here was no when-it-was-over, no after. Only the next five minutes"— extends from a fear of losing family again (Whitehead 74). The protagonist repeatedly relies on kin to make sense of the world and to counter the apocalyptic present. Unlike the American Phoenix, which uses family as "a convenient, seemingly 'natural' mode for reconciling violent historical change," Mark Spitz sees the cultivated kinship in protective terms, an emotional barricade to the

apathetic zombie world (Schultheis 6). Thus, we see a contestation between the personal and the national in terms of family that speaks to the latter's desire to reiterate normative understandings of the nation and family. In brief, white heteronormative families should be the face of the nation, as post-9/11 America demonstrated. But in seeing constructed kinship synonymous to the literal barricade that demarcates the eponymous Zone One from the rest of New York City, Mark Spitz reveals the slippages between the metaphorical and the literal (or perhaps the fault line between speculative and realist modes of representation) and validates how family operates as a kind of infrastructure that orders the chaos, "entangling us with the world and with the other beings who share it" (Hurley, *Infrastructures* 205). The created kindred with the Omega Unit, moreover, resists a predominately white version of family in its composition: Kaitlyn is white, Mark Spitz is Black, and Gary is, as we'll see, gray. Mark Spitz waxes poetic about the family as barricade soon after he begins sweeping. Thinking about the wall—the seemingly impenetrable titanic defensive structure—leads Mark Spitz to consider the micro. He deems family his "personal barricades" that "the country was built on," and the pensive protagonist admits, "They were his family, Kaitlyn and Gary, and he was theirs. He owned nothing else besides them, and the features of his dead that he superimposed on the faces of the skels… The faces of his dead were part of his barricade…" (127-128). The rag tag Omega Unit, therefore, reflects a threadbare national unity that operates via resilient dissent: it is antithetical to the white, nuclear family the government promotes to re-build the nation.[157] Remaining in the present and withholding thoughts about a post-apocalypse as a means of resilience allows Mark Spitz to protect the family that he so painstakingly creates with the Omega Unit. The flashbacks that recall his Last Night and his time in Northampton, thus, construct Mark Spitz's traumatic PASD/past familial history, and Whitehead deploys analepsis to depict how his protagonist learned the practicalities

of the apocalypse: “If you weren’t concentrating on how to survive the next five minutes, you wouldn’t survive them” (32).

Whitehead pathologizes wistful memories of the past and this zombified present through PASD, which is characterized as a “buzzword emerging from the dirt to tilt its petals to the zeitgeist” and that “a hundred percent of the world was mad. Seemed about right” (Whitehead 66, 67). Blatantly akin to the notion that everyone who witnessed the Twin Towers fall experienced collective trauma, PASD unifies the survivors of the brunt of the zombie takeover, but it also marks how the leftovers are “fucked up in their own way; as before, it was a mark of one’s individuality” (Whitehead 37). Scholars have addressed the psychological condition as either “[imposing] a human filter over their perceptions of the stragglers” (Swanson 398) or allowing for “the breakdown of our categories of the individual and even the human not as a tragedy but as a form of release” (Hoberek 412). I would like to extend this view of PASD as an psychological embodiment of profound familial loss. Indeed, simply considering how and where PASD appears in the novel reveals that it inherently relates to kinship. As the pun attests, PASD refers to a time before the erasure or collapse of quotidian systems and structures of livelihood. And as I show above with the example of Mark Spitz’s mother eating his father and the farmhouse, the trauma emblematic of this world almost always relates to the gruesome discovery of a morphed, zombified loved one.

PASD seen through the fall of the family and emergence of a post-fall world order, furthermore, exposes not just the interpersonal effects of history’s finale but also forces the characters of *Zone One* to contemplate futurity after apocalypse. As Achille Mbembe reasons, “[it] is no longer to know how to live life while awaiting it; instead it is to know how living will be possible the day after the end, that is to say, how to live with loss, with separation. How can

the world be re-created in the wake of the world's destruction?" (29). Whitehead evidences this contemplation about the ashy aftermath of calamity through Gary, Mark Spitz's comrade. One of the strangest characters in Whitehead's oeuvre, Gary is "scarcely in better shape than the creatures they were sent to eradicate," has a "granite complexion, [with] gray and pitted skin," and has fingers "which were seemingly constructed out of grime. As if he had clawed out of a coffin" (Whitehead 27). In short, Gary simultaneously embodies racial ambiguity in his zombie-like appearance, and his physical characteristics foretell the catastrophic fall of the Omega Family. In addition to his strange features, Gary is characterized by his eccentric and heartbreaking use of first-person plural, a symptom of his PASD. "He was a triplet, one of three brothers," Whitehead's narrator details, "The other two perished on Last Night, but Gary continued to speak for their collective…" (47). The loss of his brothers, dead foils to the living Tromanhauser Triplets, ignites his PASD and evinces how Whitehead uses family to bolster the consequences of disaster. In so doing, moreover, the author compels us to interrogate the structures of our lives. What makes them up? What lies in the wake of their collapses? The family as personal infrastructure is a hallmark of fiction, and its various trials or conclusive falls in post-9/11 literature expose the centrality of intimate realms as an engine to clarify and arrange the chaotic social fabric. But in *Zone One*, zombies undo all notions of this lucidity to life, because they doubly represent both spark to PASD and the past.

Both symbols of the past and harbingers of the future, therefore, zombies perfectly metaphorize the long *durée* of history. Scholars such as Sarah Juliet Lauro and Elizabeth McAlister historicize zombie lore. The zombie is "a palimpsest" on which is written its origins from the colony Saint-Domingue where "an army of insurgent slaves, maroons, free blacks, and mixed-race planters defeated three European armies to declare themselves the citizens of the

sovereign republic of Haiti. The zombie is always tinged with this history and represents simultaneously the history of the Atlantic slave trade and also legacies of resistance" (Lauro xi). But Whitehead posits that zombies embody a more recent history as well. Indeed, Kyle Bishop claims that "the primary metaphor in the post-9/11 zombie world is terrorism" (24). Thus, using the zombie to plague his post-9/11 apocalypse narrative, Whitehead envisions a future that still grapples with the implications of slavery and global terror. He collapses the long timeline of history into the zombie: mutable in its metaphorical powers, the zombie recalls breaking the shackles of enslavement *and* the anxieties of terroristic invasion. Its ambiguity also lies in its ontological place as both living (mobile, consuming) and dead. Being a flesh-eating monster requires being infected first. Plainly, the zombie stands for both victim and perpetrator. Whitehead even puts this zombified historical haunting in binary terms that collapse distinctions between zombies and humans, races, and terrorists and innocents, and they directly take from post-9/11 rhetoric: "There was a single Us now, reviling a single Them" (Whitehead 288).

Zombies in *Zone One*, therefore, reveal the racial binaries that imprinted the Age of Terror's fear of the non-white Other. As Thomas writes, the zombie figure is the "perfect allegory for the logic of twenty-first century national security in the United States" (145). In this way, as many scholars posit and as we will see in *Severance*, the zombie denotes both internalized and externalized threats based on the workings of American racism. It aligns with supposed threat Raza poses in *Burnt Shadows* when the FBI incarcerates him in Guantanamo Bay or the racialized anxiety Americans project onto Changez in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.[158] In other words, zombies symbolize "'our fears of what the Third World wants,'" ranging from extractive materials like resources to humans themselves (Glover qtd. in Thomas 145). Similarly, Spencer posits that Whitehead revitalizes the zombie narrative genre

altogether "by emphasizing how, traditionally, zombies have represented our fear of the unfamiliar and the unknown, even as that fear imbues our lives with a sense of meaning (219). Yet, in *Zone One,* zombies do not function necessarily as outsider threats; rather, as Mark Spitz's tendency to associate and humanize zombies to people from his past attests, skels come from our own backyards: the neighbor, brother, parent, co-worker, teacher. Hence, Whitehead revitalizes the zombie genre not only because his skels represent nationalistic fears of "immigrants, of terrorists, of the people who want to get into our gated communities," but also because he appropriates the flesh-eating monsters into something scarier, something much more intimate (Hoberek 411). The zombies are the threat that dismantle family, making Mark Spitz's mother eat his father; they are the remnants of those same loved ones who structure life. Thus, the zombies in *Zone One* instantiate the breaches in affective barricades in the wake of traumatic destruction. They are the horror of being alone and uprooted. Just as the Atomic Bomb so profoundly maims Hiroko's dad Bomb that he transforms into a monster, family members in Whitehead's book morph into horrifying and unsettling visions of an unfamiliar familiar.

Images of a riven world where the undead reign and family dies typifies the apocalyptic reality in *Zone One*. The novel hyperbolizes the end of days, but this speculative narrative approach accords a way to consider anew the infrastructures that undergird social interaction and interpersonal connections. To echo the extreme violence and dread of the zombie domination, Whitehead deploys images of 9/11—a moment in history that, as this project has shown, violently and terribly transforms familial formulations. Historical legacy, laden in the zombie figure and the desolate and ravaged cityscape, immediately recalls the way things were, and the analeptic moments throughout *Zone One* bolster family and home only to show their painful demise. The destruction that comes with the apocalypse unravels security blankets of comfort,

and Mark Spitz's eventual decision to wade into the skel horde reiterates the foreclosed future. The novel is a bleak depiction of 9/11's shadow over the present and future; it shows how when the dust of disaster settles, we must define or redefine those seemingly steadfast understandings of nation, home, family, and self. But not all post-9/11 zombie family novels are so bleak. Indeed, the condition family is subject to at The End need not be so implacable. As Ling Ma's *Severance* demonstrates, the zombified apocalypse can take us toward more hopeful futures.

II. The Working Dead: Capital, Nation, and Family in *Severance*

Published almost 20 years after the fall of the towers, *Severance* mentions 9/11 only twice. But its brief and vague references to September 11th signal an important development of the 9/11 family novel and the cultural reception of the attacks. Like *Zone One*, rather than speculate about the immediate aftermath of the attacks, *Severance* dwells on the lead up to and the long-term ramifications of the Age of Terror. In the novel, the attacks contextualize the horrors of capitalism and how the attacks bolster the U.S.'s insistence on white nuclear, heteronormative families. *Severance* is set in 2011 and tells of Shen Fever, a zombifying disease originating from trading docks that traps humans into a cycle of repeated labor. Protagonist Candace Chen, a pregnant Chinese American immigrant, must confront the zombified, apocalyptic nation's continual centralizing of white heteropatriarchal norms that stem from capital-colonial practices. Before she quits New York altogether, Candace continues to work at Spectra, a company that helps produce specialty books by working with various overseas companies. In that way, Spectra metonymizes an immoral global capital-colonial nexus that defines the contemporary age, and *Severance* "suggests that the banal acceptance of abusive labor practices in East and Southeast Asia to facilitate ease of life and consumption in the West is the true horror of American capitalist excess" (Gullander-Drolet 96). At once an immigrant

novel and a zombie horror novel, *Severance* shows a fortification of late-stage capitalism and colonialism's worst byproducts. Therefore, the novel aligns Shen Fever and 9/11 as two catastrophes caused by capital-colonial efforts. Drawing parallels between September 11th and the zombie fever, Ma invites us to read *Severance* as we do *Zone One*: a historical novel that imagines a future where capital crescendos to a devastating apex. Indeed, Jane Hu and Anjuli Raza Kolb rightly argue that Ma's book is "historical, in the sense that it records what has to happen — the pure catastrophe, the loss of life, the racism, the violence — in order for that world-imagining to take place" (*Post45*). My argument addresses these historical implications and examines how family and home here reveal political tensions in micro, nuclear kinship formations and in macro, national organizing methods.

I argue that Ma pairs Shen Fever and 9/11 to evidence how capital-colonial endeavors effectuate change at both familial and national levels. Intimate spheres, family and home, in the novel show how American colonial projects rooted in capitalist ideology work at the micro and macro levels concomitantly to reiterate white, heteropatriarchal formulations of family and to promote racialized facializations of terror. Moreover, I posit that Ma slowly builds the scalar properties of these effects as *Severance* continues, fortifying how the public and the private in the Age of Terror merge completely. The micro changes manifest in the novel through the effect Shen Fever has on people: mummifying them in the amber of labor, whether domestic or professional, and reiterating capitalism's use of family for labor production. The reversion to heteropatriarchal familial norms because of Shen Fever reflects the larger national values that the U.S. emphasized after 9/11; both the attacks and Shen Fever are treated as an affront to a specific version of and vision of homeland, a white one that reflects the idealized domestic, nuclear family. Thus, the macro vicissitudes brought on by American capital-colonial projects appear in

Severance most clearly in the commemoration scenes and in the racial scapegoating as a response to Shen Fever. This scapegoating, furthermore, absolves the U.S. from its participation in perpetuating the very social ills that catalyze events like 9/11 and the Shen Fever. Ultimately, however, *Severance* is not all doom and gloom. It ends with a ray of hope coming from the very realm that represents the dangers of capital: family. Finding strength in her unborn child, Candace escapes Bob's clutches and creates what scholars call a post-family. This new method of kinship practice is one of alterity and finds footing in non-normative methods of organization by resisting capitalism and colonialism. *Severance* concludes with a hopeful future sprouting from the chaos of ruin.

Just as in *Zone One*, *Severance* uses the home as a narrative device to reiterate the dangers of the end of the world. The sanctimonious veneer surrounding the domestic sphere has shattered, and the home transforms into a site of a dangerous kind of nostalgia that triggers Shen Fever. The home is the place of transmission and of the utmost violence. In Whitehead's novel, we see how a return to the home catalyzes trauma, and the same is true of Ma's book. Zombie novels such as these not only speak to the legacy of 9/11, but they also adulterate the home to convey the extent and reach of pervasive violence. It affords a way for the attacks and the precarious state of contemporary life in the United States to infiltrate the domicile and enact a violent unmaking of intimate realms.

A marked difference between *Severance* and *Zone One* is how the familial institution dies. For Mark Spitz, the zombie takeover literally infects his family and tears it apart; for Candace Chen, however, family falls apart well before the zombie apocalypse. As Amy R. Wong writes, "Candace's orphanhood — thematized throughout the novel as severances from childhood, Fuzhou, her family, her white Brooklyn boyfriend, her colleagues, her job, and Bob's

cult — makes her a remainder herself, unassimilable to any usual structure of kinship" (*Post45*). Her father is killed in a sudden hit-and-run, and her mother quickly follows suit, succumbing to Alzheimer's. The protagonist describes her orphanhood in apathetic and neutral terms, as if inevitable: "It was the summer of 2006 and the move [to New York] itself seemed like a slight, inconsequential event in the grand sequence of things. Which was: my mother died, I graduated college, I moved to New York" (Ma 34).[159] In other words, by the time Shen Fever ravages the world, Candace is already familiar with the feelings of familial loss that characterizes the fevered era and her fellow survivors; it is a wayward and listless sensation that makes her feel "like a homeless person in [her] own house" (54). The acceptance of her aloneness compels Candace to "waste time" by practicing a routine of walking and photographing the city by herself for her blog NY Ghost (39).[160] Throughout *Severance*, Ma analeptically knits a tapestry of Candace's family that slowly narrates the story of the end of one family and the start of another. As flashbacks of family convey dynamics between her many uncles or revisit Candance's parents' immigration story, they also layer the novel with an overwhelming melancholic feeling of loss. Analeptic scenes spotlight how death cataclysmically disrupts quotidian familial routine, and the death of the family limns how Candace's life is tinged with a racialized and cultural expectation to work and be useful. Otherwise put: the temporal back and forth to scenes of family signals how and why Candace is obsessed with routine and work.

Kinship, therefore, not only reveals a racialized understand of Candace's work ethic as an extension of her immigrant subjectivity, but it also shows how capital requires families to work. That is, as Christopher Chitty posits, the nuclear family is "a powerful regulatory instrument for reproducing a reliable, regimented laboring population" (33). Ma merges capital's familial wishes with immigrant drive: "I just want for you what your father wanted," Candace's

immigrant mother tells her as she dies, “to make use of yourself … No matter what, we just want you to be of use” (Ma 190). This death bed desire sparks Candace’s unwavering work ethic, extending from a place of familial responsibility and buttressing her immigrant subjectivity. The adage “to be of use” is the expectation to complete the American Dream her parents left China to achieve, deeming the pressure of the “immigrant work ethic” a familial responsibility (Wong *Post45*). This unwavering ethic carries well into the pandemic as Candace is the only person who still works in New York City. Familial expectation, therefore, relates directly to capitalist work ethic. As Wong rightly states, to be of use “defines personhood” and is “the seduction of Western capital's greatest ideological hoax” (*Post45*). In lieu of family, work offers Candace purpose, and she fulfils her mother’s dying wish by giving into capitalism’s power. This relationship between family and capitalism is also ensconced in the title’s dual meanings. Severance refers to Candace’s family-less life and the collapse of society as the plague spreads, and it operates in the capitalistic sense: a company gives an unwilfully terminated employee the benefits and compensation they deserve. This latter form of severance is a sore spot for Jonathan, Candace’s only lasting connection before the zombie apocalypse and the father of her unborn child. His former employer changes severance packages: “Severance would no longer be scaled according to the number of years that employees had worked, but the company would provide a flat fee for all employees who had worked there for fewer than ten years” (136). This prompts a rush of pink slip layoffs, effectively changing Candace’s relationship to Jonathan when he decides to quit New York after losing his job. This codependent relationship between kinship and capitalism poses an important question about the nature of work, whether familial obligation or a means of survival in the world: how can a person be of use by working when the working conditions do not sustain livelihood?

Yet, despite the uneven conditions that capitalism thrives on and the crushing zombie apocalypse that leaves her practically alone in New York, Candace continues to work at Spectra. It is a central issue in the novel, and Ma herself wonders why. She says in an interview, "The question I kept trying to figure out was, Why does Candace Chen keep working at her job? Understanding her family background and this immigrant imperative for success helped me complete the picture. Candace's immigrant backstory was the most difficult, yet vital, part of the story to write" (*The Paris Review*).[161] Family clearly influences the desire to work, because it provides stability and routine at a span of time, from the moment of her mother's death to the height of the apocalypse, during which everything verges on collapse. In short: working offers structure and survival. Dora Zhang reformulates this key question about Candace's penchant for work by asking, "how much can we habituate ourselves before a situation becomes unlivable?" (*Post45*). Zhang intimates that habit is what sutures the frayed edges of life and that it makes "accommodations to structures or relations that are by all rights intolerable" (*Post45*). Lauren Berlant puts it another way: the protagonist exemplifies how people "feel attached to the soft hierarchies of inequality to provide a sense of *their place in the world*" (194). Candace accommodates to these soft hierarchies when she moves into her office, thereby securing and maintaining the tethers between work and home. She has no work-life balance because capital ineluctably is beholden to domestic labor, especially as the world begins to collapse. Candace, therefore, falls into the seductive enchantment capital casts for her with a vision of interchangeability between domesticity and labor. As I show later, though, *Severance* ends with a post-family framework that dispels this façade in a possible post-capital age.[162]

The inextricability between the home and work also manifests beyond the empty skyscrapers of New York and into the suburbs of Illinois, highlighting the expansive collapse of

social divides in the wake of calamity. To build an arsenal of supplies, Candance and the other survivors stalk: they search and strip any space for its resources and make use of them as they inch toward the Facility, the quasi-mythological promise land that white leader Bob is determined to reach. Stalking is the job of the apocalypse. Rife with macho and misogynistic connotations, the term "stalking" itself suggests hunting and gathering, an archaic method of survival. It is a form of resource extraction that "is envisioning the future" and "building the Facility" (58). We might call stalking a kind of domestic colonization, rooted in harmful patriarchal ideologies of conquest. While the circumstances of the end of the world deem that any locale is open to stalking, the group prefers houses. "They were our bread and butter," Candace ironically recalls, "We basked in their homey feeling, imagining the Saturday breakfasts, the TV evenings. And we were familiar with the range of layouts, the types of products, having grown up in similar homes" (Ma 58). Seen through the prism of domestic colonization, a suburban manifest destiny, stalking the nuclear home for its material comforts and familiarity elevates the white heteropatriarchal site as the standard, default, and desired realm of belonging in the apocalyptic times. Ma exhibits how following calamity, the U.S. bolsters traditionally white normative kindred configurations, akin to the tremendous reiteration of white heteronormative familial ideals lionized after 9/11. An archeological dig of the recent past, stalking, which Bob deems is "an aesthetic experience" because of its "rituals and customs," perverts the "homey feeling" because the fevered often still roam inside (58). This is called a live stalk: "the occupants were still alive, but incapacitated by the fever. They were rounded up and herded into rooms" (60). The first live stalk Candace relates unveils how the zombie fever conjures a haunting and hollow yet enticing vision of capitalism's breeding ground: the nuclear family unit.

Outwardly, the zombie family looks normal but really, they're fevered, aimless, and senseless, engaging in patterns of behavior they learned or habituated to while alive.[163] Ma devotes ample space to describe these familial creatures of habit to not only express the tragic perversion of kinship because of the apocalypse but also to generically situate the novel as a different kind of zombie novel, one that isn't overtly terrifying like *Zone One*. Rather, the horror of this zombie novel arises from the ghastly idea that the labor we spend our lives doing day in and day out could also be what we do in death too. Ma's depiction of the fevered recalls what Tony Williams writes about the intersection of zombies, family, and capital: "Because zombie residual (learned) instincts parallel those conditioned by capitalism, one may ask where these instincts first develop…the family" (272-273). The family in the live stalk, the Gowers, embody this principle. Bob and the group arrive at the Gowers' home, "a powder-blue colonial" with a "dry brown lawn" on a "December something" afternoon "somewhere in Ohio" (Ma 59). The patchwork details are both concrete and ambiguous, reflecting the uncanny scene within the home, both familiar in its routine and connotative powers but unfamiliar in that the Gowers are dead. Candace watches as "the family seated themselves around the cherrywood dining table, decorated with a cream lace runner, anchored by a bowl holding what looked like moldy, decomposed citrus fruits" (61).[164] Ma's eye for interior décor almost paints a quintessential white family portrait, a scene reminiscent of a 1950s Americana TV show, but the moldy fruits in the center, anchor not only the table runner but the whole dining room. The citruses ruin the tableaux of familial bliss; they, like the family, are dead from the inside out and visually signify the inescapable capital condition. Ostensibly, the Gowers are the quintessential white, heteronormative American family. They even "clasped their hands together on the table and bowed their heads" to say grace, but the Gowers are bereft of substance, rotted from the inside

(Shen Fever is a fungal disease that nestles in your body and slowly works its way outward), and stuck in a loop of habit (61). The moment they finish their invisible meal, they begin again with Mrs. Gower "unstacking plates and resetting the table," (62). The fruits of this labor, of eating "together" as an undead family, are spoiled.

The intricate details of the zombified domestic tableaux, filtered through Candace's narration, aestheticizes her dangerous obsession with family and how capital's call to work informs kinship. And in their affectless subjectivity, the zombie Gowers characterize capitalism's enticing draw. She is entranced by the Gowers and cannot look away at the ironic family life of the living dead. "You could lose yourself this way," she notes, "watching the most banal activities cycle through on an infinite loop. ... the routines don't necessarily repeat in the identical manner. If you paid a little attention, you would see variations" (Ma 62). Studying the fevered for their variations, repetition with difference, is both part of the "aesthetic experience" of stalking and is an analytic that echoes the format upon which capitalism operates. While this obsession over finding the discrepancy—"The variations are what got to me," she later says—recalls her previous desire to keep working in the Spectra office, it also signals Candace's desire for stability and comfort, for home and family (62). Thus, "Ma demonstrates the dangerous allure of familiarity. She reveals the connection between the familiar — often centered on the home — and the zombie-like nature of capitalist consumerism. Desires for the familiar in *Severance* lead to repeating the past, impeding what should be done to create a new, better future" (Tanner *Post45*). In other words, family and home—staple signifiers of an American brand of capitalism and the very intimate spheres Candace lacks—entice and seduce her to feel as if that is what she needs. Yet, as we see at the end, to escape that reversion to the white

heteronormative structures that delineate the capitalist past, Candace must escape Bob, the figurehead of white, heteropatriarchy.

This integral moment at the live stalk, moreover, also underscores how the survivors contribute to the destruction of family. Important to note about the Gowers and the victims of Shen Fever is that they are harmless. In the middle of the novel, Ma provides a Shen Fever FAQ sheet, presumably the same one Candace and her co-workers receive when the pandemic ramps up to worrying heights. We learn that "the infection is not contagious between people" but rather it "is contracted by breathing in microscopic spores in the air" (Ma 149). Therefore, returning to the earlier scene at the Gower home, we recognize that the shell of a family does not pose any danger to the survivors. As Eileen Ying compellingly asks about this stalking scene, "Who, we might ask, are the villains here?" (*Post45*). Nevertheless, Bob, the cultish, self-appointed leader, permanently kills the Gower family.[165] It is a ruthless echo of American capital-colonial ventures that destroy to extract resources. Rounding them up like pigs for the slaughter, Bob gathers the zombie family into the dining room where they share their ghostly meal and gives them "a brusque, merciful shot to the head" (70). This senseless killing bares a ruthlessness that tinges the apocalyptic air; in tolling another death knell for kinship structures, the survivors order their understanding of chaos. Lawlessness reigns supreme, and a world defined by capitalism's heteropatriarchal norms has no time for affective reflections about what's right.

Bob's insistence on such violence is justified in language of white, patriarchal benevolence and liberation, rhetoric rampant in the post-9/11 era to rationalize unnecessary violence both abroad and domestically: "It's the humane thing to do," fellow survivor Genevieve explains, "Rather than having [the fevered] cycle through the same routines, during which they degenerate, we put them out of their misery right away" (Ma 70). While I address the resonances

between 9/11 and Shen Fever below, I want to focus here on how Bob's justification to kill the Gowers recalls a hard-hearted response endemic to the Age of Terror. After Candace fails to see the Gower daughter, Paige, hiding behind a curtain, Bob turns into a cruel pedagogue and instructs the protagonist to shoot the girl: "Let this be a lesson to you to be more observant next time" (70). Another kind of war on terror that differentiates a "them" versus "us," the determination to exterminate the family positions *Severance* as a new kind of 9/11 family novel. This layers racialized zombie genre conventions on top of the now-familiar responses to the attacks, narratively expressing the lengths Americans will take to ensure survival and protection from a non-threat. To Bob, the Gower family gives a face to the "undetectable" spores that cause Shen Fever (149). As Karen Engle posits, "Facialization operates as a method of identification whereby the face of a subject, which is believed to reveal an interior truth, or deep essence, comes to stand for the narratives a nation tells about itself" (85). Thus, in having Bob kill the Gowers as justification for Shen Fever, Ma constructs scalar relationships between macro and micro spheres that accentuate the microcosmic reflection of the nation within the family. Plainly, Bob's eliminating the "threatening" Gower family encodes the post-9/11 cultural and national demand that white, male Americans stamp out presumed terroristic threats. Hence, the Gower family and the fevered zombies in general corroborate recent scholarship that suggests the influx of zombie invasion narratives mirrors a post-9/11 anxiety about another similar attack. Kyle Bishop, for instance, argues that September 11 "caused perhaps the largest wave of paranoia for Americans since the McCarthy era. Since the beginning of the war on terror, American popular culture has been colored by the fear of possible terrorist attacks and the grim realization that people are not as safe and secure as they might have once thought" (17). Bishop continues, positing that the zombie narratives (he investigates film) reflect that anxious coloring in pop

culture. In this vein, then, *Severance* proves that the American literary imagination still fixates on the zombie as a mutable metaphor for contemporary anxieties in the post-9/11 era. Like *Zone One,* Ma's novel depends on family and home as the crucial pieces to understanding the contemporary condition. Indeed, as these two novels demonstrate, home and family are both sites of nostalgia and fear, of comfort and danger.

These affective dichotomies of what home and family represent at the end of the world manifest most clear in Ashley's house. One of the survivors in Bob's cultish group, Ashley adamantly wishes to stalk her childhood home where the fellow millennials can find some weed. Stalking Ashley's home is mired in questions of whether she is ready to face the inevitable: "What if [Ashley] saw things she didn't want to see?" Candace asks herself (Ma 118). A history of interpersonal, pre-catastrophe familial dynamics also stimulate the apprehension of this stalking. Ashley's tenuous relationship with her parents transforms into regret once the fever hit. "It's different for every family," Janelle says, doubly meaning the dynamics of family and how units responded to the crisis (119). In keeping with genre conventions that necessitate a slow expositional build up and conclude in calamity, the stalk for pot at Ashely's home quickly goes awry. Immediately upon entering the "small, boxy ranch with blue aluminum siding, stained with rust along the sides," the group sees Ashley's father's corpse teeming with maggots: "They dripped from his chin down to his threadbare T-shirt, onto his belly. Flying maggots, larvae maggots, maggoty maggots, maggoted maggots, dancing their maggot mating dance all over his maggoted face" (121, 124). The descriptions here not only make the skin crawl, but they limn the subversive horror of the apocalypse: its most awful effects occur *inside,* where homegrown intimacy is both created and sent to die. Rust eats away at the home's exterior, but the inside is worse; the barrier between the public and private, the unsafe and safe, is non-existent. Just as

Mark Spitz's discovery of his mother consuming his father emblematizes the collapse of family and social order, here the descriptions of rot and decay show how the apocalypse has ironized comfort into fear, reiterating the now uncanny nature of home and family.

This moment of pure subliminal fear and revulsion sparks the revelation that determines the rest of the novel and its resistance to former formulations of family and home: "We shouldn't be stalking our own homes" (Ma 124). The nostalgia for and return to previous intimacies that characterizes the end of the world's reification of capitalist norms (nuclear family and home) triggers Shen Fever. Indeed, Ashley, upon revisiting her childhood bedroom, immediately falls into the trap of habit and repetition. Trying on different dresses and posing in front of a mirror, she quickly becomes fevered and dons a similar gaze to "when someone is looking at their computer screen, or checking their phone" (128).[166] For Ashley, visiting her old home with the intent of closing chapters and showing her friends a vision of her "former self" is an act of optimism, something provokes happiness; she even "perk[s] up" when the group sets out on the stalk (119). Ashely's return home to her "carnation pink" room where necklaces adorn the walls stresses capitalist gender norms embedded in the nuclear home (125). As Jenna Hanchey and Erica Vital-Lazare articulate, the pink walls "also [signal] that return to [what] we're comfortable with when we think about gendered positionality, safety…" (*Severance* Radio). The stalk's inevitable and tragic conclusion is an instance of what Berlant calls cruel optimism: "when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing" (1). The obstacle in Ashely's case is yearn for the comfort of home and the life she lived before. She notes as they walk towards the house that she "should have come back earlier" to rectify past grievances with her family (120). That desire to step into the past, to rectify and repair the nuclear family leads to Ashley's infection. Candace comparatively frames Ashley's desire to return in psychological and

temporal terms: “If I ever found myself in the vicinity of Salt Lake one day, I would probably keep on driving. It is too depressing, too soul-crushingly sad, to reminisce. The past is a black hole, cut into the present day like a wound, and if you come too close, you can get sucked in. You have to keep moving” (120). Using the rhetoric of injury and corporeal trauma, Candace iterates that the conditions of the apocalypse, where familial and domestic fixtures remain in flux, necessitate a hopeful futurity that sprouts from chaos and lacks heteronormative traps.

Yet, despite Candace’s insistence to reject previously nostalgic and intimate spaces, homes are not the only structures where the public-private and comfort-danger divides are erased. Inhabiting any place of fondness runs the risk of turning the healthy into the affectless fevered. Spaces of fondness, in both *Severance* and *Zone One*, are a death sentence. In this way, moreover, the definition of home and affective locales becomes mutable to the individual’s emotional connections to the place. Just as family is a subjective collection of people, home is what you make it based on your recollections and experiences. “Memories beget memories,” Candace muses after the stalk at Ashley’s house devolves into chaos, “Shen Fever being a disease of remembering, the fevered are trapped indefinitely in their memories” (Ma 160). The Facility, the important yet vaguely named refuge to which Bob shepherds the survivors, represents this kind of memory building that threatens to snare the fevered in a jail of their own remembrances. The Facility turns out to be an abandoned mall that Bob frequented as a child: “We were standing in front of Deer Oaks Mall, a beige complex with signs boasting a Macy’s, a Sears, and an AMC movie theater with eight screens. This was supposed to be the Facility?” (160).[167] But, as Candace quickly learns, this empty building reveals the interrelation and exchangeability between capitalist centers and the home.

Bob's choice to establish a home within the mall is both practical and sentimental. The resource-laden mall is rooted in a familial memory that sparks its renovation into a home. Upon arrival, Bob and the team stalk the Facility. As the squad preps, Candace recalls what the leader said earlier. When scoping a place to check for the Fevered,

> You are remembering, even though you have not set foot in a mall since you were a teenager. And whether the memories source from some collective memory … or from personal memory, try to see as much as you can. Try to remember as much as you can. And because memories beget more memories, you always remember more than you think is even there. The ones that are hidden from ourselves are the most revealing, give you the most information. … A stalk should never be personal. It is about envisioning. (163)

The flaw in Bob's logic is clear: how can a stalk be impersonal when it necessitates our own personal memories? At the Facility, stalking serves as a steppingstone to transform the mall into a pseudo permanent home. Clearing the space of zombies ensures a "safety" from the terror, after all. As stalking makes way for inhabiting, the mall resembles a nuclear home that recalls the houses the survivors investigated in the suburbs: "the department stores on the first floor [are] to serve as communal spaces" and "the smaller boutiques on the second floor here could serve as personal rooms" (165). In other words, the department stores are akin to the living room or family room, and the upstairs are the bedrooms. A theme rampant throughout 9/11 literature, home renovations and internal displacement foreground the material consequences of catastrophe and underscore the abandon of affective connection. Recall, for instance, how Hans and Rachel are displaced in *Netherland* because of the attacks, or how Nadia and Saeed in *Exit West* take refuge and then unceasingly repurpose their dwellings to accommodate for the ensuing violence outside.[168] But refuge in *Severance* means to re-enliven the capitalist norms that inform nuclear family dynamics and colonial projects. Reviving the dead mall into a nuclear home with the ragtag survivor family collapses distinctions between capital's public influence on the familial private realm; when the symbol of American capitalism itself becomes the home, there is no

escaping Bob's vicious ideological project or heteronormative reification. The home and mall's easy interchangeability shows that "the struggle for those in Candace's world — and ours — is to find a way to inhabit the often-unlivable conditions of capitalism" and that "*Severance* offers a critique of how we habituate to the very structures and routines that lead to our undoing" (Zhang *Post45*). In Bob's case, this undoing extends from the nostalgia the mall harbors.

Severance's climax accentuates how Bob's choice to change the Facility into a home recalls its role in his life, bringing the personal to his political aims of establishing heteronormative domestic order. When he jails Candace inside a L'Occitane boutique because of her pregnancy, Bob reveals that as a child, the mall was his sanctuary when his parents argued. He tells Candace, "My parents fought a lot, and so I'd come here a lot. I'd just walk around. When I was hungry, I'd eat free samples in the food court. … The employees knew me" (Ma 246). Encumbered in pained memories and a means of escape from familial strife, then, the mall demonstrates how capitalist locales can easily step in for domiciles. The public and private is separated by automatic sliding doors and the smell of pretzels. Therefore, it is not surprising when Candace discovers Bob fevered as he walks around the mall. When she realizes his brain has turned, Candace thinks of "teenage Bob, aimlessly wandering through the mall to escape his parents' fights at home" (281). Accompanying this hollow walk is an "unaffixed" gaze "to a vague middle distance, as if watching a secret movie projecting in front of him" (281). Bob's glazed stare projects toward his past; he watches memories of himself walking the mall, as if recorded on old home videos. It is "a ruinous habit of the backward glance," of being tangled in the past and what the mall offers Bob that fuels his transformative fever into a zombie, undead state (Lucia Tang, *Post45*).

Ma's critique of capital and its relationship to family slowly climbs to larger heights as *Severance* unfolds. Alternating between the past and the present, the analeptic portions lead up to the moment Candace decides to quit New York for good, and as she slowly reaches that conclusion, the critique of capitalism and the stakes of Shen Fever amplify. Thus far, we have moved from the Gower home, a domestic tableau, to the mall, a larger social and communal gathering space that replaces home. Yet Ma takes the depiction of family to national heights toward the end of the novel by setting the apex of the zombie apocalypse in 2011, near the ten-year anniversary of 9/11. The September 11th attacks, as Marc Redfield has theorized them, responded to American capitalist-colonial-patriarchal power and occurred in targeted seats of the nation's hegemonic power. The attacks appear most overtly in a flashback when Candace realizes Shen Fever is another tragedy after which nothing will be the same. The protagonist awakens to the sound of knells commemorating "the moment when the first plane struck the north tower" (Ma 212). She continues to describe the "elaborate ceremony being held at Ground Zero, with a recitation of the names of the dead" (212). In a way, too, *Severance* itself recites the horrors of 9/11 and what follows; written almost 20 years after and set exactly a decade after the attacks, Ma's novel establishes a historical repetition with difference in Shen Fever. While insignificant compared to the public health concerns happening in the novel's imagined 2011, the ten-year commemoration represents how national practices of remembrance and honor orbit family. As David Simpson maintains, "The routines of commemorative culture, whether private or public, exist to mediate and accommodate the unbearably dissonant agonies of the survivors into a larger picture that can be metaphysical or national-political and is often both at once" (2). In other words, such honoring—reading out the names of the almost 3000 people who died on 9/11, for instance—performs the scalar work of family representing and reflecting nation. The

family's pain is the nation's pain. And that affinity resounds in the knells Candace awakens to, permanently ringing in American consciousness and subconsciousness to honor the families of the fallen.

The recitation of names commemorates the victims for their surviving families, and it also speaks to a ubiquitous familial loss throughout *Severance*. At the annual 9/11 anniversary ceremony, lauded speakers recite the names of every victim who died on that September day and in the World Trade Center attacks in 1993. Writing about this observance, Engle claims, "Names, in most cases, are all that remains of the victims, but they remain isolated and detached from the scene of destruction … surviving relatives of 9/11 are entombed in their own perpetual mourning weeds, left only with names to repeat—names to make it real" (41). Making it "real" reveals the presence in absence laden in mourning and loss. Memorializing and remembering in *Severance*, moreover, paint 9/11 as an event that cleaved family before the zombie fever. And that ruin endures: Shen Fever will claim more families. Think, for instance, of how before stalking, Candace and the other survivors state their "full birth certificate names" as a "sealant to contain the goodwill and luck" created from the prayer circle (Ma 60). In reciting their names with the one their families gave them, the characters ritualistically recall their personal histories, their origins, and their now-dead kin. Thus, *Severance* maps how historical moments founded at the intersection of capital-colonial projects, like 9/11 or Shen Fever, untie both micro and macro familial bonds: from the nuclear to the national, no kindred group is left unscathed.

Moreover, Ma flattens the important ten-year anniversary by overlaying it with a bigger sense of dread: the death of capitalism. Candace recalls "how, after it had happened, President Bush told us all to go shopping," but Shen Fever, which resembles 9/11 in the terror, panic, and racialized fears, cannot succumb to capitalism's seduction and instead, "The streets were quiet"

(212). While Candace mistakes President Bush for his brother Jeb, she shows how U.S. capital-colonial missions undergird both historical moments, illustrating "the real threat that 9/11 posed to national interests as far as the power structure was concerned: the devastating interruption to the flow of capital that would persist if the collective sense of anxiety was not quickly alleviated" (Knapp 24). Yet the similarities between 9/11 and Shen Fever can only go so far. Here, the attacks exemplify what Elisabeth R. Anker calls melodramatic political discourse: "citizens are overwhelmed by forces outside their control, and this discourse puts an experience of powerlessness into a comprehensible, narrative form" (35). For President Bush, that narrative form, a method to order the chaos, promotes the very American capitalist tradition that sparked 9/11 in the first place. Shen Fever, however, is so terrifying and endangering that capitalism has failed; it no longer offers the solace to regain composure and comfort, and in its place, shopping becomes a nostalgic practice.

September 11th and the fever also parallel each other in their capacity to facialize terror in the form of the non-white Other and as a means of exculpating the U.S. from its participation in harmful capitalist structures. As Shen Fever begins to spread through global import and exports sites, the U.S. quickly passes a travel ban "to prevent citizens of Asian countries from visiting the United States. … China [was] at the top of the list" (Ma 210). Thus, in tandem with Shen Fever, a racist yellow peril sweeps the nation that is routed through a binary that Stephen Hong Sohn calls "Alien/Asian." It "demonstrates the dramatically divergent and varied ways Asian Americans have been represented as dangerous, subversive, and tactical in visual, aural, and written texts" (7). Not only does this eerily adumbrate the violence against Asians and Asian Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic, but in putting a racialized face to Shen Fever, *Severance* indicts the U.S. for both failing to acknowledge its participation in the cruel methods

of production and unstable labor practices that capitalism demands *and* in global capital's responsibility in racially scapegoating Asian people. Ma demonstrates this dual indictment by dichotomizing U.S. responses to the atrophying health crisis. On the one hand, government officials request the *Times* to remove their Shen Fever victim count, what Candace calls "the Death Knell," to avoid panic and blame (Ma 214). Unlike the commemorative rings that wake her up on 9/11, these federally-controlled Shen Fever knells point to the epidemic's recalcitrance and politicization: "It had become so obscure and shrouded in controversy … The seriousness of the epidemic varied depending on which news source you trusted" (214-215). On the other hand, the nation immediately sustains a racialized response. The *Times* unflappably reports that the "travel ban of visitors from Asian countries…would go into effect immediately" (215). The U.S. helps to create Shen Fever, but as the capital and colonial virus wreaks havoc, the country steps aside to pass the blame to the Alien/Asian, citing a familiar narrative of protection and exception.

Much of the discourse surrounding September 11th similarly excuses the nation of its participation in imperialism in the Middle East, purporting an American innocence that renders the attacks as a "dystopian crisis for white masculinity, authorizing the idealistic vision of 'homeland' that justified the invasions, wars, sanctions, and occupation…" (Edwards *Post45*). This idealistic vision of the homeland, in other words, is for white people. As Deepa Kumar asserts, "the 'homeland' … tends to be white, even if it is not explicitly articulated as such" (162). The racial scapegoating jettisons the U.S. from the destructive equation of colonial-capital projects, thereby creating a kind of historical amnesia to ensure the endurance of white-centered forms of organization, namely the family and the nation. As we see in the novels by many writers in this project, non-white people are routinely painted as the terroristic other. Therefore, in *Severance*, Shen Fever echoes 9/11 in two principal ways. First, in its complete overhaul of

familial and domestic dynamics, and second, in the "failure of imagination" that such catastrophe could occur or be, at least in part, the white-U.S.'s fault.

Indeed, as Candace notes, the spread of fever is so alarming that New York City begins to falter. "Everywhere else could fall apart," she thinks in disbelief, "but not New York. Its glossy, reflective surfaces and moneyed environments seemed invincible. Even after 9/11, even after the attempted bombings, even after the blackouts and the hurricanes and the rising waters due to global warming" (257). The anaphoristic phrase "even after" matches the political critique Ma makes via capitalist zombies: repetition defines the system. And as a stylistic device, anaphora exhibits how Ma situates the novel within a decidedly very recent contemporary historical timeline that conveys the almost absurd nature of New York's downfall.[169] This failure to imagine opens a Pandora's box of generic possibility, and zombie fiction fits the bill. The capricious connotations of zombies contain the capacity to carry capitalism's horrors. And Ma's aesthetic choices here highlight how the post-9/11 era ushered a feeling of disbelief that erases the dividing line between science fiction and realism.

While *Severance*'s aesthetics certainly sustain the erasure of speculative and realist modes of narrativizing the post-9/11 era, they ultimately denote a hopeful future that opposes the grim zombified, capitalistic present. The most overt instance of family in *Severance* comes from Candace's clandestine pregnancy at the brink of the pandemic. After slightly wavering about whether to keep the baby, she decides to labor towards labor as the world collapses. The unborn baby is a symbol of hope, but this is not the kind of reproductive futurity we see in Whitehead's novel. Rather, the child represents an order-less world, one beyond the capitalist and federal influence like the Tromanhauser Triplets. More specifically, Candace's baby ushers in a world that refuses predications by U.S. sociocultural logics. Thus, the reproductive futurity we see in

Severance is one of alterity—one that resists Edelman's claim that "the future is mere repetition just as lethal as the past" (31). Instead, Candace's unborn baby, whom she affectionately calls Luna, epitomizes what queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz calls a "then and there" queer futurity. Muñoz calls upon us to imagine more hopeful futures: "we must dream and enact new and better pleasures, new worlds. Queerness is a longing that propels us onward, beyond romances of the negative and toil in the present" (1). The future *Severance* imagines is one that not only rejects capitalist oppression but considers the End, death, chaos, and a necropolis as a beginning. Such hopeful futurity not only follows queer theorists like Jack Halberstam, who argues that wildness can name "the refusal to submit to social regulation" and a "space of potential" (1), but it also trails scholars such as Anthony Sze-Fai Shiu who claim that visions of Asian American ethnofutures leave "with the possibility of a future in which the conditions that produce our present sense of 'us" could begin to be disassembled by marking the limits of thought" (317). Using collapse as a starting point rejects and unmakes oppressive systems that define the past and present. In *Severance*, such a future delegitimizes and weakens the capital-colonial vice grip on intimate spheres.

Ma shows this rejection and unmaking in the final words of the novel. Candace escapes the facility and reaches an empty, cleaved Chicago, a city that reminds her of her mother's own imagined future away from her difficult husband. The book concludes with these sentences:

> Up ahead, there's a massive littered river, planted by an elaborate, wrought-iron red bridge. Beyond the bridge is more skyline, more city.
>
> I get out [of a car] and start walking. (Ma 291)

The aesthetics of destruction here point to alternate modes of thinking about chaos, of seeing the End as the Beginning. Indeed, Candace's pregnancy bespeaks a similar hopeful End. Family in *Severance*, unlike in *Zone One*, imagines a collectivity to navigate the new social order, to

reconstitute ways of living. Ma's conclusion clearly evinces how in some cases, in the wake of calamity and political violence sparked by capitalistic greed, forms of kinship are lifelines.

In other words, *Severance* doesn't argue that family cannot survive the end of capitalism or that it dies altogether like in *Zone One*; rather, it argues that familial formations will no longer anchor on labor and capital to keep themselves afloat. It resists the very notion that "Capitalism structures both the family and the pandemic's circuits across the globe" (Wong *Post45*). Ma's novel, therefore, ends with what Vorris Nunley calls a post-family. This "emancipatory" kindred construction seeks "to implode the heteronormative, racialized, and class core of the idea of the nuclear family" and its "insights offer a protean, tangible, substantial democratic ethos" (176). In its defiance to white heteropatriarchy, *Severance*'s conclusion and vision of family is also anti-capitalist and anticolonial.[170] Thus, Ma's book recognizes that formulations of the nuclear family are contaminated by and bound up with U.S. colonial- capitalist ideologies that leave us zombie-like. Rather than capital sustaining familial bonds and norms, something else should, a liberating social structure. One that is, I would argue, more beneficent. *Severance*'s open conclusion, thus, is one of a limitless future that centers kinship on its own terms, not confined and defined by labor and social constructs. The novel uses The End as a moment of becoming— not one of cruel optimism but a kind of optimistic cruelty. The world is mean, but Candace starts walking, holding onto the promise of the life within her. As Jessica Hurley postulates, "Reproductive futurity can be as much a utopian vision of escape from oppression as it is oppression's tool" (*Infrastructures* 151). This idea is evident from the novel's very first sentence: "After the End came the Beginning" (Ma 3). *Severance*, then, starts where it ends; it's an ouroboric novel that renders how The End leads to a new chapter, a new story, a new beginning.

Zombies are hard to pin down because of their interstitial position between life and death and their racialized history, but this complexity affords metaphorical malleability to reflect the past and present and to imagine the future. Their uncanny ability to slip into the skin of their surroundings, a kind of mirroring camouflage, is what makes them terrifying. They originate as anti-colonial and anti-slavery resistance fighters, and while they carry that history forever, they also embody new histories, namely in the 21st century, 9/11. The zombie is a palimpsest that reads the narrative of world history. In this respect, as Jen Web and Samuel Byrnand posit, zombies metaphorize "our own shadow selves, the part that always returns to bite us and which we can never keep fully repressed" (112). Zombies clarify what it means to be human in a world where the vice grip of global politics and capitalistic gain stand to disenfranchise and reject the individual, and the undead limn how oppressive regimes destroy units of collectivity altogether. As *Zone One* and *Severance* demonstrate, the zombie in the wake of 9/11 unveils the precarious nature of family. This familial loss exudes and ferries a traumatic aloneness rooted in the past; simultaneously, however, it can operate as a place of becoming and beginning, opening up to boundless possibility to combat what was once thought to be a foreclosed future.

CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION:

FAMILIALIZING CRISIS

At the end of Fatima Farheen Mirza's *A Place for Us*, Indian-Muslim immigrant Rafiq lays in a hospital bed in Northern California where, as he timidly comes to terms with his life, he slowly dies of cancer. It is largely a classic American immigrant life: move to the States, work hard, reap the financial rewards. But his familial life has been marred by a prodigal son named Amar who, by today's standards can be deemed a bit of a mess. He struggles to fit in as a child, gets caught up with the wrong crowd, and flunks school. Most importantly, though, Amar occupies the vulnerable space of being a Brown American male and must navigate the cultural clashes. And as for many families, 9/11 represents a crucial turning point in the perception and reception of Brown people in the nation. It is an apotheosis that clarifies for Amar the racialized tensions that rise with the smoke of the smoldering towers.

Half meditative reflection on his life and half missive to Amar, Rafiq's section offers an intimate account at how 9/11 encroaches on the domestic sphere and altogether reorders familial dynamics. In the wake of the attacks, Amar begins acting out more than ever and travails to find a place for himself in white America, in school, and in his family. Rafiq recalls,

> The twin towers fell the next morning. … I did not think of how you might be affected. You were a boy. I did not have to worry about you the way I worried about the safety of my daughters, both of them then wearing hijabs. … I was so alone. I was not sure what the world outside was like, when it would regain a shape I knew, if my family would be safe inside it. (344)

The brief passage buzzes with the racial, national, political, and familial considerations I have made in throughout *Ordering the Chaos*. The intersections of these social rudiments, moreover, underscore how the outside hurtles inside—the curb separating the public and the private

dissolves the moment the towers collapse with a fiery gasp. This short meditation on a life riddled with familial missteps reverberates with a political understanding of a War on Terror culture that further marginalizes and disenfranchises Brown people.

The dissolution of the central family in *A Place for Us*—like many of the novels I examine in this project—stresses how political violence disrupts the fabric of domestic and familial life and how the racist responses to those acts of violence contribute to a sense of displacement and unbelonging. These disruptions, both in a literal and metaphorical sense, unhome the most ostracized communities. As I have shown with Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *Exit West*, the familiarity and stability of emplaced domesticity uncomfortably shifts from under Brown feet as exclusionary ideologies and cultures of the War on Terror seep into every social and intimate sphere. But twenty years after the fall—what we might call the new post-lapsarian moment—has the post-9/11 world regained a familiar shape?

I am skeptical. Familial rupture and domestic displacement, examined in Part II with Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* and Joseph O'Neill's *Netherland*, manifest in a material sense as tangible reminders of the way things were. This familial renovation contingent upon death or marital separation uncovers how the attacks stole a semblance of normalcy for thousands in the US. Yet, while novels like Foer's and O'Neill's substantively depict liberal, white American material aftermaths of 9/11, they remain silent on the nation's extractive and deterritorializing "liberation" and "counterterror" measures abroad. The novels fail to engage with the vexed core and material consequences of the imperial War on Terror—the revoking of not only family and land but of autonomy. I do not claim that 9/11 novels *must* converse with the subsequent global conflicts; however, I do wish to suggest that these novels, which are often afforded more critical attention than other works, substantiate a

dominating whiteness in post-9/11 literary studies and in the literary landscape that jettisons ecologies of war that characterize the lived experiences of people across the Global South. As the recent botched withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan attests, the War on Terror continues to rage, reinforcing and revitalizing ongoing displacements, refugee crises, and familial separations. Or take for example the unnecessary bomb the U.S. dropped in Kabul, killing ten civilians, including up to seven children. Centering the voices of the victims in post-9/11 literary studies is the best way, and in my opinion the only way, to fully grasp the riven culture of the present age. The imperial projects and demonstrations of military might that comprise the War on Terror abroad continue to destroy the lives of innocent noncombatants and shatter families, communities, and nations.

But this insistence on hegemonic displays of power is not unique to the post-9/11 era; indeed, as I also show in parts II and III, the 9/11 family novel contextualizes and historicizes the 20th-century and 21st-century's ubiquitous violence within a longer timeline of American-imposed acts of terror. From the Dresden bombing in Jonathan Safran Foer's book to the long timeline of sustained attacks on the Middle East and across Asia depicted in Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* and Porochista Khakpour's *Sons and Other Flammable Objects*, I present how War on Terror ideologies and determinations to dismantle domestic and intimate spheres are endemic to American foreign policy. Exposing such a history of violence shows us that the Age of Terror has been ongoing in the Global South for far longer than 2001. These novels, therefore, encourage us to rethink the timeline of the Age of Terror altogether and to reconceptualize, indeed even dismantle, notions of periodization. As Erica Edwards reminds us, "the US and its allies had been visiting this dystopian crisis upon Black and other oppressed populations throughout the Global South for 500 years" (*Post45 Contemporaries*). Can 9/11 and the War on

Terror serve as periodizing lodestars in a region defined by terror for centuries? Here is Nadeem Aslam in his 2008 novel *The Wasted Vigil*, which takes place in US-occupied Afghanistan during the early aughts: "Even the air of this country has a story to tell about warfare. It is possible here to lift a piece of bread from a plate and following it back to its origins, collect a dozen stories concerning war-how it affected the hand that pulled it out of the oven, the hand that kneaded the dough, how war impinged upon the field where wheat was grown" (43). War permeates every level of existence: not only does it tinge the air Afghans breathe, but the imperial spice peppers their food. Note also how Aslam kneads tenses together; past and present seamlessly coalesce to insist on the consistency of war. The merged temporality here highlights the uselessness of periodization via the pervasiveness of Western military presence and violence. The exhibitions of disproportionate power and terror that affect the Global South is just repetition with little difference. In reconsidering the contemporary era within its honest historical context, we necessarily also refocus the discourse around the victims and innocent noncombatants rather than the violent perpetrators. This bottom to top revaluation reveals the cyclical nature of terror and violence imparted by Western hyperpowers.

This pathology of hate, a symptom of the savage colonial-capitalist conditions the US was founded on and continues to thrive on, works domestically as well to both unmake families and ensure the exceptionalizing of a particular kind of family. The white heteropatriarchal nuclear family has always been central to American value systems, and 9/11 re-emboldened the unit. Edwards' provocative claims about post-9/11 formulations of race provide a helpful frame for understanding this reifying of white family norms. As she has recently argued, the marriage of insistent patriotism and hypersecurity after the attacks "synthesized the production of new racial subjectivities and new forms of racial classification and violence with rationalizations of

neoliberal economic policy and exercises of global expansion through military and carceral domination" (Edwards *Other Side of Terror* 72). In essence, then, 9/11 not only ushered in new procedures of militaristic and carceral terror, but it also inaugurated new social taxonomies of non-whiteness that in turn reinforce a white ideal that manifests namely in the form of family. Public discourse about kinship and collectivity after the attacks, unsurprisingly, laud a white, heteronormative family that reflects the very capitalist morals that incited 9/11 itself.

Colson Whitehead's *Zone One* and Ling Ma's *Severance* highlight the dangers of venerating the white American family as the national nonpareil. These zombie novels, in short, suggest how the nation promotes a narrative of white heteropatriarchy in response to widespread terror. Part IV deliberately moves away from the realist mode because speculative fiction offers methods to look anew at preexisting conditions, and in *Zone One* and *Severance*, the walking and working dead offer these fresh insights about the post-9/11 era's exceptionalizing of family and whiteness. The figure of the undead not only ferries an anxiety of re-attack, but it also signifies the very capital-colonial dogma rooted in histories of marginalizing, suppressing, and oppressing people of color. The horror genre, moreover, also invites a glimpse at the disillusion of domesticity via racialized understandings of monstrosity. Zombies plague post-9/11 culture because monsters—a tired metaphor for the minoritized subject—speak to the horrifically disproportionate geopolitics of the age. Examining the imperial principles at work both domestically and internationally, I have shown that War on Terror culture spans the globe, displacing and deterritorializing people of color in the name of white nationhood and liberation. The conditions of this hate ironically reinforce national borders and boundaries but culturally are endemic around the world. In these chapters, I postulate how the post-9/11 literary imagination

takes up this exceptionalizing of family to cast a wide net that captures both sweeping geopolitical and miniature understandings of contemporary politics.

While scholars such as Richard Gray, Elizabeth S. Anker, Kathy Knapp, and others have compellingly argued on the domestication of post-9/11 literature—the resurgent thematic emphasis of the home and family—I deviate from that strain here by examining scalar characteristics of kith and kinship. Throughout *Ordering the Chaos*, I demonstrated how the family unit is a microcosm of the nation in two principal ways. First for example, in Foer and O'Neill's novels, the two families embody the kind of white nucleus the US exceptionalized following the attacks: the quintessential, white heteronormative unit is broken, yes, but it can be repaired. These redemptive family arcs echo the unity politicians urged after the attacks; yet, as I showed with *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, that call for collectivity jettisoned Brown people. Second, and much more politically resonant, families in these novels signify how political violence demands a reorientation of domesticity and kindred makeup. Nadia and Saeed in *Exit West*, for instance, renovate their internal domestic spaces to protect themselves from the state-driven external furor outside their walls, in turn forcing them to simultaneously straddle both a romantic and fraternal relationship. Understanding this scalar relationship between nation and family reorients the discourse on 9/11 fiction because it illuminates the stakes of political violence on the most intimate levels, and it also reveals the positionality of family to the state. The close-knit relationship between the two social spheres cannot function without each other in our current formulations of them: "We must vacate the here and now for a then and there" (Muñoz 185). As Ma ultimately posits in *Severance*, to withstand the heteropatriarchal and capital-colonial strictures of family, we must begin elsewhere, turn toward a queer futurity and post-family estimation of kinship that resists necropolitical influence on social organization.

Exilic practices that unmake homes and any notion of belonging, material reminders of the past, histories of violence and trauma that shape identities, and zombies that buckle and creak under the weight of history. These concepts, I have argued, make up what I call the 9/11 family novel and highlight the imperial, heteronormative, and capitalistic qualities that define the contemporary age. Ultimately, throughout *Ordering the Chaos*, I locate the relationship between the contemporary era—defined by 9/11 and the conflicts in the Middle East and South Asia—and family. This relationship is integral to acknowledging ongoing imperial projects abroad and the reigning white supremacist social and legal structures that define the US domestically. In other words, family reveals local and global political stakes and motivations. In post-9/11 fiction, as an echo chamber, family occupies a peculiar interstitial junction at the crossroads of upheaval and resilience. The novels I have examined here either convey stories about families torn apart by political violence or those that endure the tumult of mayhem. Moreover, the complexity of the attacks themselves and their regressive, dangerous, and problematic responses underscores why the family functions as a perfect metaphor for the contemporary era. Kinship divulges not only the present's operating imperial creed but also the pain and suffering political violence deals. It also encourages queer formations of collectivity that resist heteropatriarchal and homonational bounds constructed by capitalist ideals. Therefore, the home and other intimate spaces transform into public arenas that hold political weight. In examining these domiciles, I divulge how acts of violence across the annals of history seep into the brick and mortar that support and structure pedestrian lives.

I have also sought to demonstrate in *Ordering the Chaos* that fiction about 9/11 and its panoply of triggers and ramifications, namely the War on Terror, thematize family to reveal how the state encroaches on intimate circles to make the public sphere crueler and more regimented.

The state operates with an ironic intimacy that molds relationships and togetherness for its own means. That is, what happens in the nation begins at home and ripples outward with terrible might and fury. In this way, the family mirrors the nation, and authors utilize constructions of kinship to provide an intimate lens into that scalar relationship. The scalar project of winnowing down from the macro to the micro exposes the relationality between state and family, of nation and home, through life-altering deaths and displacements. This interaction between macro and micro sociopolitical levels also bares how regressive and dangerous ideologies of supremacy and normativity effectuate political influence through a footing in intimate relationships and spaces. As such, family in these works magnifies the state's affective tactics for hegemonic control; power takes root in tearing social fabrics that provide clarity and meaning to our lives.

In the post-9/11 family novel, the attacks and the War on Terror shape the familial and domestic sphere through ideological considerations of belonging and nationhood, material things, interpersonal histories of violence, and, finally, through metaphors rooted in classic generic figures and tropes. The family is an echo chamber that captures the inescapable crises of the post-9/11 world. Terror finds its way in every nook and cranny of the quotidian realm and fundamentally shapes and defines our every day. The novels I have interrogated throughout *Ordering the Chaos* reveal an integral notion about collectivity in this era of terror and counterterror. Family, whatever its composition, is a just one form of togetherness that resists oppressive regimes of Western hegemonic power and other histories of deterritorializing violence.

But the 9/11 family novel exhibits the limited powers of fiction itself and the political implications inherent to the contemporary literary landscape, how artistic modes of representation are not enough to combat the savage intensity of political and social terror. Fiction

cannot save the world. Rather, I wish to posit by way of conclusion, reading such artworks is just the first step. To catalyze meaningful change, we must also practice radical forms of kinship that resist, unmake, and abolish the systemic institutional oppression that defines the world as we know it.

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APPENDIX A: INTRODUCTION

[1] This pairing between 9/11 and WWII is evident throughout the fictional response to the attacks. Many novels, two which I study here (*Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* and *Burnt Shadows*) consider the relationship between two generationally defining events. As it relates to family, moreover, this bridge between historical moments exemplifies how the nation uses the intimate sphere as both a defense mechanism, staking a claim that domestic infringement necessitates a violent counterattack, and as a segregating tool to underscore which version of family matters most in times of trouble.

[2] Another popular historical linking is between the Cold War and the War on Terror. Andrew Hoberek compellingly posits that the Cold War never ended because it erased the very notion of global and regional conflict. Ultimately Hoberek suggests that "[w]ar has metamorphosed from a punctual event into an existential state, albeit one that for Americans always takes place elsewhere" (205). This blending of the global and regional—what Adriana Kiczkowski calls the "glocal"—pervades post-9/11 fiction and informs the scalar relationships I call attention to. For example, in *Burnt Shadows*, Hiroko feels the pain of global nuclear conflict between India and Pakistan locally in her burned back: "she didn't see the ache in her back as a result of the plane ride but rather a sign of her birds' displeasure that she should have chosen this, of all countries, as the place of refuge from a nuclear world" (Shamsie 293). The macro and micro here signify the relationship between the state and the individual, the inescapability of the weight of global conflict. For more on the relationship between the Cold War and the War on Terror, also see Kapadia.

[3] Muñoz characterizes kinship as "an alternate chain of belonging, of knowing the other and being in the world" (*Cruising Utopia* 123). This queer kinship centers belonging in an organization that prioritizes support and liberation; Muñoz's formulations encompass much of what queer theory defines as family, broadening its definition to include the revelatory people and spaces of inclusion that otherwise may not be found.

[4] Here, I work with what Gayatri Gopinath calls "a queer diasporic frame of analysis" that illuminates "alternative forms of collectivity and communal belonging that redefine 'home' as national, communal, or domestic spaces outside a logic of blood, purity, authenticity, and patrilineal descent" (158).

[5] Characterizing neodomestic fictions, Jacobson writes that the novels often "highlight instability" through style and theme, such as an inconclusive ending (35). The 9/11 family novel's instability arises from acts of political violence, but it also features inconclusive or anti-Aristotelian plot structures, reiterating what critic Michiko Kakutani suggests about post-9/11 fiction altogether. She writes, "All too often these creative efforts have tried to impose a conventional narrative upon those events, consciously or unconsciously pushing the horror and the chaos of 9/11 into a sanitized form with a beginning, middle and end -- an end that implies recovery or transcendence. But while our therapeutic culture may want to subject all experience

to simplistic 12-step procedures, closure vis-à-vis 9/11 remains elusive, and the artistic efforts, which enshrine that closure, tend to feel hollow and forced."

[6] I am indebted to Dylan Lewis for teaching me the first line of Johnson's *Clarissa*: "I am extremely concerned, my dearest friend, for the disturbances that have happened in your family" (1).

[7] Aliki Varvogli reads the home as representative of a truth about America learned in the wake of the attacks: "the terrorist attacks were not visited on an innocent nation that can credibly think itself a once happy home, coveted and maligned by envious outsiders" (188). This understanding of the nation signals the miniaturization of the nation as the home that I address throughout *Ordering the Chaos*.

[8] Following Black feminist scholars such as bell hooks, Jacobson also notes that the domestic sphere is also defined by other similar realms: "home is not exclusively private or isolated. Rather, it is defined by its associations with the community and other spaces in its vicinity" (48). This notion of relational domesticity is particularly important in 9/11 family novels that show the global interrelations of the Age of Terror. *Burnt Shadows*, for instance, demonstrates this through the Tanaka-Ashraf and Weiss-Burton family web.

[9] Varvogli contests that the "domesticated" novels Gray discusses "focused in a short-sighted, self-obsessed way on the impact of the tragedy on happy or privileged American families; the conventional narrative structures and modes of representation sought to tame the chaos produced by the attacks; and finally, for many American novelists 9/11 was interpreted as an American not global tragedy" (181). This is the case with many 9/11 family novels about upper-class white men: the attacks act as an affront to their already-privileged way of life.

[10] The ultimate irony here is that Suzanne's father is half Persian; however, he has renounced his Iranian roots.

[11] Jasbir K. Puar also writes about this family-as-nation metaphor, approaching it from a lens of policed and politicized queerness: "If we follow V. Spike Peterson's theorization of nationalism as heterosexism, in which she situates the nation not only as familial, but also as fraternal, we see that the fraternal nation-state is organized to promote political homosocial relations among men in order to discourage and prohibit homosexual relations between men" (49).

[12] I have written elsewhere that 9/11 literary studies is characterized by a pervasive whiteness; that is to say, the criticism surrounding this subfield of contemporary literature emphasizes by and large white authors. I would argue that this white bias extends into the post-9/11 literary marketplace as well. It participates and upholds what Richard Jean So calls cultural redlining: a publishing trend that favors white writers over writers of color.

[13] Criticism about 9/11 and the War on Terror must incorporate more poetry and drama; doing so demonstrates how other literary forms speak to the attacks and the war in different ways. Some poetry collections about 9/11 and post-9/11 include Divya Victor's *Curb* (2020), Christopher Kennedy's *Encouragement for a Man Falling to His Death* (2007), and Solmaz Sharif's *Look* (2016). Ayad Akhtar's *Disgraced* (2012), Neil LaBute's *The Mercy Seat* (2003) and Anne Nelson's *The Guys* (2001) are plays that welcome scholarly attention.

[14] For more on ethics and 9/11 literature, see Banita.

[15] Recent post-9/11 literary criticism corroborates my point here about fiction's power to reveal political injustices. For example, Lindsay Thomas maintains that the "uses of fiction" can "bring

about the kind of collective action necessary to confront the U.S. national security state. Or, to put it more strongly, I am advocating for the use of fiction that is such collective action" (207). As I mention in the conclusion, I do not believe that fiction can save the world, but I do think it offers a step in the right direction.

[16] In utilizing the domestic sphere as a political actor, Hamid's novel aligns with The Visible Collective's art instillation *American Gothic*, which "[mimics] this tradition of modernist portraiture with large photographs of Muslim detainees and family members … within the 'home,' or the domestic sphere, forcing its viewers to wrestle with the persistent 'foreign in a domestic sense' in which Muslim immigrants are viewed in the US" (Kapadia 111). While *American Gothic* has a specific post-9/11 political agenda, its argument about what home looks like for Muslims in the West parallels *Exit West*, which recounts two young people from a Muslim nation looking for home.

[17] As many scholars have now noted, Albert Camus's *The Fall* inspired the *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Both novels utilize a monologic form. Another less well-known inspiration for *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is Antonio Tabucchi's *Sostiene Pereira*. As of yet, no scholars have compared the two novels' formal similarities. For more on the personal history of writing *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, see Hamid's *Discontent and Its Civilizations*.

[18] As I explain in chapter three in my discussion of Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows*, the War on Terror adulterates self-definition. In Shamsie's novel, for example, the state erases Raza's sense of who he is, reducing him from a transnational and transethnic subject to a nameless terrorist in Gitmo. We see, then, that the War on Terror operates to dismantle every aspect of society from the top down—from civilization to citizens.

[19] President Bush famously called the War on Terror a "struggle for civilization" (Americanrhetoric.com). In response, legal scholar Leti Volpp writes that President Bush's claim in "its ideological effect is the legitimation of the religious and modern imperative to eradicate either from without or within the force of despotism, terror, primativism and fundamentalism, each of which are coded as Middle Eastern, Arab, or Muslim" (1582).

[20] Leerom Medovoi claims that "Changez's sentimentality suggests how both emotional life and finance capital in this novel operate according to a common logic of investment. New York is, for Changez, as global and worldly as capital itself, respecting no borders among nations, peoples, or color lines" (650). This combination of the worldly and capitalistic recalls what scholars such as Zizek and Redfield note: that the terrorists chose New York City specifically for the attacks. Attacking the *World* Trade Center in the middle of a major American city is part and parcel of the symbolism that Changez admires about 9/11.

[21] In the alarming introduction to his book about American Muslims, Bayoumi recounts the NYPD's post-9/11, one-hundred-*million*-dollar program to spy on Muslims across the city. The program is rooted in a racist bias toward Muslims, deeming "selected mosques as 'Terrorism Enterprises,' meaning any visitor to these Muslim houses of worship could be investigated" (Bayoumi 5). This institutional implementation of insidious and baseless investigations is a hallmark of the culture of the War on Terror. It is the institutional and programmatic cultivation of the Muslim menace. This in turn feeds into perceptions of the Muslim, furthering a damaging Islamophobic narrative in the nation. For more, see Bayoumi's *This Muslim American Life*.

[22] The American Dream is a theme that prevails in immigrant fiction, even after 9/11 when the public and private ostracization of Middle Eastern and South Asian families became more

blatant. For more on post-9/11 literature and the American Dream, especially as it relates to immigrant fiction, see Carol Fadda-Conrey and Kelsie Donnelly.

[23] Kelsie Donnelly suggests that "Erica radiates regality as a female Queen of the animals," building an analysis from the predation tropes throughout the novel (9). This understanding of Erica makes sense, especially within the novel's setting. Erica is queen of the (concrete) jungle until 9/11. After the attacks, "(Am)Erica is no longer an American Dream but an American Nightmare: less a secure fortress, than a haunted and unstable shell of her former self" (Donnelly 10). This succinct and compelling reading of Erica helps to understand why Changez quit his home in America and within the small family he created with Erica.

[24] Nostalgia plays a major role in post-9/11 literature. The desire to return to a pre-9/11 and pre-War on Terror world, reveals a fear of the contemporary moment's uncertainty, chaos, and indefinability. For example, in Jonathan Franzen's *Freedom,* Joey witnesses 9/11 on tv much like Changez does. But this white college student knows the attacks changed everything forever. The narrator states, "Joey just wanted normal life to return as fast as possible" and that "[b]efore long, [Joey] was so lonely and isolated and hungry for familiar things" (233). Eventually, Joey learns that his family offers him that familiarity. For more on nostalgia and post-9/11 literature, see Randall.

[25] Adnan Mahmutović writes that Erica and Changez's strange relationship can be understood through the idea of positionality—that their courtship fluctuates between moments of profound intensity and uncomfortable distance. The awkward sex scene in which Changez supposedly embodies Chris is one such example. Mahmutović writes, "At certain extreme points, as in the act of lovemaking when they are as close physically as two objects can possibly be, they could not be farther apart. Not only that, since her positionality is elevated in relation to his, Changez needs to pretend to have the kind of positionality her dead lover used to have in order to be intimate with her" (7).

[26] Changez's narrative can be seen as a counter to Erica's manuscript. Whereas he is nowhere to be found in her book, she is everywhere in his story. This tension highlights his enduring love and desire to maintain a connection to America, even though by the end of the novel he organizes and incites anti-American protests. For more on the literary qualities of Changez's narrative, see White.

[27] The metanarrative aspects of Hamid's novel are particularly intriguing in the context of post-9/11 fiction. They highlight not only the book's innovative forms and approach at the classic immigrant story, but they also highlight a call to literary action, so to speak, that encourages experimental literature in this new era of history. For more on the metanarrative elements of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist,* see Margaret-Anne Hutton.

[28] Shalini Shankar writes, "At first glance, the term *desi*, the Hindi word for 'countryman,' is simply the newest in a long line of names used to refer to South Asians living outside the Indian Subcontinent. Upon closer examination, however, Desi marks the inception of a particular type of diasporic, racially marked, generationally influenced consciousness at the beginning of the millennium" (1). The theorization of desiness and American fiction is necessary because it provides a lens through which to understand lived South Asian-American experiences. In particular, desiness as it relates to the pre- and post-9/11 experiences unravels a complex history of racial dynamics. While I cannot analyze Hamid's novel through desiness in this project, I do

think it offers a new line of exciting inquiry not yet seen in the extensive scholarship surrounding *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.

[29] A similar filial resistance appears in Khakpour's *Sons and Other Flammable Objects*, which I take up in chapter three. Family as resistance, especially for the Middle Eastern or South Asian family, is imperative to the Brown response of 9/11 and the War on Terror because it partly combats the legalized and militarized reactionary practices against Muslim men. For more see Bayoumi, Maghbouleh, and Lee.

[30] Hamid writes in *Discontents and Its Civilizations* that his extended family made up his world after he moved from the U.S. to Pakistan: "[I] understood … that my cousins were actually like brothers and sisters, a classroom-sized clan always ready to chat and play and come unquestioningly to my defense against the outside world" (20). We see then that for Hamid himself, the private, intimate family protects from the harsh public. This filial defense strategy appears in all his novels.

[31] Many South Asian writers such as Kamila Shamsie or Salman Rushdie mark the simultaneity of the War on Terror and the India-Pakistan standoff in the early years of the 21st century through the lens of family. For example, Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* amalgamates the standoff, the War on Terror, the 1945 bombing of Nagasaki, and the Cold War to convey the jarring velocity of global conflict in the second half of the 20th century and the early years of the 21st. In combining the concurrent international tensions as Hamid and Shamsie do through family, post-9/11 literature offers an ordering of the chaos through filial organization; that is to say, the family—be it nuclear or chosen—serves as an analgesic to the precarious international relations.

[32] I borrow this use of "global" and "world" from Debjani Ganguly, who delineates "global" as "the domain of territorial and material expansion"—nations defined by borders (21). "World" is that sphere "not overdetermined by spatial and regional configurations of capital accumulation but informed rather by a constellation of aesthetic, affective, and ethical forces generated by the conflicts of a post-1989 world" (24). World, that is, deals with the political and economic.

[33] For more on the role of the beard in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, see Chiu and Meneses.

[34] Changez's beard appears on the first page when he tells the American: "Do not be frightened by my beard: I am a lover of America" (1). Not only does this quick sentence reassure the American, but it also dispels any and all stereotypes about the beard. The colon in between the clauses appropriates the connotations of brown men's beards in American culture. It unmakes the generalization that bearded brown men have a vendetta against America. This label, moreover, exemplifies the way in which the logic of the War on Terror attaches itself to the most ridiculous and, frankly, stupid understandings of Middle Eastern and South Asian men. Incidentally, writers out of the Pakistani diaspora often thematize beards. For instance, in Wajahat Ali's play *The Domestic Crusaders*, Khulsoom echoes Changez's mother when she chastises her son for his beard: "Didn't I tell you to shave your beard before you came? … Why didn't you hold a sign saying, I'M AN EXTREMIST. ONE WAY TICKET TO ABU GHARIB, PLEASE" (41).

[35] The maxim "Focus on the fundamentals" appears in Hamid's third novel *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*. The impressive second person narrative forms a do-it-yourself novel that teaches "you" (the reader) how to rise in the ranks of capitalist Asia. For more on *Rising Asia* and its economic considerations, see Poon.

[36] Notably, the fundamentals do not take into account the empathetic value of a company, though Changez sometimes feels "compassionate pangs" for the "soon-to-be-redundant workers" (99). We see then how American capitalistic endeavors do not leave room for sympathy—for humanistic considerations. If the company is a ruthless meritocracy, then it extends that ideology to the treatment of its clients.

[37] White claims that "'fundamentalism' is used to describe the ethos of Underwood Samson" (445). Hamid, in this sense, upturns the general understanding that Pakistanis are fundamentalists, as Erica's dad asserts. This reading of Hamid's novel is understudied. It boldly positions Underwood Samson—that bastion of capitalism—as a terroristic enterprise, not Changez and certainly not Brown men. Similarly, Rajini Srikanth writes, "In using the word 'fundamentals' with its echo of the unsavory connotations of rigid religiosity, Hamid spotlights the distasteful single-mindedness of an economic system that is built on the unyielding notion of profitability" (75).

[38] Similarly, Muhammad Safeer Awan argues, "Muslim immigrants from South Asia, particularly Pakistan, live through a double bind: on the one hand they are bracketed with the Asian/South Asian diasporic identity, and on the other, their transnational identity also compels them to be part of the Muslim Ummah at large" (16).

[39] Bayoumi writes that the "War on Terror culture promotes the seductive synergy of militarism and entertainment…while rationalizing or ignoring the massive civilian death toll of the War on Terror" (13).

[40] Medovoi suggests that Changez has "two recurring doubles in the novel - his boss Jim (originally from a poor, working-class Midwestern family) and his Caribbean colleague Wainwright, both of whom (precisely because they are from elsewhere) push the reader away from Changez' s Pakistani particularities" (647). Wainwright and Jim indeed are kindred spirits Changez by virtue of similar backgrounds, but they do not "push the reader way" from the protagonist's cultural and national idiosyncrasies. Throughout the novel, Changez mentions his Pakistani heritage in corporate spaces, especially after 9/11. In fact, the beard itself illustrates Changez's resistance to cultural and national erasure in Underwood Samson.

[41] Changez tells the international news that "no country inflicts death so readily upon the inhabitants of other countries, frightens so many people so far away, as America" (Hamid 182).

[42] As his oeuvre expands, Hamid seems to depend on names less and less. *Moth Smoke*, his first novel, is abundant with place names, historical figures, and other proper nouns. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* has a few but a noticeably decreased amount; *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* has only one proper noun throughout (Asia). Finally, *Exit West* both skirts away from and specifies names. Nadia and Saeed are the only two named characters, and their home city is unnamed; however, the cities they move to are always named.

[43] Hamid argues that the migrant experience is a great equalizer. Toward the end of *Exit West*, for example, the narrator relays an elderly woman's experience of watching the world around her change as she stubbornly remains in the same house she grew up in. The section concludes with a simple sentence that works as the novel's thesis statement, so to speak: "We are all migrants through time" (Hamid 209). Nadia and Saeed are refugees, not migrants. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), migrants "choose to move not because of a direct threat of persecution or death, but mainly to improve their lives" and should

they choose to return home, migrants "will continue to receive the protection of their government" (unhcr.org). Refugees, on the other hand, are persons fleeing armed conflict or persecution" (unhcr.org). Nadia and Saeed certainly migrate within their own lives, working with, against, and toward monumental change; nevertheless, the political calamities that plague their city endanger them and *force* them to escape. Goyal takes Hamid to task for his novel's thesis, claiming, "Hamid's slogans like 'we are all migrants' or 'we are all refugees' distort the specific lived experience of the displaced person for whom such categories were invented, discarding the legal category for humanizing metaphor" (256). Jettisoning the refugee's lived experience by way of universalization destabilizes the victims' subjectivity and fails to consider the political consequences of the forced flight from home. In so doing, we also run the risk of not holding the responsible parties accountable. Therefore, throughout this section, I refer to Nadia and Saeed as refugees. Words matter, even in fictional worlds.

[44] As scholarship about *Exit West* continues to grow, one evident point of contention between scholars is how to categorize the novel. Al-Nakib deems it slipstream (235); whereas Goyal and Naydan consider it magical realism (250, 435). In a similar vein, Rubenstein takes from Ann and Jeff VanderMeer and categorizes *Exit West* as "New Weird" (Post45.com), and Nasia Anam calls it "dystopian" (672).

[45] Yogita Goyal touches on the unnamed setting in *Exit West*'s first half, adhering it to genre: "If realist novels traditionally evoke a sense of place by providing detailed descriptions of locations and characters that allow the reader to immerse herself in a recognizable culture, Exit West jettisons such a project of recognition, emplacement, or geopolitical specificity" (247). The unnamed city layers the novel with a sense of mystery and hints at the magical realist genre—one that many Brown authors have adopted. In an interview, Hamid claims that he refrained from naming the city because his affective response to making it Lahore would be too great: "…I didn't want to name it Lahore, where I live, because something terrible happens to that city. And it would have broken my heart to do it to my own city" (PBS News Hour). More obviously, the nameless setting in *Exit West* recalls the nameless nation in Hamid's third novel *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*.

[46] Terrorism-inspired art is another staple of post-9/11 literature. For example, in Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*, Lianne and Martin see towers in a still life painting of kitchen objects. Interestingly, it is only after Lianne and Martin look at the painting *together* that Lianne "saw what he saw. She saw the towers" (49). It takes a communal act for the towers to appear. That the Twin Towers appear in the painting of domestic items speaks to a larger argument I make throughout the project that terrorism, specifically 9/11, infiltrates and upends the domestic sphere, showing the attacks' influence in even the paltriest ways. For more on terrorism and art, see Kapadia and Pozorski.

[47] Nadan, arguing that screens in the novel work as a larger political metaphor, suggests that love, which is "flattened by flat digital screens" instead becomes three-dimensional and visceral: "*Exit West* finds magic and beauty in the acts of migration … and it portrays love as a part of a vision for social justice in a twenty-first century defined my migration amid ubiquitous screens and barriers" (446). While I do not agree that screens and barriers impede the flowering of love, I do agree that the novel certainly positions love as the diametric opposite of a twenty-first century tainted by political strife and violence. Whereas violence tears us apart, love brings us together.

In a particularly moving section, Hamid tells the story of two elderly men who fall in love because of their access to the doors. Hamid imagines a most hopeful consequence of a borderless world: not only does love flourish, but ridiculous qualms about who and how to love fall to the wayside.

[48] Love blossoming against a war-time background is not a new theme; indeed, it is a bit of a romantic literary cliché. Scores of novels juxtapose love and war. In contrast, *Exit West* bungs everything into one pan, so to speak, combining genres that include the war novel, the refugee novel, speculative fiction, and realist fiction.

[49] A walking contradiction in many ways, Nadia does not pray but wears her traditional robes so "'men don't fuck with [her],'" and she partakes in pre-marital sex and drugs (Hamid 17).

[50] In an essay for the *New York Times*, Hamid writes that racial surveillance reinforces the dividing wall between the public and the private. He uses the racial profiling he faces in airports as an example: "For 17 years, I entered and exited [the U.S.] with ease and traveled within it without impediment. … When I return now, I am sent to wait for an hour or longer at the secondary inspection facility deep in the windowless belly of every large American airport" ("The Great Divide"). He continues, claiming that nations utilize such borders (whether metaphorical or literal) most often on "the poor, the darker-skinned;" this is clear as Nadia and Saeed are forced behind the walls of their new London home by the police because of a divide between nativists and refugees ("The Great Divide").

[51] Refugee literature, unsurprisingly, is critical to literature and human rights. Scholars recognize that the refugee crisis directly correlates to human rights affronts that range from empire to famine and war. Human rights scholar Eleni Coundouriotis rightly argues that refugee literature thematizes flight in the mobile sense: flight from one place to another. She writes, "The narrative arc of stories of flight suggests we should rethink the framing of refugee experience as the result of a single event of expulsion/displacement in the past and see it instead as a tide of events that we cannot stem without returning to the refugee subject a promise of a future" (85). For more on the intersections of literature, the refugee crisis, and human rights, see Gallien, and Parikh.

[52] Vehicles often convey a deportation worry in this refugee crisis. Those who seek refuge in a nation are oftentimes sent back via plane or boat. Valeria Luiselli tragically shows this in *Lost Children Archive*; planes in particular signal the end of a hopeful dream. Talking about children she watches board a deportation plane, the narrator thinks, "…They'll be removed, relocated, erased, because there's no place for them in this vast empty country" (182). The plane is a technology of refusal and erasure in this sense. In this way, too, planes align with drones in this War on Terror culture: emerging from the sky to announce death and calamity.

[53] Nasia Anam claims that Nadia and Saeed witnessed an apocalypse when their city fell, which means that "the perceived end of the world amounts to no more than another trial to withstand. This is perhaps the most radical aspect of Hamid's novel: its insistence on defusing the apocalyptic by normalizing it and integrating it into the fabric of human life" (674). Anam's point underscores a routine experience of deterritorialization for refugees.

[54] Nguyen writes, "The refugee camp belongs to the same inhuman family as the internment amp, the concentration camp, the death camp. The camp is the place where we keep those who we do not see as fully being human, and if we do not actively seek their death in most cases, we

also often do not actively seek to restore many of them to the life that they had before, the life we have ourselves" (18)

[55] "Dark London" refers to the governmentally enforced blackout in the refugee camps. Blackouts and power failures are motifs in Hamid's fiction; characters often dwell in darkness because of power outages. Turning off the lights and submerging people into darkness is also a well-known torture tactic in the War on Terror that victims such as Salim call "The Darkness". This torture tactic figures prominently in Pakistani writer Mohammed Hanif's *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* in which protagonist-narrator Ali Shigri is plunged in the depths of a dark cell, skewing his sense of space and time. For a reading of energy and power in Hamid's novels, see Rubenstein; for more on War on Terror torture, see Bayoumi; for more on "The Darkness", see Risen.

[56] A hunter-prey binary appears throughout *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* in a layered metaphor about food. As Changez and his American interlocutor get ready to eat, Changez says, "…the time has now come for us to dirty our hands. … There is great satisfaction to be had in touching one's prey" (Hamid 123). This relationship between the hunter and the hunted speaks to my concentration of intimacy; while certainly not engaged in a filial relationship, the hunter and the prey do share an intimate bond with high stakes: life and death.

[57] In more ways than one, the apathy toward refugees in *Exit West* recalls the hatred toward Muslims in post-9/11 culture. The refugee threat—functioning under the strange assumption that "they'll take our jobs"—echoes the terrorist threat. Cultures metamorphose over time. The War on Terror culture does as well, shifting away from, but not erasing, a terrorist threat to a fear of the refugee. For more, see Crone.

[58] For more on this "everywhere" quality of the War on Terror, see Gregory.
[59] Karolina Golmowska argues that Oskar's quest re-territorializes New York City after the attacks. This is an "attempt to regain familiarity with the urban space through movement [and] is motivated by the desire and necessity to tame and control it" ("Navigating" 25). In this way, *Extremely Loud* parallels other post-9/11 metropolis navigation novels such as Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis* and Joshua Ferris's *The Unnamed*.
[60] Scholars routinely note the novel's postmodern qualities: the intertextuality, the multiple narrators, the temporal slippages, and the addition of photos, etc. Smith writes that a post-9/11 book like *Extremely Loud* "employs a variety of textual tricks that highlight the novel's artificiality, it wears its intertextual play on its sleeve, and it blends a degree of realism with interjections of the absurd" (164). For more on the postmodern qualities of *Extremely Loud*, see Däwes, Holland, Ingersoll, and Smith.
[61] Matthew Leggatt offers a contrarian view about the attacks, claiming that little changed after the Towers fell and that fiction does not reflect the so-called shift other scholars address simply because writers never address the change: "Just as these fictional works fail to articulate any tangible difference outside of the lives of particular characters who may have been directly affected by the event, it is hard to identify exactly what has changed in its wake" (208). For more about whether 9/11 was a watershed moment, see Leggatt and Dudziak.
[62] Foer's first novel, *Everything Is Illuminated*, similarly nests narratives. The interlocking pieces in *Illuminated* are much larger in scope, however, spanning from the late 18th century to the late 90s.
[63] Ilka Saal writes that *Stuff That Happened to Me* encourages a victim-oriented empathy: "our narrative memory must then inevitably proceed from the perspective of victimhood, the passive voice that effaces agency and reduces history to 'Stuff that Happened to Me', as the title of Oskar's scrapbook aptly suggests" (467).
[64] For more on the relationship between *Extremely Loud* and *Hamlet*, see Ingersoll, who claims that the novel uses intertextuality to convey a sense of tragedy. He writes, "For Oskar, 9/11 was especially tragic because the father he lost was in his eyes the perfect father, reminiscent of the idealized father figure Hamlet mourns" (55).
[65] Dominick LaCapra writes, "In working through [trauma], the person tries to gain critical distance on a problem and to distinguish between past, present, and future" (143). This is the inherent struggle of the novel's three protagonists: the past joins the present and the future with immense pain, reflective of the novel's obscure temporality.
[66] For more on the full closet and empty casket, see Bryan, who examines commemoration in the novel.
[67] As Sheila Liming remarks, "…the archive, as a space and as a construct, engineers forms of distance while also affording certain levels of intimacy" (146). Thomas's closet simultaneously abates Oskar's heavy boots and reminds him of his father's physical absence. Hence, Foer reminds us that objects cannot replace the subject. That familial disunity, though painful, will remain.

[68] Susan Stewart writes that a souvenir of the past "generates a narrative which only reaches 'behind,' spiraling in a continually inward movement rather than outward toward the future" (135).
[69] For more on kinship objects, see Ahmed, Appadurai, Holmes, and Carsten.
[70] Philippe Codde writes that the key is "a transparent metaphor for the door that will presumably give [Oskar] access to his father's past" (3). While the key does metaphorically unlock a door for the protagonist, the door does not lead to an understanding about Thomas's past. Though he learns a little about his father on his adventure, Oskar considers the key a clue in one final adventure with Thomas. The other narrators tell us more about Thomas's past.
[71] This idea of small action and large consequence applies to the Schell family dynamics as they relate to 9/11's international influence. Thomas is just one out of almost three thousand victims in the attacks. His death is even more inconsequential when we consider the War on Terror. Nevertheless, as the novel reminds us time-and-time again, Thomas's death has towering effects on Oskar's life.
[72] In her examination of the death of things in postwar American fiction, Sarah Wasserman writes, "When we turn our attention from the life of things to the way things die, we see that perpetual—but never absolute—loss is fundamental to the experience of many American novels" (*Death* 23). Thus Oskar's obsession to figure out exactly how Thomas died is part of a larger American tradition.
[73] Initial reviews of *Extremely Loud* deem the novel overly sentimental because of Oskar's narration and the depiction of trauma after the attacks. For instance, John Updike called the novel "sentimentally watery" (newyorker.com). Scholars such as Victoria Marie Bryan skeptically approach inflammatory reviews of the novel. Bryan notes that the critiques of Oskar are unfair and that the child-narrator is in fact "a representation of the post-9/11 condition" (275). I appreciate Bryan's attempts to rectify unfair reviews of the novel, but her reading paints a monochromatic reading of Oskar as the post-attack sentiment, creating a monolith of mourning. Not everyone in the nation (or the world) mourns similarly. The material obsessions highlight just one way to process trauma.
[74] For more on empathy and *Extremely Loud*, see Saal, "Regarding".
[75] In an article about how graphics narrate and navigate plot, Johanna Drucker writes that "the graphic *placement* of the images plays a crucial part in the way they produce meaning within the text" (122). As such, the art store pad works as a navigational tool, pushing the narrative forward and encouraging Oskar to search for other instances of Thomas's name. Scholarship about the graphic qualities of Foer's novel is underdeveloped. While an in-depth inquiry of the graphic content goes beyond the purviews of this chapter, it would be welcome in the conversations about fiction's innovations 20 years after 9/11. For more on graphics, see Drucker and Watkins.
[76] Dowling writes that the space Thomas leaves and the spaces in Grandma's narrative can "attest to things unassimilated and unavailable to direct knowledge that create rifts within one's sense of time, self and reality" (3).
[77] Without a doubt, the flipbook stands as the most divisive aspect of the novel. Some initial reviewers scorned the use of the falling man images while others embraced the visual treatment of national trauma. For instance, Walter Kirn angrily deems the flipbook "high jinks" and "Peter Pan-ish" (*New York Times*). In another example, B.R. Myers calls the novel's conclusion "poor

taste" (*The Atlantic*). Scholars conversely tend to applaud the flipbook for its "touching account of a young man growing up" (Gray 52). For more on the controversy surrounding *Extremely Loud*'s conclusion, see Pozorski, who deems such critical oscillation a quality of the crisis of art after 9/11: "There are too many possibilities of seeing a terrorist attack in any number of scenarios" (x).

[78] Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows*—the subject of Part III—also pairs WWII to 9/11 and the War on Terror.

[79] Jennifer Rickel argues that the parallels between the Dresden bombings and 9/11 renders both events apolitical. She writes, "bearing witness to 9/11 by way of Dresden effaces the victims and depoliticizes both events. It implies that American suffering on 9/11 absolves the US of its historical military aggressions and initiates the nation into victimhood" (179). While the nation is a victim of its own devices, this does not push Foer to depoliticize either event. Rather, it universalizes the notion of historical tragedy as affecting both Germany and America. One catastrophe does not trump another. For more on the universalizing of tragedy and war-driven pain, see Versluys.

[80] Similarly, Watkins proffers that Grandma's "use of protracted spaces between sentences … seem to capture something of the careful articulation (pace and hence tone) of her iterations" (6). She tiptoes around her past, circumspect in her remembrances.

[81] Verslyus compellingly asserts that filiality "triggers the ultimate unburdening and, finally, allows [Grandma] to place trauma within language" (98). Yet, as the linguistic tower of graphic memory attests, the attempt to unburden illustrates trauma too. Thus, the cycle of painful memory and loss continues.

[82] This recalls the material preservation of the schtetl Trachimbrod in *Everything Is Illuminated*. The small town is razed by a Nazi raid, leaving only one survivor, a woman who salvaged everything she could from her hometown.

[83] The adverbs "extremely" and "incredibly" refer to various things that shape Oskar's life. Beyond the proximity of historical trauma and political violence, the adverbs also recall William Black, the owner of the lock, who first appears early in the novel. Oskar hears him at Abby Black's apartment: "The man in the other room called again, this time extremely loudly" (Foer 93). Oskar learns the identity of "man in the other room" much later. The coincidence reveals that William was, like history, incredibly close. We see how Foer networks relations not only through the key but also through serendipity.

[84] In every narrator's section, trauma is indelible and entirely too awful to put into clear words. Passing over of the attacks is a trope in post-9/11 literature. I interrogate a similar passing over 9/11 in Part III in my analysis *Sons and Other Flammable Objects*.

[85] Pozorski claims about this linguistic impasse, "We as American intellectuals, artists, citizens, and parents have found ourselves at a crisis point that stems from an inadequate response to twenty-first century traumas" (ix). She suggests that the issue with the post-lapsarian moment is "not that there are no adequate words or signs" to reference the attacks; rather, the problem "is that there are too many" (1). To that end, my interrogation of the inundation of stuff in *Extremely Loud* falls in line with Pozorski's claim that too many references abound. Oskar sees 9/11 and familial fracture in every object.

[86] David James writes that O'Neill's lyrical realism "democratiz[es] the sublime" and "captures wonderment in a quotidian instant, implying that there's something enriching … about the way awe might be collectively observed and shared by people who otherwise wouldn't acknowledge each other" (74, "In Defense").
[87] Kim, a structural engineer, in *Burnt Shadows* does the same. In this way, materialist inquiry into post-9/11 literature affords a look at how the attacks invade and define every space and the most specific objects.
[88] For more on the Chelsea Hotel, see Golimowska ("Cricket as Cure"), Hill, and Wasserman ("Optics").
[89] It is necessary to note that other terroristic acts do not register the same level of despair as 9/11. Comparing London to New York, Hans narrates, "…in spite even of the disturbance of 7/7—a frightening but not a disorienting occurrence, it turns out—Londoners remain in the business of rowing their boats gently down the stream" (O'Neill 178). Hans passes off the terrorist attacks on 7/7/2005, which killed 52 and injured 700, on the London Underground as if they are almost nothing.
[90] Kathy Knapp argues that post-9/11 suburban American novel introduces a new kind of everyman: "A middle-class, middle-aged white male who holds himself accountable both for his failures and his failure to act" (xxvi-xxvii). While Hans is not middle-aged, nor does he live in suburbia, the sentiment of accountability remains true; he openly blames himself—at least in part—for the disillusion of his marriage, merging the roles of international politics and personal misgivings as equally influential on the domestic sphere. He reaches an epiphany: "I felt shame because it was me, not terror, she was fleeing" (29-30).
[91] The dehumanized description of himself recalls the grotesque dehumanized descriptions of Mr. Tanaka after the bombing of Nagasaki in *Burnt Shadows*, the subject of part III. The apocalyptic descriptions of life and self in post-9/11 fiction is a fruitful line of inquiry that goes beyond the purviews of this project.
[92] One cannot help but search for all the allusions to O'Neill's Modernist literary ancestors. Here, the chime of Big Ben is a homage to *Mrs Dalloway*. Clarissa finds the resounding rings of the tower "irrevocable," as if Big Ben notates death knells rather than hours (4). For more on O'Neill and Modernism, see Snyder.
[93] Such a passage is indicative of what Smith deems a sickness in contemporary novels: "It seems perfectly done—in a sense that's the problem. It's so precisely the image of what we have been taught to value in fiction that it throws that image into a kind of existential crisis, as the photograph gifts a nervous breakdown to the painted portrait" (np). Smith ignores the clear callbacks to Fitzgerald's lyricism in *The Great Gatsby*; the lyrical realism in *Netherland*, too, speaks to the necessary act of making the mundane beautiful, as David James argues in his article, which can be read as a kind of response to Smith.
[94] For more on the shift from the sublime to the picturesque, see Stewart.
[95] Smith writes, "But if literary Realism survived the assault of Joyce, it retained the wound. Netherland bears this anxiety trace, it foregrounds its narrative nostalgia, asking us to note it, and look kindly upon it" (np).
[96] The memory of the ferry ride with his mother is indicative of what Svetlana Boym calls restorative nostalgia, which "puts emphasis on *nostos* and proposes to rebuild the lost home and

patch up the memory gaps" (41). Moreover, nostalgia of healing "builds on the sense of loss of community and cohesion" (42).

[97] The flinging backwards and forwards in time in *Netherland* not only reflects the way memory catapults us into different moments in time and space, but it also echoes the arbitrary nature of the world itself. In an interview with *Contemporary Literature*, O'Neill states, "…I mean I try to produce a novel which reflects the way things in the world come into being: randomly" (6). This also mirrors the way cricket seems to divinely fall into Hans's lap.

[98] O'Neill's 2014 satirical novel *The Dog* concludes not suspended but reclined; protagonist X. awaits Dubai government officials in his beloved reclining chair, overlooking an ironic "magnificent vista" of a white wall. X. narrates, "I could stay where I am, looking at that wall, for a long time—and in fact this is what I do, quite without foreboding. On the contrary: any minute now, Watson, followed soon after by the others, will as it were rat-a-tat-tat on the door" (O'Neill 241). *The Dog*, like *Netherland*, takes its narrative impetus from marital fallout, but it does not end with a portrait of reunion. The suspended ending thus operates differently across O'Neill's oeuvre. On the one hand, it signals the sun-dripped horizon of possibility of a post-America life; on the other, it functions as a generic convention, leaving the reader to wonder whether neoliberalist X. will be imprisoned for his post-America choices.

[99] This ennui and despair of how to fill the day after the attacks and familial fallout is the subject of many post-9/11 novels. For instance, in *The Good Life*, protagonist Luke tells Corrine, "'…I can't imagine *what* I should be doing. What are we supposed to do now?'" (McInerney 95).

[100] Jeffery Gonzalez writes that *Netherland* depicts "a white person struggling not to react defensively when encountering demographic diversity or consider black and brown bodies derisively" and that the novel therefore "becomes an interesting one to consider in an era of resurgent nativism, where multicultural societies must face the problem of whiteness meeting itself as a result of meeting its Others" (301).

[101] Interestingly, like *Extremely Loud*, *Netherland* is devoid of any reference to the PATRIOT Act or any mention of domestic strife following the attacks. Rather, O'Neill emphasizes the international ramifications, even if just slightly.

[102] For more on cricket and community and for more on macro-micro relations in literature, see Moraru.

[103] José Liste Noya writes that American cricket is "true to its oxymoronic name, for cricket here represents what America defaults upon, the American promise itself…," making the city a space of unlimited possibility (394).

[105] Scholars such as Daniel Immerwahr, Steven Belletto, and Joseph Keith rightly claim that neocolonialism is responsible for America's position as the world's hyperpower. Immerwahr suggests that America owes this rise to power to the acquisition of "military bases, tiny specks of semi-sovereignty strewn around the globe" after WWII and colonialism ended in its traditional sense (343-344). This imperial change from large colonies to dots on a map emblematize neocolonialism. Like in traditional colonial endeavors, a racial capitalism drives neocolonialism, and on the page, the two empire-affirming ideologies look similar. More specifically, Belletto and Keith posit that U.S. neocolonialism in particular "legitimated its ascendance to the dominant international power by redeploying a long-standing and central ideology of American exceptionalism: the idea that the United States was in a distinctive position to lead the world and to promote the general interests of humanity and freedom, not only because it was anti-Communist but because it was innocent of Old World legacies of empire and colonialism" (3).
[106] For a detailed analysis of Hiroko's burns and their narrative impact, see Jose, who claims that "While Hiroko may want to leave behind the trauma of the Nagasaki bombing, the continuing effects of the bombing on her body results in the very late birth of her son which in turn creates a particular kind of subjective experience" (11).
[107] For a detailed comparison of the bombing of Nagasaki and 9/11, see Ramazani.
[108] This episode recalls the disharmony of worlds colliding in *Sons and Other Flammable Objects*, which I explain in part two of the chapter. The fear of worlds colliding in an already-interconnected world is ironic and demands more interrogation, especially as it relates to terroristic and colonial violence.
[109] Zinck claims that *Burnt Shadows* falls into the category of contemporary fiction that "[focuses] on the failure of relocation and the need to return to one's homeland" (53). While I agree that *Burnt Shadows* is in part about the failure of relocation—underscored by Hiroko's moves across the globe—I disagree that the novel imports the desire to return home. Early in the book, Hiroko quite plainly states that she does not wish to return to Nagasaki: "'I don't want to go back to Nagasaki. Or to Japan. I don't want to hide these burns on my back, but I don't want people to judge me by them either'" (101).
[110] Shared experiences as progenitors of relationships appear throughout Shamsie's fiction, and they are not contingent upon terrorism or other acts of political upheaval. Her oeuvre, instead, highlights how connection can be forged from all facets of life. Devon Cambell-Hall, for example, argues that in Shamsie's *Salt and Saffron*, "Food serves as the catalyst that enables a communication that transcends the social discrepancies between this couple" (177). A more recent example is how Eamonn and Isma connect through their Britishness in America in *Home Fire*.
[111] Shamsie routinely takes up anti-state positions in her fiction, oftentimes critiquing nations through a feminist lens. In *Broken Verses*, for instance, protagonist Aasmani Inqalab castigates Pakistan's patriarchal structures and censorship laws; in *Home Fire*, Shamsie denounces British racism and xenophobia, claiming that state-imposed restrictions on Muslims in turn have a hand

in the devolution of the family. For more on Shamsie and the state, see Emily Horton and Bruce King.

[112] This is not to say, however, that the novel does not feature characteristic elements of post-9/11 literature. Like other post-9/11 narratives that center on family and the consequences of political strife such as Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* or Fatima Farhan Mirza's *A Place for Us*. For more information on this domestic turn in post-9/11 fiction, see Richard Gray and Kathy Knapp.

[113] Kim is, of course, not the only racist character. Steve—a paramilitary CIA officer and Harry's former colleague—also harbors a similar worldview based on assumptions. For instance, he conflates all Arab people to members of al-Qaeda (283). Shamsie underscores domestic and international American prejudice against Middle Eastern people.

[114] Shamsie's 2017 novel *Home Fire* echoes Raza's turn toward the mujahideen; in it, Parvaiz joins the Islamic State and realizes the error of his ways. Men's disillusion with Islamic fundamentalism recurs in Shamsie's fiction.

[115] Shamsie states something similar to Zinck about the prologue, though not as controversially, "Well, the first page of the novel is actually the last thing I wrote—and I did it because I wanted the readers to have some sort of sense of where the action would end; it felt too dislocating to place the readers in Nagasaki with no sense of where or how the book might propel itself forward" ("Interview" 159).

[116] For more on the American decolonization project after WWII, see Immerwahr and David Newsom.

[117] Immerwahr writes that "the Bush administration figured out that it could use the U.S. Empire" to detain suspected terrorists; thus, the naval base "held on lease from Cuba since 1903" transformed into a CIA prison in 2002 (389).

[118] Mahajan's depiction of Gitmo as a legal and human rights transgression welcomes a reading that pairs well with recent literary criticism about the contemporary era. For example, with her ideas about incarceration, Yogita Goyal maintains that "[s]lavery, in fact, frames a range of contemporary phenomena across the globe: from human trafficking to illegal immigration, from conscription in war as a child soldier to forced marriage, from debt bondage to domestic servitude" (2). Goyal's conceptualization of the legacy of slavery in the 21st century includes narratives that feature unlawful incarceration and torture. Scholars like Georgiana Banita rightly include incarceration narratives in the post-9/11 cannon.

[119] The ironic and dispiriting use of the conditional mood at the end of *Burnt Shadows* opposes the hopeful tone Khakpour takes at the end of her novels. Whereas Khakpour takes the optimistic route, Shamsie takes the pessimistic, presenting a harsh reality about the global political ramifications on terroristic states.

[120] While Harry Burton is a man who, according to Kamila Shamsie, lives "in a world of lies and manipulation" and whose only desire "is to win," he most certainly would not be proud of Kim's mistake ("Interview" 161). The betrayal of family is antithetical to Harry's relationship with Sajjad, Hiroko, and Raza. Though he worked for the purveyors of terrorism in the Middle East, Harry maintains his thread in the spider's web. He is loyal to his family.

[121] For more on falling and 9/11, see Ancker, Junod, and Pozorski.

[122] For example, Sanaz Banu Nikein writes in her poem "Iranians v Persians", "As soon as a bomb explodes--/ … every news station reports with no shame:/ *it's probably Iranians again*"

(Karim 9-13). The Orientalism Mikein stresses takes root in the assumption that Iranians are terrorists and hail from "the axis of evil," what President Bush deemed the trio of Iran, North Korea, and Iraq during his 2002 State of the Union Address.

[123] This project aligns itself with Aimee Pozorski's examination of falling in literature about 9/11. The concentrated look at one recurring image in a survey of literature about the terrorist attacks is still novel, but it is fruitful in its narrow scope because it shines a light on the trends in contemporary literature. In so doing, these purposefully constrained interpretative lenses recognize a shared understanding of altered meaning of particular images or ideas. For more, see Pozorski and Knapp.

[124] For different understandings of neo-Orientalism, see Douai and Lauricella, Altwaji, and Keshavarz.

[125] Moreover, neo-Orientalism from within the Middle Eastern world itself seems to originate largely from memoirs and novels that exoticize the Middle East, and that they are "produced, published, and disseminated mainly in the United States and Western Europe suggests that their authors' investment in politics must be understood … in relation to the neo-imperial interests and interventions of the United States in the region" (Behdad and Williams http://www.entekhabi.org/).

[126] The Revolution's power to displace people and replace notions of home for the Adam family bring to mind Azar Nafisi's romanticizing of America as an Oz-like nation of glory and brilliance: "As the reality of the Islamic Republic insinuated itself into our lives and Tehran lost its colors and sounds, America was transformed in my imagination into a lush, green, teasingly colorful and desirable land" (72). For the Adams, however, the man behind the curtain soon reveals himself and America's shine quickly tarnishes. This is a hallmark in Khakpour's work. For more, see her short story "In the House of Desire, Honey, Marble, and Dreams".

[127] Whereas the apartment complex reflects the global world, with its many ethnicities and nationalities, it is isolating to the Adams because they seem to be the only Iranians there. Eden Gardens is removed from the large Iranian community in Los Angeles known as Tehrangeles. This community denotates a class divide among the Iranian-Americans, highlighting the economic disparities immigrants faced after the Revolution. Many maintained their wealth, while others lost it. Eden Gardens, moreover, reflects Khakpour's own experiences after moving from Iran to L.A. Her family lost a portion of its wealth in the early years of the Iran-Iraq War. She states that the Iranian population in Tehrangeles "was the worst of L.A. in some ways. Very materialistic, very consumer culture, flash and trash L.A. stuff, and we were sort of nerdy, more modest family living about a half hour away … I was a little phobic of them" (Introduction 16). For more, see Khakpour, "What I Saw".

[128] Violence entering the domestic sphere is a common theme in post-9/11 fiction. For example, in Ian McEwan's *Saturday*, Henry Perowne and his family are terrorized by a group of men who take the family hostage. The Perowne family's harrowing account is set against the backdrop of the anti-Iraq War protests in London. Another instance is in Don DeLillo's 2002 story "Baader-Meinhof", which is about a man who enters a woman's apartment and refuses to leave without sex. The threat of rape reeks in every moment, but ultimately does not occur. Still, however, the man's refusal to leave and terrorizing behavior mars the protagonist's world: "She saw everything twice now. She was where she wanted to be, and alone, but nothing was the same"

(117, *Angel*). The specifically gendered form of terror in the domestic sphere like in *Saturday* and "Baader-Meinhof" necessitates more interrogation in post-9/11 studies. For more, see Ancker.

[129] Besides the Iranian Revolution's displacing powers, familial trauma clarifies why Lala has "no comment on her old homeland" (Khakpour 61). After their parents are killed in a car crash, Lala and her brother, Bob, live with extended family. When Bob disappears, Lala is bereft of her immediate family. A major subplot in the novel is Lala's search for her brother; it is what takes her to New York City and how she is able to save Xerxes at the end of the novel. This project does not allow for a sustained analysis of Lala's traumatic childhood and the disappearance of family as an identity-shaping mechanism, but this is a worthy line of inquiry in future criticism about *Sons*.

[130] The relationship between falling, "Adam", and sin does not escape me, but I refrain from aligning the three together in my analysis because the imparting of Western Judeo-Christian perceptions onto the non-Jewish and non-Christian Middle Eastern subject fuels the identity politics of the novel, and an analysis that reads falling as a sin opposes Khakpour's political agenda.

[131] Here, we see how *Sons*, like *Burnt Shadows*, displacement is direct a consequence of American hyperpower.

[132] The election of Donald Trump in 2016 did not mollify relations with Iran either. Trump's Muslim ban revved up tensions like never before, barring the entry of "foreign nationals" from many Muslim-majority nations, including Iran (whitehouse.gov). Matters took a turn for the worse in January 2020 when President Trump issued a call, killing General Suleimani in Iran and leading the two nations on the brink of war. About the Muslim ban, Khakpour asks, "What is going to happen to this country, what will they do to my other country? You can be a refugee once, I've always thought, but how to be one twice?" (*CNN*). For more see Baker, et al.

[133] Melani McAlister writes that anti-Iranian sentiment in America originates from the media's positioning of the Iran Hostage Crisis as an attack on the American family and domestic sphere. She writes, "The private sphere … became politicized precisely through the staging of an imminent threat to its autonomy. With the family under siege as a highly visible trope, the preservation of a privileged site for the nonpolitical life of individuals became the signifier of American national identity" (199-200). For more on American-Iranian relations in the 70s and 80s, see McAlister.

[134] Khakpour writes about her experiences with camels in a personal essay that recounts a trip to the zoo in 1986. Her family encourages her to ride a camel named Scheherazade, though she's apprehensive because of its Orientalist connections to Middle Eastern people. She recalls, "Father, I don't want to be taken for what I inevitably think they will take this as, a group of Middle Easterners here—Iranians actually, and just a few years after these guys were selling 'Fuck Iran' buttons in supermarkets" (*Guernica*). For more, see "Camel Ride, Los Angeles, 1986".

[135] For in-depth historical analyses on the targeted racism toward Middle Eastern people after the Iranian Revolution and 9/11, see Maghbouleh, McAlister, and Lee.

[136] Dual identity is a linchpin in post-9/11 fiction. In this way, *Sons* likens itself to a plethora of post-9/11 novels that handles the delicate topic of the attacks and identity, particularly for

Middle Eastern and South Asian characters. For more see Fatima Farhan Mirza's *A Place for Us*, Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*, Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist,* and Ayad Akhtar's *Homeland Elegies*.

[137] Many post-9/11 novels engage with the events themselves, thrusting characters into the Towers during the attacks. For example, Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* begins with protagonist Keith Neudecker walking out into "not a street anymore but a world, a time and space of falling ash and near night" (3). Keith works in the Twin Towers and escapes before they fall. In a more harrowing and more emotionally draining example, Frédéric Beigbeder imagines a father and his two sons in the Windows on the World restaurant at the time of the attacks. As the novel continues, we see the futile risks people take at the top of the North Tower to save themselves or each other. For an analysis of these novels, see Kristiaan Versluys.

[138] Incidentally, hope looms largely in Khakpour's fiction in relation to the terrorist attacks. For example, her second novel *The Last Illusion* concludes with the towers falling and people "not silent but shouting, and not crying but laughing," and in the dusty air of the post-fall New York City, all protagonist Zal knows is "the realness of the moment, the most alive he'd ever felt" (319).

[139] David Simpson examines why authors pass over the grotesque and perhaps pornographic descriptions of the terror of 9/11. He argues that to understand 9/11, authors must not shy away from depicting the scale of death in their writing: "But there has been a visible taboo cast over the real or imagined representation of dead and dying people, one that is not fully explained by appealing to the feelings of the survivors or of the families and friends of the victims" (213). To do right by those who perished and those who survived, Simpson suggests, writers must adhere to the harsh realism. Doing so begins the process of deciphering what seems undecipherable.

[140] Maghbouleh importantly notes that a further irony in the post-Revolution and post-Hostage Crisis immigration flux has to do with race. Iranians race themselves as white because of their Arian ancestry, and the U.S. indeed legally recognizes them as such; however, after moments of historical upheaval such as the Iranian Revolution and 9/11, Iranians are socially Brown. This browning coincides with the uptick in racialized violence and targeted xenophobia toward Brown people in the late 20th century that continues today.

[141] Erika Lee presents an alarming statistic about racial profiling in the immediate aftermath of 9/11: "In the days following the terrorist attacks, 1,200 men who matched an Arab/Middle Eastern/Muslim phenotype and were determined to be suspicious were arrested and detained under high security conditions. None were found to be connected with terrorist activity, but many were ordered deported on immigration violations and were referred to by the government as 'terrorists,'" (302). The post-9/11 racially motivated ideology reflects a pre-decolonial mindset that depends on the likes of xenophobia and Orientalism. To assume that a phenotype equates to terrorist takes root in scientific racism.

[142] The Frankfurt airport is an imperative space for the Iranian-American experience. The city is one of the few layover places in between American and Iran: law "requires American-based travelers to fly to Iran with international carriers and to book itineraries that include a layover in a place not under US diplomatic sanction" (Maghbouleh 116). In other words, because U.S.-Iran relations have been tenuous since the Iranian Revolution, those visiting Iran must leave American airspace first, enter another nation's airspace, and *then* fly to Iran. A game of

international leapfrog. For more on airports and the politics of flight, see Maghbouleh, chapter five.

[143] Douai and Lauricella claim that different cultural mediums, especially mass media and the news, frame Middle Eastern men as terrorists through Orientalist projections of inter-Islamic sectarian strife. They argue that "an investigation of Western media's news coverage of the Shia-Sunni tensions offers an opportunity to revisit the deep-seated Orientalist treatment of Islam as 'Other'" (11).

[144] Khakpour calls the unexpected ending "a false contract with the reader" (*Modern Language Studies* 22).

[145] About this idea of a sustained critique of empire in after 9/11, Said writes, "We allow justly that the Holocaust has permanently altered the consciousness of our time: why do we not accord the same epistemological mutation in what imperialism has done, and what Orientalism continues to do?" (xviii 2003). For more, see his preface to the third edition of *Orientalism* (2003).

[146] For more on zombies and 9/11 see Peter Dendle.
[147] I opt for "apocalyptic" rather than "post-apocalyptic" here because, as both *Zone One* and *Severance* make very clear, the apocalypse is on-going. Zombies still roam, social structures still fail, and conditions of the present perpetually remain bleak. For more on "apocalyptic" versus "post-apocalyptic", see Heneks.
[148] Whitehead often notes the influence of George A. Romero's 1968 film *Night of the Living Dead*, which features a Black protagonist not unlike Mark Spitz. But Whitehead's fascination with zombies is across his oeuvre. In *Sag Harbor,* for instance, protagonist-narrator Benji describes a hoard of white customers outside an ice cream parlor as a group of "the living dead" (Whitehead 139). Another instance occurs in *Apex Hides the Hurt* when the unnamed protagonist becomes zombie-like with an infected toe, and he walks around with an "Advanced State of Necrosis" (200). The fixation on zombies throughout Whitehead's works signals not only a subjective interest in the walking (un)dead and the cultural relevancy of the zombie figure, but it also highlights the way Whitehead uses the horror trope in a variety of ways: as a symbol of invaders, of corporeal limits, and of figures of history. For more on the mutability of the zombie, see Lauro.
[149] Huehels suggests that Whitehead's theme of post-races spearheads a new kind of African American novel, one that treats race as "ontological rather than representational" and in which its "significance derives from the way it does or does not impact, connect, link up with, and influence other things in the world" (110).
[150] Marc Redfield compellingly writes that the narrative center of 9/11 isn't the attacks on the Pentagon or on the plane that crashed in Pennsylvania but instead on New York City because "the socio-geographical space inhabited by the World Trade Center was (and is) heavily mediatized, so utterly penetrated by representational technologies of global reach, and so symbolically at the heart of the world's various political, financial, and semiotic webs of power that the destruction of the towers could not help being at once the ultimate media event and (therefore) a haunting image of the deracinating force of communicational technology at work…" (3).
[151] For more on film and Whitehead, see Spencer.
[152] This scene about the television compares the attacks to what many scholars have already addressed: that 9/11 looked like a blockbuster disaster film. As Redfield reminds us, "the main medium of transmission was television. It is estimated that by the end of the day as many as two billion people worldwide had seen footage of the burning and collapsing towers" (27). For more on the filmic qualities of 9/11, see Redfield and Engle.
[153] For more on *Zone One* and grammatical construction, see Swanson.
[154] Hoberek marks that alongside the praises of the metropolis, "[e]leswhere the novel indulges in a running joke about suburbia," which is "the site of Mark Spitz's greatest trials" (408). In this way, *Zone One* is similar to other post-9/11 novels that show the effects 9/11 had on suburbia: Lorrie Moore's *A Gate at the Stairs,* Chang Rae-Lee's *Aloft*, and Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land,* to name a few.

[155] In *Game of Thrones*, for example, the Wall in the northernmost region of Westeros separates civilization from wild terrain and staves off White Walkers—frozen zombies—from entering the continent. The wall inevitably falls.
[156] Whitehead's humanizing of skels counters what many scholars such as Saunders believe is fundamental to the zombie creature's subjectivity: they exist but are wholly inhumane. Saunders writes that a zombie "lacks any traits evoking humanity (other than its human-like shell)," and it is for that reason—along with their dead/undead subjectivity—that Saunders calls for them to be called "post-dead" (86).
[157] Thomas writes that resilience "refers to the ability to adapt to and recover from disaster" and that "[R]resilient individuals are like flexible objects—nonhuman in their ability to bounce back" (119, 120). This certainly describes Mark Spitz who, despite losing his nuclear family and numerous chosen families, exhibits an unnatural ability to get back up and continue to fight.
[158] Saunders, for instance, writes that "the current obsession with zombies, and particularly looming (albeit unlikely) threat of human-zombie conflicts, is a reflection of the dangers of invasive alterity associated with uncontrolled spaces in the current era of globalization" (80-81). For more on the zombie and the rise in post-9/11, see Saunders, Stratton, and Thomas.
[159] Dora Zhang writes that Candace's affectless response to the monumental shifts in her life speak to one of the many meanings of the title: the "severance" of the title applies not only to job layoffs and the displacements of global migration, but also to the remove from one's affective life — and the narrowing of its scope — that comes from prolonged and multi-pronged alienation" (*Post45*).
[160] For more on Candace's camera, photographs, and blog, see Beeston.
[161] For more on working and the immigrant experience, see Wong.
[162] Lauren Berlant writes that "capitalist activity always induces destabilizing scenes of productive destruction—of resources and of lives being made and unmade according to the dictates and whims of the market" (192). Candace behaves thusly with Spectra: subjecting poorly paid laborers further into precarity for the Bible production. This, of course, spins out of control when Shen Fever blooms across the world.
[163] Eileen Ying argues that the fevered "take Marx's theory of alienation to its logical endpoint: all sense of agency appears to have been evacuated from the working body, now perfectly docile and utterly disconnected from the objects it produces" (*Post45*). But these workers, importantly, alter the outcome capitalism has in mind for them. Calling the fevered *coolies*, Ying continues: "though the fevered exhibit an extraordinary endurance, they are entirely unproductive. Ma's coolies short-circuit the capitalist system in which they live, resulting in wholesale economic collapse" (*Post45*).
[164] This kind of vibrantly expressed nostalgia occurs throughout *Severance*. Take, for instance, how Candace walks past a Juicy Couture flagship shop after the city empties: "it looked so pristine … Not just untouched but immaculate" (Ma 258). The narrator revels in the store's rare, untouched perfection. But the moment of normalcy is undercut by the fevered employee with a missing jaw. Candace posts a picture of the saleswoman to NY Ghost and is accused of "posting disaster porn" (259). Not only do these details ironize Candace's—and the reader's—expectations, but they also connect the pandemic to 9/11. The day after the attacks, news outlets printed or showed the (in)famous Falling Man image taken by Richard Drew. The media was

similarly accused of sharing disaster porn. For more on the censorship of post-9/11 images of trauma, see Pozorski, Engle, and Junod.

[165] Bob speaks to the many traditional zombie narrative tropes. Usually a man, the self-appointed leader in zombie fiction often has deep rooted familial trauma and is shrouded in a mysterious past. Think, for example, of The Governor or Negan in *The Walking Dead*.

[166] Wong writes, "The fevered acquire the blank face of both the screen viewer and the inscrutable and technophilic Oriental — the Asiatic body who haunts discourses about the pandemic in both Ma's novel and COVID-19" (*Post45*).

[167] Again, like Whitehead, Ma takes clear inspiration from George Romero's *Dawn of the Dead*, which takes place in part in an abandoned mall.

[168] The difference in *Severance*, however, is the notion of willful roaming rather than forced or necessary displacement. For more on walking and Ma's novel, see Summer Kim Lee.

[169] Mediation is another important difference between Shen Fever and 9/11. On the one hand, people witness the fall of New York to Shen Fever, but most die and don't read the NY Ghost after the End: "*If New York is breaking down and no one documents it, is it actually happening?*" (Ma 254). The blog is the only form of media that maps what's happening in the city. On the other hand, most people witnessed 9/11 and only a few, comparatively speaking, died.

[170] Aanchal Saraf argues that Ma employs the many manifestations of severances throughout to position the novel as anti-capitalist: "Our severance needn't be from homeland or community, but from the very processes that seek to dehumanize us and reduce us to mere abstraction" (22).