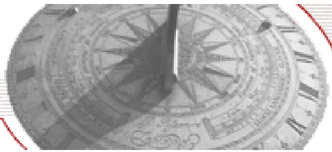
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""Pull a thread here and you'll find it's attached to the rest of the world": Perpetration and Community in Nadeem Aslam's The Wasted Vigil"

Renard, Christopher

ABSTRACT

After the tragic attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, there has been an increasing tendency to consider only Muslims as responsible, as demonstrated by their almost constant demonization in post-9/11 novels. Chapter 2 will show that most authors have reproduced a dichotomic discourse about terrorism – considering, as pointed out by Edward Said, that 'we' are never terrorists, 'they' always are. The last chapter eventually conducts an analysis of Nadeem Aslam's novel The Wasted Vigil, which offers a completely new perspective. The present dissertation aims to show how the Pakistani novel blurs the lines between the subject-positions of victims and perpetrators – which are both investigated in the first chapter of the present work. Aslam, through his historicization of 9/11, manages to place this event alongside other historical moments in his novel, consequently suggesting the existence of a causal relationship between them. Eventually, the analysis demonstrates how the novel, because it echoes Michael Rothberg's concept of "multidirectional memory", manages to create new forms of solidarity which emerge thanks to the characters' realization that they all have two things in common: while they can unite because they have all lost someone they loved, they also understand – thanks to novel's polyphony and intertextuality – that the countries they come from are all responsible for the destruction of their lives.

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“Pull a thread here and you'll find it's attached to the rest of the world”

Perpetration and Community in Nadeem Aslam's *The Wasted Vigil*

Mémoire réalisé par
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« *Penser le terrorisme, ce n'est pas le justifier. Mais c'est juste dire que quand on l'aura pensé, on pourra agir contre.* »

– Michel Onfray, in *On n'est pas couché*, on June 6, 2018.

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INTRODUCTION

The genuine artists will bring human warmth and longing and complexity to what is two-dimensional in other, lesser hands.

– Nadeem Aslam, "Where to Begin" (2010)

Since the very beginning of History, traumatic events have haunted human experience. Some of them have become more salient than others – like the Holocaust in particular, which has been one of the subjects most dealt with so far in trauma studies, which emerged in the 1990s. 9/11 has, however, acquired a comparable status, especially because of its unprecedented visual impact. In their own individual ways, both have been considered as unique events among global history because of the impact they had on people's individual and collective consciousness. In *After the Fall*, an overview of some post-9/11 literary responses, Richard Gray suggests that the uniqueness of 9/11 can be explained by three main factors. First, the attacks on the World Trade Center have immediately acquired a particular status because their target was highly symbolic. Second, the death toll was unprecedented. With almost 3,000 victims, the event was qualified, in 2001, as the most lethal terrorist attack on American soil. As stated by Gray, "[t]o have war brought home was an unusual experience for America, to have the mainland not only invaded but attacked from the skies and devastated was not only unusual but unique" (Gray 2011: 4). Third, the media coverage of the event was global, making the whole world an eyewitness of the collapse of the towers: "every moment could be replayed, slowed down, speeded up, put in freeze frame" (Gray 2011: 7), and this obviously expanded the span of the trauma.

Most analyses conducted in the field of trauma studies after 9/11 have mainly focused on the victims' traumatic experience. As pointed out by Raya Morag in *Waltzing with Bashir*, a groundbreaking study of perpetrator trauma in cinema studies, "the dominant point of view has always been that of the victim" (Morag 2013: 9). Quite recently, trauma studies have taken a completely new turn, focusing on and explaining the perpetrator's side, as demonstrated by publication of the *Journal of Perpetrator Research* (JPR) in 2017. In spite of this step towards the study of the perpetrator, no analysis – to my knowledge – has been carried out on the unsteadiness of the categories of victims and perpetrators in the context of 9/11 in the literary field. The editors of the JPR aptly suggest in this first issue that these categories are not fixed. According to them, after 9/11, one could question the responsibility and the guilt of America, because the United States committed acts of violence after being targeted on its own ground –

it therefore left the state of victimhood for that of perpetration. Therefore, even though the articles gathered in this first – and only – issue dealt with the Rwandan genocide, the editors truly hinted at the existence of this important phenomenon – *viz*. the unsteadiness of the categories. These first observations will guide this dissertation, for it will indeed show how an individual's subject position can switch from victim to perpetrator – and one might also consider a third step in this shift, with the perpetrator going back to the stage of victim.

Cathy Caruth's definition of 'trauma' would therefore prove to be especially relevant in this context. According to her, trauma "is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way its very unassimilated nature – the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance – returns to haunt the survivor later on" (Caruth 2016: 4 – original emphasis). This haunting memory could therefore be perceived as the spark that can arouse feelings of revenge, which, in turn, can lead to the perpetration of violent acts. One could argue that Primo Levi, in *The Drowned and the Saved*, already suggested the existence of this phenomenon when he pointed out that some Jews were forced to commit atrocities against their fellow prisoners in order to save their own lives. Levi indeed writes that some Jews agreed – even though there was no real room for choice – to collaborate with the Nazis – and join the "Special Squad" because they thought they would then get access to privileges. In other words, in his analysis, these individuals were both victims and perpetrators *simultaneously*. As stated in *The Drowned and the Saved*, "it [had to] be the Jews who put the Jews into the ovens; it [had to] be shown that the Jews, the subrace, the submen, bow[ed] to any and all humiliation, even to destroying themselves" (Levi 1986: 40). The violence they committed was thus an expression of the trauma they endured themselves. However, it could be stated that Levi does not explain how a single individual's position can change over time. The present analysis will thus precisely discuss how one individual can take on the characteristics of each category one after another, and not simultaneously. Still, an important issue highlighted by Primo Levi will keep its importance here. In his famous essay, Levi already argued that clear boundaries between those categories do not exist: he indeed opposed the way popular history is taught, influenced by a Manichean tendency dividing the field into 'we' and 'they' (Levi 1986: 25), rather suggesting the existence of what he calls the "gray zone".

To discover if the subject positions do vary over time, it is essential to consider History as a whole, and not single out one event on its own. This is precisely what Primo Levi did, since his study's emphasis was solely put on the Holocaust. Keeping in mind this specific purpose, Michael Rothberg's groundbreaking work on *Multidirectional Memory* will prove to be highly relevant: breaking away from an essentialist perspective of traumatic events – what he calls

'competitive memory', *viz*. a conception which leads to some kind of competition between victims – Rothberg rather suggests the concept of 'multidirectional memory'. As stated in his book,

> [m]any […] intellectuals have argued that, while it is essential to understand the specificity of the Nazi genocide (as of all events), separating it off from other histories of collective violence – and even from history as such – is intellectually and politically dangerous (Rothberg 2009: 8-9).

According to him, considering a traumatic event as unique might give rise to a "hierarchy of sufferings" which, in turn, instead of binding victims together in grief, would rather generate distinctions among traumatized groups.

Putting forth a new kind of community is precisely the goal of Nadeem Aslam in his 2008 novel *The Wasted Vigil*. Solidarity arises between the characters mainly because they all discover that grief is a feeling they have in common. Moreover, and perhaps this definitely sets *the Wasted Vigil* apart from most post-9/11 novels, Aslam's narrative also pertains to challenge the conception of Muslims as the only people responsible for 9/11 through its historicization of the events – which clearly echoes Rothberg's argument. In Aslam's novel, the history of Afghanistan is invoked alongside 9/11, thus suggesting that the roots of the attacks can be found within the centuries-long history of imperial intrusions. This novel could therefore be considered as his answer to the question he raises in the epigraph:

> [w]hat is more important to the history of the world – the Taliban or the collapse of the Soviet empire? A few agitated Muslims or the liberation of Central Europe and the end of the Cold War? (Aslam 2009: epigraph).

Contrary to many authors, Aslam decides not to choose since he deals with both the rise of the Taliban and the collapse of the Soviet empire. He actually even adds other historical events to his narrative. For this reason, Aslam suggests that Afghanistan's present situation has partly been built upon the vestiges of the Cold War. What is more is that Aslam's strength is not to simply bring his characters together because of their shared grief: he also raises his readers' awareness that the nations represented by the characters are responsible for the mourning of others. Aslam consequently represents all nations as both victims and perpetrators.

The present dissertation therefore aims to better understand how Aslam manages to bring about new forms of solidarity through his representation of perpetration. First, it will attempt to better understand the figure of the perpetrator: who is a perpetrator? is perpetration a consequence of victimhood? has terror only been used in the East or can Western countries be considered as terrorists too? In order to answer these questions, the first chapter of this dissertation will be devoted to perpetrator studies. A major emphasis will be put on the concept of perpetrator trauma and on the evolution of the representation of the perpetrator figure –

designated by Morag as an "unwanted ghost" (Morag 2013: 11) – as well as to the rising interest in the study of perpetrator characters in literature. The second part will give a brief overview of the literature produced after 9/11 and the challenges it faced and sometimes successfully overcame. This section will then focus on an often-neglected aspect: the connection that can be made between the ensuing trauma of 9/11 and that of colonialism, which already suggests that both Western and Eastern countries can be considered as victims *and* perpetrators. Finally, chapter 3 will focus on Nadeem Aslam's novel *The Wasted Vigil* and discuss how terrorism, within this narrative, can be seen as a consequence of previous historical moments (among which the settlement of foreign powers in Afghanistan). Central to this novel is the terrorist figure who is presented as a highly traumatized young man seeking for revenge against the Soviets and the Americans throughout the narrative. This chapter investigates how the novel actually gives birth to a "fellowship of wounds" (Aslam 2009: 10), regardless of any distinction between the trauma endured by each character presented in the text. The novel destabilizes a widespread Western cliché – *viz*. the strong dichotomy between 'victim' and 'perpetrator' – by portraying a multiplicity of characters, giving a voice to each of them, and clearly representing their own backgrounds. Because the characters eventually gather together in a same place, their voices – and their stories – merge and different historical moments are connected together, which consequently places Aslam in line with Rothberg's notion of multidirectional memory. Instead of reproducing a us/them dichotomy, Aslam rather breaks national borders and bring people together in what Ayesha Perveen calls a "third space" (Perveen 2015).

CHAPTER 1 – PERPETRATOR STUDIES

I. From Victim to Perpetrator Trauma

> *[P]erpetrators of extreme violence can suffer from trauma – but this makes them no less guilty of their crimes and does not entail claims to victimization or even demands on our sympathy.*
>
> – Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory* (2001)

It has already been suggested that for decades, trauma has been exclusively associated with the victims, mainly focusing on how the latter try to work out of their traumatic state[1]. This overemphasis on the victim's perspective mainly originated from ethical reasons. Scholars feared that paying attention to the perpetrator figure would, in turn, undermine his guilt or even deny the suffering of the victims:

> [o]ne of the greatest concerns […] is that understanding the perpetrators might in some way lead to a justification of their actions or to a consideration of them as victims of the times, the system or the prevailing ideology; in short: circumstances beyond their control (Critchell, Knittel, Perra & Üngör 2017: 18).

It is already worth noticing that the novels produced after 9/11 have followed the same pattern, privileging at first the point of view of the victims over that of the perpetrators.

In *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001), Dominick LaCapra claims that "not everyone traumatized by events is a victim. There is the possibility of perpetrator trauma which must be acknowledged" (LaCapra 2014: 79). This statement has been the starting point for further research, like Raya Morag's *Waltzing with Bashir* (2013), in which she analyzes the representation of perpetrator trauma in documentary films about the second *Intifada* during the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. According to her, too much attention has been given to victims alone. Morag moreover points out that this emphasis has actually strengthened the victim-perpetrator binarism, which has made it even more difficult to talk about perpetrator trauma. However, the focus has slightly been redirected onto the perpetrator figure in the 1990s, when "a number of factors […] contributed to th[e] upsurge in attention to the perpetrator and perpetration" (Critchell, Knittel, Perra & Üngör 2017: 1). At the end of the Cold War, a number of archives describing the atrocities committed under Communist regimes became available for study; moreover, the end of the Apartheid also raised attention on acts of perpetration; likewise, the Rwandan genocide gave rise to discussions about crimes against humanity (Critchell,

[1] A pervasive concept used in these studies was the Freudian talking cure, according to which an individual can overcome his traumatic state through the use of language.

Knittel, Perra & Üngör 2017: 1). These elements obviously offered a real opportunity to researchers to eventually discuss the position of the perpetrator and try to understand her/his motivations.

The Holocaust is considered as one of the most iconic traumatic events in the Western world. Because of that, it has become one of the landmarks in the field of trauma studies, as demonstrated by the many analyses conducted on the subject[2]. Similarly, perpetrator studies have at first mainly been conducted within the context of the Holocaust. Since the beginning of the new millennium – and particularly since September 11, 2001 – the study of perpetrators has taken a completely new turn, primarily because perpetration itself has drastically changed. First, the type of perpetration has switched from state violence or genocides to violence committed by fundamentalist organizations such as al Qaida and ISIS (Critchell, Knittel, Perra & Üngör 2017: 1). Second, these events have also raised the question of guilt regarding Western powers (in relation to the acts of violence committed in the name of the War on Terror, at Guantanamo Bay for instance). Finally, the attacks on New York and Washington also bear witness to a radical change: the beginning of the 21st century marked a shift towards what can be called the 'new war'. The practices of war are constantly evolving over time, simultaneously with technological discoveries (allowing the creation of new weapons) among other factors. According to Neta Crawford, Professor of Political Sciences at Boston University, "new combatants are accountable to a small clique or to none at all" (Crawford 2003: 10). In other words, within the context of the new war, the perpetrator subject-position can be taken on by a single individual (whereas it used to be mainly represented by a group as a whole). Furthermore, Morag also underlines how the logic of the new war is not limited to any particular war zone, and how it does not only involve soldiers since civilians are also targeted on purpose. Therefore, the distinction between soldier and civilian does not really exist anymore, which means that perpetrators can also hide among civilians; this explains why suspicion arose so rapidly within societies[3]. Under such circumstances, Crawford claims that "an acute bodily-ness characterizes new war" (Morag 2013: 5), the body itself therefore becoming the battlefield, as brilliantly conveyed in Nadeem Aslam's novel[4].

---

[2] This is highlighted by the title of some essays written by Dominick LaCapra, one of the most important contributors to trauma theories (*Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (1994) and *History and Memory after Auschwitz* (1998)).

[3] This rising suspicion is perfectly portrayed in Mohsin Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2008), as will be discussed in chapter 2.

[4] In *the Wasted Vigil*, Qatrina is forces to carry out the amputation of the hand of her husband, Marcus. This passage is discussed more precisely on page 52.

Acknowledging the existence of both types of trauma does not mean that both positions are considered identical. In a comparative table (Morag 2013: 15), Raya Morag has listed out many differences between the traumas of victims and perpetrators, which stem from a significant divergence: while the victim trauma derives from an event which s/he knew nothing about in the first place, the trauma of the perpetrator stems from something s/he was aware of (since s/he is the one who carried it out). That explains why the status of the victim is considered as a given position, while that of the perpetrator is a conditional one: as stated by Morag, "the victims' trauma is a given [position], one that has happened, while the perpetrator' by definition is conditional and future-oriented"[5] (Morag 2013: 21). However, both traumas share the same origin since the two of them occur after an act of violence. The perpetrator is indeed traumatized by what her/his own actions imply (moral contradictions) while, in the meantime, the victim enters the traumatic state because of what the perpetrator did to her/him. What must eventually be understood when dealing with these types of trauma is that the account of the traumatic event does not take the same form whether it is produced by the victim (*testimony*) or the perpetrator (*confession*)[6]. According to Morag, confession allows for a more complete understanding of the event: "[w]hile the failure of testimony (ambiguous, contradictory, opaque, fragmentary, partial, indistinct or disguised – to recall but few of the ways it is described in research) to capture the incident is evident, the 'success' of confession ideally captures its referent, the deed" (Morag 2013: 20). For this reason, the perpetrator's point of view should definitely not be avoided, since it is the only account which, according to Morag, would provide an accurate representation of violence.

Some scholars like Raya Morag or the editors of the JPR argue that we have now reached the 'era of the perpetrator' because this figure has been given an increasing interest over the past few years. In *Quand le Bourreau Prend la Parole*, Anneleen Spiessens argues that the perpetrator's perspective gives access to a set of information that remains out of reach for the victims: "*[s]i la parole du bourreau intéresse [...], c'est qu'elle est censée éclairer les facettes du crime inaccessibles aux victimes*" (Spiessens 2016: xi). However, one must always be careful about the perpetrator's voice in literature, especially when s/he is the narrator of the story because as such, s/he can very often be considered as unreliable. As highlighted by Spiessens, the perpetrator's voice can acquire an argumentative dimension (Spiessens 2016: 29) which betrays her/his potential wish to undermine her/his actions or explain them by revealing

[5] This differentiation is highly relevant in the context of the present dissertation, because *The Wasted Vigil* discusses the importance of *future* generations who powerfully represent the possibility of moving on in the novel.
[6] Both types of account will be dealt with when addressing trauma and perpetration in Nadeem Aslam's novel.

how s/he had no other choice than to behave the way s/he did. By doing so, the perpetrator seeks the reader's sympathy and understanding, which already shows the first danger of the perpetrator's narrative. If one should not completely fall for the perpetrator's tale and take her/his side, one should never turn a deaf ear on it either, because one would then miss out on an opportunity to hear a text that would make it possible to understand how and why violence has been committed (Spiessens 2016: 29). Similarly, limits and dangers could be ascribed to the voice of the victim. Every author of a discourse tends to create an *ethos* in order to convey particular emotions and reactions to her/his audience. Because the voices of the perpetrator and the victim can be questioned regarding their reliability, confronting them together would be the best way to reach a less biased narrative. In *The Wasted Vigil*, Nadeem Aslam brilliantly overcomes these dangers by giving a voice to each character presented in his novel, and consequently to the perpetrators as well as to the victims. More than simply exposing their versions of the events they experienced, the characters' stories constantly overlap and complete each other. The novel consequently suggests that an accurate representation of the events mentioned in the narrative requires the observer to consider all the points of view s/he can get access to.

II. Looking at one Subject-Position Through the Lens of the Other

> *[I]t is […] imperative to regard perpetrators in the context of victims, bystanders, and other subject positions within historical, theoretical, and ethical frameworks.*
>
> – *Journal of Perpetrator Research*, vol. 1 (2017).

As stated by the epigraph, no research should entirely be conducted on the perpetrator alone since this position can only be understood in relation to other subject positions. There has often been a tendency to separate the victims from the perpetrators; research has focused on either one of the two figures, thus intensifying the pre-existing gap. In 1986, however, Primo Levi wrote that in the concentration camps, for the Jews, "[t]he enemy was all around [them], the 'we' lost its limits, the contenders were not two, one could not discern a single frontier but rather many confused perhaps innumerable frontiers, which stretched between each of [them]" (Levi 1988: 27). Levi already showed that the lines between these categories were blurred, a phenomenon he refers to as the "gray zone". According to him, "there exist gray, ambiguous persons, ready to compromise" (Levi 1986: 37). Similarly, the first issue of the JPR echoes this statement. Reiterating LaCapra's argument, Blackie, Hitchcott and Joseph state that "[t]he perpetration of violence can be traumatizing. As such, it implies that the boundaries between

perpetration and victimhood are not always as clear-cut as might be expected" (Blackie, Hitchcott & Joseph 2017: 71).

"Los Intocables", by Cuban artist Erik Ravelo

In *Los Intocables* (*The Untouchables*), a series of photographs designed by the famous activist artist Erik Ravelo, children are represented as victims crucified on a cross made out of their abusers' bodies, displaying the many shapes that violence against children can take, like – from top left to bottom right – molestation committed by members of the Catholic Church; pedophilia; wars; human organ trafficking; liberal gun possession; or eating disorders and obesity. According to Fabrica (the company for which Erik Ravelo is the Creative Director), "[t]he word Los Intocables refers to those who must be protected (the children) and those who remain unprosecuted (the abusers)"[7] (Fabrica 2013). The fact that both positions are referred to with the same name already suggests their interconnection. In this series, which aimed to show both the causes and the consequences of the children's traumatic experiences, the victims had to be represented alongside their perpetrators. Similarly, following Levi's assertion and Erik Ravelo's *Los Intocables*, the present dissertation aims to reveal how victims and perpetrators are not steady categories and how these subject positions cannot be taken separately, since the existence of one implies the existence of the other. The emphasis will therefore be put on the victims and the perpetrators, as well as on the witnesses who, as people who were not directly

[7] This quote comes from the short article on *The Untouchables* on the Fabrica website, available at the following address: http://www.fabrica.it/los-intocables/.

involved in the event, might provide another insightful perspective, perhaps less flawed by any bias. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that the witness is also the person thanks to whom the suffering of others is acknowledged. As rightly noted by Jessica Benjamin in her essay on the moral third, the witness, by taking the position of the 'moral third' (also called the 'third space') "transcends binaries such as good versus bad and us versus them. It is a position in which we encompass the ordinarily split position of perpetrator and victim" (Benjamin 2015: 16).

In Nadeem Aslam's *The Wasted Vigil*, a witness is often close to the victims or perpetrators. This tends to erase any remain of bias from the text, but also, and perhaps more importantly, to bring some kind of hope within the narrative. Benjamin argues that

> [t]he moral third's idea that everyone can live has to be upheld by witnesses across the world who publicly acknowledge every violation. These witnesses must serve as the eyes and voice of the world by expressing condemnation and indignation over all injustice, injury, trauma, and agony endured by victims of all kinds. […] The presence of a witness who embodies the moral third may make it possible for victims to begin to believe once more in the possibility of a lawful, caring world […] (Benjamin 2015: 17).

In *The Wasted Vigil*, it could be stated that each character successively occupies this position. All of them can therefore be considered, at different times, as witnesses (for instance Lara actually sees Casa's suicide and David's simultaneous attempt to rescue him). Moreover, the confessional mode is, according to Benjamin, what eventually brings hope, because "witnessing and acknowledging injuries and injustice – *especially ones we have perpetrated* – creates the conditions for change" (Benjamin 2015: 17 – emphasis added). It is thus thanks to the perpetrator's acknowledgement of her/his own guilt that change seems possible, that a solution finally seems to exist. Nadeem Aslam's novel will also prove to be highly relevant in this regard because some characters change throughout the story and eventually admit having harmed others. This matter will be discussed in more detail later.

Differentiating victims from perpetrators might sound like an easy task. Yet, this enterprise proves to be harder than expected. In the first issue of the JPR, the editors argue that

> whereas the dividing social boundaries between perpetrators and victims are crystal clear during the mass killings, these lines can become more ambiguous and ambivalent before and after. […] Perpetrators can become victims; victims can become perpetrators; and 'bystanders' or 'third parties' can become either (Critchell, Knittel, Perra & Üngör 2017: 13).

This passage therefore suggests that looking at a precise event (as suggested by the word *during*) would allow a clear distinction between the different subject positions. However, as soon as the research encompasses a larger scope – by looking at previous or following moments – then, the frontiers of the categories become blurry. With the attacks on the World Trade Center, it became even more difficult to disentangle these positions since the United States (*viz.*

the victims of the attacks) directly called for revenge, thus entering the realm of perpetration almost immediately after the events occurred – the transition from victim to perpetrator being almost simultaneous:

> the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the global 'War on Terror' have […] focused attention on the guilt and responsibility of the United States and its allies. The acts of torture and extra-judicial incarceration in Abu-Ghraib and at Guantanamo Bay, for example, not to mention the killing of civilians as a result of drone warfare, have contributed to a pervasive ambiguity surrounding the distinction between victims and perpetrators, heroes and villains (Critchell, Knittel, Perra & Üngör 2017: 1).

It is often agreed on that a victim is an individual who was personally hit by violence and who, because of that, has entered a traumatic state. Yet, it is still important to mention that not all victims should be considered in a same fashion, because there are as many types of victim as there are types of violence. Similarly, the meaning of the word 'perpetrator' can apply to numerous situations. Consequently, defining these categories can lead to difficulties. For the purposes of this dissertation, these two words have to be understood as follows: Scott Straus, Professor of Political Science and International Studies, sees the "perpetrators as those who had a hand, directly or indirectly, in the physical destruction of individuals" (Straus 2017: 36). Likewise, a victim will be defined here as an individual who had to endure *any kind* of violence. In other words, the category of victims – as understood here – does not solely contain individuals who were physically harmed (*viz*. direct victims), but also people who had to live in regions where violence was ubiquitous and who might consequently have lost someone they cared about (*viz.* indirect victims).

When dealing with 9/11, the first type of perpetration that comes to mind is terrorism. If we limit our research to the modern era[8], this phenomenon finds its roots in the French Revolution. It then referred to a political regime whose goal was to spread fear among society in order to assert its power and authority. In this case, terrorism refers to the use of violence by the State, but it can also be used to describe the violence used against the state in order to change its policies or to overthrow the existing regime. Even though the practices of terrorism have continually been evolving, a feature remains at the heart of its definition: terror is a tool to reach a particular objective, and "[a]s a tool […], terror espouses [this] principle: to bend one's adversary's will while affecting his capacity of resistance" (Chaliand 2016: 6-7). Terrorism is therefore not an end, but rather a means. As it is often claimed that the end justifies the means, the legitimacy of the phenomenon is often subject to debate and disagreement. According to Noam Chomsky, terrorism is a matter of point of view since it "conventionally means 'terrorism

[8] Gérard Chaliand indeed claims that instances of terrorist acts can be found even before this event.

directed against us and our friends'" (Chomsky 2002: 75)[9]. Because of that, the victim/perpetrator tension previously mentioned has often taken the shape of an opposition between 'us' and 'them', which was referred to as *orientalism* by Edward Said in 1981, a concept the critic defines as "an imaginative and yet drastically polarized geography dividing the world into two unequal parts, the larger, 'different' one called the Orient, the other, also known as 'our' world, called the Occident or the West" (Said 1981: 4).

In the 1990s, Samuel Huntington formulated the theory of the "Clash of Civilizations". According to him, at the end of the Cold War (which opposed two Western superpowers, *viz*. the United States and the USSR) the centerpiece of international politics "bec[ame] the interaction between the West and non-Western civilizations" (Huntington 1993: 23). In his article, Huntington continues his analysis by claiming that in the future, cultural identities will become increasingly important: "[t]he Velvet Curtain of culture has replaced the Iron Curtain of ideology as the most significant dividing line in Europe" (Huntington 1993: 31). It is worth noting that Huntington's theory echoes the evolution of terrorism, which is today strongly related to religion – one of the strongest cultural components according to Huntington. This relation between religion and terrorism has often been represented in post-9/11 novels. The Cold War, considered as a turning point for Huntington, is often seen as a proxy-war because the conflicts sometimes took place abroad, especially in Afghanistan.

III. Afghanistan and the Culture of Violence

By the end of the U.S. proxy war against the Soviets […]
Afghanistan was a country devastated by war.
– Deepak Tripathi, *Breeding Ground* (2011).

Since the present dissertation deals with Nadeem Aslam's novel *The Wasted Vigil*, the emphasis will be put on Afghanistan (the place where the story is mainly set) and the different events that are mentioned in the narrative, such as the Cold War, the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan, and the rise of the Taliban regime. Moreover, even though the British occupation is not directly tackled in the novel, the presence of Marcus (an Englishman) as one of the main characters and the reference to his father (who was a doctor at a missionary hospital in Afghanistan) forces us to briefly explain the Anglo-Afghan wars, which broke out when the British Empire wanted to extend its control over new territories.

[9] During a seminar on Literature and Terrorism, Prof. Michel Lisse made the same observation, noting that "*[l]a détermination du terrorisme – ou d'un acte comme terroriste – est toujours le fruit d'une interprétation, d'une lecture […]. L'interprète, le lecteur […] met en œuvre un discours qui […] a une dimension performative, c'est-à-dire que par le fait de nommer un acte comme terroriste, […] cet acte devient terroriste"* (Lisse 2016).

Even though his essay *Breeding Ground* does not directly mention the Anglo-Afghan Wars, Deepack Tripathi still acknowledges that foreign interest in Afghanistan goes back to the early 19th and 20th centuries; which is precisely the period of time when the three Anglo-Afghan wars occurred. In 1837, Victoria was crowned Queen of England, when she was only eighteen years old. A rivalry started to arise between Great Britain and Russia, because both wanted to extend their authority over new territories. Because the British forces had previously colonized India, they were intensely concerned with the relations between India and its neighbouring country, Afghanistan. Wishing to "secure India against what they believed to be plans for a Russian Invasion" (Burton 2014: 43), the British invaded Afghanistan in 1839. As they did not trust the Emir in power, the British decided to install a new one. Their domination did not last long however, because insurrections among Afghan populations quickly broke out. British forces were therefore forced to leave Kabul in 1842. The former Emir – Dost Muhammad Khan – was eventually restored to the throne.

In the 1870s, the British once again decided to take actions in Afghanistan because they noticed the increasing ties of Russians with Shir Ali Khan – who had replaced his father, Dost Muhammad Khan, as Emir. As a result, British troops were sent to Afghanistan. This is how the second Anglo-Afghan War broke out in 1878 with a new British invasion. In order to see the withdrawal of the British troops, the Emir agreed to sign a treaty in 1879: the British would leave if the Emir consented to rule in accordance with Great Britain's desires. Because of popular uprising, the British decided to install a new Emir. They supported the nephew of Shir Ali Khan, Abd al-Rahman, if he agreed to recognize the Treaty that had been signed in 1879 with his uncle.

The Second War therefore ended on a rather positive note for the British. However, when the First World War broke out, the Afghans showed intense signs of support for the Ottoman Empire against the British. Even though the Afghans remained uninvolved during the war, Habibullah Khan – successor of Abd al-Rahman – was assassinated in 1919. The throne was therefore given to his son, Amanullah, who announced the Afghan complete independence from Great Britain during his coronation. This statement triggered the third – and last – Anglo-Afghan War, which was won by the Afghans. At the end of the war, a peace treaty was signed: it recognized the independence of Afghanistan. Before that, the Afghans had also started a friendship with the new Bolshevik regime. This relation between Afghanistan and the Soviet Union would last until the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.

According to Deepack Tripathi, the Soviet Invasion of 1979 was triggered by the 1973 coup, which marked the beginning of "Afghanistan's long descent into war" (Tripathi

2011: 18). This coup enabled Daud to seize power, and consequently turn Afghanistan into a republic – while it had previously been a monarchy. The 1973 coup was made possible thanks to the support of communists and young Soviet-trained officers. As noted by Tripathi, this "highlighted the foothold the USSR had secured in Afghanistan since 1956 – the year in which the country started to receive significant military aid from Moscow" (Tripathi 2011: 31). In 1977, Daud becomes President, while Afghanistan simultaneously becomes a one-party state. Obviously, this evolution did not please the Soviet leaders. When Daud met Brezhnev – *viz.* the Soviet leader – that same year, the President told him that only Afghanistan had the power to decide how and where foreign experts were employed in the country (Tripathi 2011: 33). Daud did not want his country to become too dependent on foreign nations. A year later, the Afghan President was killed, like some members of his family, during a Communist Coup (in 1978). Taraki was then put in charge of the country, and a friendship treaty was signed between him and Brezhnev. While the ties with the communists of the Soviet Union increased, popular resentment simultaneously rose within Afghanistan. Even if three revolts were tamed, this only fueled popular resentment to a higher level.

In 1979, Amin overthrew Taraki. This was an unwelcomed event for the Soviets who perceived Amin as less reliable than Taraki. This new coup had a twofold consequence: on the one hand, anti-Soviet sentiment grew stronger, and on the other hand, American influence increased in Afghanistan. Resistance to the regime intensified among the rebels – known as the Mujahideen – and by December 1979, they managed to gain control of 23 out of the 28 provinces of Afghanistan. As a consequence, the Soviet Union decided to send troops in Afghanistan, in order to regain control over the country. The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan had therefore started. However, instead of repressing people's will to revolt, the Soviets' arrival only made it intensify: "[t]he invasion unleashed internal resistance on a much greater scale […], marking the beginning of a new and more violent era in the history of the Afghan conflict" (Tripathi 2011: 57). Because they did not receive the support of local inhabitants, the Soviets resorted to coercion: their "aim was to spread fear to break the will of the Afghan population, and to demonstrate that any sympathy for any anti-Soviet activities would be costly for entire communities" (Tripathi 2011: 78). Because violence was escalating and reaching unprecedented levels, many Afghans decided to flee their country and settle in Pakistan where they were trained in camps financed by the United States[10]. With the support of America and

[10] Fleeing Afghanistan because it had become too violent is perfectly presented in *The Wasted Vigil* by Zameen, who wished to move to Pakistan because "in [her] own country, the land wanted to strike [the inhabitants] dead and so did the sky, and everyone wanted to get to a refugee camp in Pakistan" (Aslam 2009: 343).

Pakistan – among others – the Mujahideen forces managed to gain more territories around 1986, when a new weapon entered the battlefield. The stinger missiles indeed made the difference, and eventually forced Gorbachev to propose the withdrawal of half of his troops from Afghanistan in 1987, and the rest in the following year (Tripathi 2011: 75).

In 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait. Because the United States believed that Iraq would then move to Saudi Arabia – a region important for its oil resources – they decided to free Kuwait from the Iraqi occupation – even though they claimed it was to protect the world against the threat that Iraq represented. America managed to free Kuwait in 1991. In the meantime, in Afghanistan, the Taliban – a group of students initiated by Mohammad Omar – had started to gain importance. Most of the members of the Taliban were former refugees who had fled Afghanistan during the Soviet invasion. The rise of the Taliban can thus be considered as another consequence of the Western interference in the East. According to Tripathi, "the end of the US-Soviet conflict left *a legacy that caused* Afghanistan to sink into anarchy and full-scale civil war" (Tripathi 2011: 116 – emphasis added). The Taliban had a goal: to "end th[is] state of lawlessness and to restore peace and security in Afghanistan" (Tripathi 2011: 109). However, in order to achieve their objective, they resorted to coercion and terror. Even minor offenses were severely punished. In 1996, they managed to seize Kabul, the Afghan capital, and by 1998, they controlled almost the entire country.

During the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, an important member of the Mujahideen forces was Osama bin Laden. When the Soviet troops withdrew, he left for Saudi Arabia. While Kuwait was invaded, he did not agree with the Saudi royal family's decision to call for the Americans' help – because he would have preferred asking Afghanistan. This disagreement led to bin Laden's decision to leave Saudi Arabia for Sudan. Bin Laden had already created the organization of al-Qaeda in 1988. When he arrived in Sudan, he had already planned a few operations, like the 1993 first attack on the WTC. When he came back to Afghanistan in 1996 – while the Taliban were seizing Kabul – he sought to create an alliance between the Taliban and his own organization: al-Qaeda (Runion 2007: 126). When these two groups merged, more operations were set up. In 1998, two American embassies were targeted in Kenya and Tanzania. Two years later, an attack was planned against the USS Cole – a US naval destroyer. In 2001, the Pentagon in Washington and the WTC in New-York were also targeted, when members of al-Qaeda hijacked American airliners, and crashed them into the buildings. Al-Qaeda's wish to destroy America can be explained by the following factor: most members of the organization had previously fought in wars in which America was involved. As stated by Tripathi, "[t]here were enough wars going on around the world to supply fighters filled with hatred against

America and willing to die for their mission to destroy what the United States stood for" (Tripathi 2011: 131). After being the victim of these attacks, the United States only wanted to avenge itself, and consequently invaded Afghanistan:

> [t]he initial shock felt by America turned into anger and a determination to exact retribution […] And so, more than ten years after turning away from Afghanistan, the United States was back to overthrow the Taliban, successors to the Mujahideen whom it had helped finance with billions of dollars in the war against Communism" (Tripathi 2011: 133).

This brief overview indicates that violence is a phenomenon which has been implanted in Afghanistan because of foreign nations, especially the Soviet Union and the United States. Afghanistan has consequently developed a "culture of violence", which is defined by Tripathi as "a condition in which violence permeates all levels of society and becomes part of human thinking, behavior, and way of life" (Tripathi 2011: 137). According to Tripathi, the culture of violence is shaped by external forces, and creates a climate of fear (Tripathi 2011: 137). These characteristics apply to Afghanistan. Since the end of the 19th century, Afghanistan has been the battlefield of successive wars. Between the wars, the regimes in power often used coercion as a means to assert their authority. It has indeed been demonstrated that the Soviets resorted to violence to gain people's support. Similarly, the Taliban displayed extreme violence – especially against women. Those who challenged Taliban's rules were severely punished, and many amputations were carried out[11] (Runion 2007: 124). One could also refer to the Americans' behavior after their invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. America also resorted to violence and fear out of revenge, especially at Guantanamo Bay, a prison whose name instilled fear throughout the Muslim world. Violence has become so pervasive in Afghanistan because of the successive wars that every aspect of the Afghan life is related to violence, which is brilliantly depicted in *The Wasted Vigil*. Nadeem Aslam indeed writes that:

> [e]ven 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 the wheat was grown (Aslam 2009: 59).

The successive settlements of foreign forces in Afghanistan can be seen as different waves of colonization. It could indeed be said that the British, the Soviets and the Americans came to Afghanistan and changed its organization. They mingled into the affairs of the country and showed interest in Afghanistan's riches – like the lapis lazuli for instance[12]. Using this as a starting point, one could therefore consider colonialism and foreign interventionism as the trigger of the use of terror – or, in other words, of terrorism – in order to promote one's ideals.

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[11] It has already been pointed out that in *The Wasted Vigil*, Marcus's hand has been cut off.
[12] The Western interest for lapis lazuli is represented in the novel as discussed on page 51.

Even though literature has not always been able to engage with the political implications of 9/11, the present dissertation will discuss how Nadeem Aslam's *The Wasted Vigil* manages to deal with these aspects by historicizing the events of September 2001. Placing 9/11 in relation with previous historical events indeed allows Aslam to suggest that 9/11 can be considered as a consequence of these previous moments. Moreover, because the terrorist act presented in the novel can be linked to previous instances of violence committed in other parts of the world – and can therefore be seen as a consequence of these – Aslam's novel also manages to put forth new forms of community and solidarity, deriving from the shared grief of the characters.

Chapter 2 – Engaging With the Political: 9/11 and the Postcolonial

> *I always say that I vote every time I write a sentence […] Coming from Pakistan, and belonging to the Islamic world, I can't not be aware of how politics affects our daily lives, how it is not just dry legislations and laws and statements. It's visceral.*
>
> – Nadeem Aslam, in an interview[13] (2008).

Losing faith in the power of language after traumatic events seems to be a recurrent phenomenon in the literary field. This feeling has been acutely experienced after the Holocaust, as much as it has been since 9/11. In *After the Fall*, an overview of post-9/11 literature, Richard Gray, somehow echoing Adorno's well-known statement[14], claims that most writers have been confronted with the impossibility to find the right words in the face of such atrocities, the representation of a brutal event being therefore doomed to failure. Toni Morrison, among others, acknowledges this "failure of language" (Gray 2011: 1) in her poem "The Dead of September 11", in which she addresses the victims with these words: "I have nothing to say – no words / stronger than the steel that pressed you into itself; no scripture / older or more elegant than the ancient atoms you / have become" (ll. 26-29). According to Jacques Derrida, evidence of this belief in the loss of the power of language lies in the way we constantly refer to the deadliest attacks against the United States on its own ground. During a conversation with Giovanna Borradori just a few days after the attacks, Derrida said that

> 'Something' took place […]. But this very thing, the place and meaning of this 'event' remains ineffable, like an intuition without concept […] out of range for a language that admits its powerlessness and so is reduced to pronouncing mechanically a date, repeating it endlessly (Borradori 2003: 86).

The impossibility to represent these events probably stems from the unprecedented scale of the trauma they brought about; Richard Gray wrote that different reasons explain why it "was not only unusual but unique" (Gray 2011: 4). Traumatic images have been so deeply rooted in people's consciousness that they have been haunting the minds of Americans ever since, especially that of the falling man which has been mentioned – and even reproduced – in many

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[13] The complete interview is available at the following address (accessed August 4, 2018): https://www.bookbrowse.com/author_interviews/full/index.cfm/author_number/11utation49/nadeem-aslam.

[14] Adorno famously wrote in his essay "Cultural Criticism and Society" (published in 1951) that "to write poetry after Aschwitz is barbaric" (Adorno 1984: 31).

post-9/11 novels[15]. From this moment onwards, most Americans – and, actually, most of the Western world – started to feel anxious about their future. The hijacking of the planes completely tore the American belief of superiority and untouchability apart. Fear spread among society while many Americans grasped that from now on, they could be targeted again. As shown in Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*, Americans were "waiting for th[e] other shoe to drop" (Spiegelman 2004: 1).

As previously mentioned, with the end of the Cold War, people started to give an increasing importance to their cultural affiliations. In his essay on the "Clash of Civilizations", Samuel Huntington indeed writes that "[t]he years after the Cold War witnessed the beginnings of dramatic changes in people's identities and the symbols of those identities" (Huntington 1996: 19) and that states would, after that, "cooperate with and ally themselves with states with a similar or common *culture* and [be] more often in conflict with countries of different *culture*"[16] (Huntington 1996: 34 – emphasis added). According to Gohar Karim Khan, who wrote a thesis on post-9/11 Pakistani literature, this concept of culture is precisely what some writers might struggle with, especially when they write about the "cultural/civilizational other" (Khan 2013: 6). Richard Gray too noticed this Western inability to write about the 'enemy' – an attitude he compares with some kind of paralysis. This perhaps partly explains the limits of Euro-American literary responses to 9/11, which tend to remain rather self-centered. This was already suggested in 2008 by Catherine Morley who claimed that "writers outside of the U.S. have taken on the Muslim subject more willingly, and according to Pankaj Mishra much more successfully, than their American counterparts" (Morley 2008: 294-295). Morley reiterated this statement in 2011 when she wrote that "[m]any novels, among them Updike's *Terrorist*, manifestly failed to understand or to offer a convincing portrait of the figure of the other" (Morley 2011: 719).

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[15] Some authors have also tried to play with this image, such as Jonathan Safran Foer, who ended *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* with a flipbook of the falling body in reverse, which, instead of falling to the ground, is brought back into the WTC; this reinvention of the events brings both nostalgia and hope to the narrative.

[16] In *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Huntington claims that "[f]or peoples seeking identity and reinventing ethnicity, enemies are essential" and that "enmities occur across the fault lines between the world's major civilizations" (Huntington 1996: 20). This attitude could be explained by what Freud calls the "mechanism of displacement". On the matter, Moghaddam writes that intergroups relationships are shaped by the following pattern: in order to keep tensions away from one group, then the negative emotions have to be redirected onto another group. According to Moghaddam, this is precisely what is currently happening between America and the Islamic world: "Islamic fundamentalists can bind together their people in love as long as the 'Great Satan' represented by the United States is there to hate. Similarly, […] after the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Empire, the United States needed another external enemy to use as the target of displaced aggression, and Islamic fundamentalism was constructed as the new 'barbarian enemy at our gates'" (Moghaddam 2006: 17).

Writing about other cultural identities might therefore lead to intensify the tensions between East and West. John Updike's *Terrorist* is highly representative of this, since Ahmad Mulloy, the main character, is racialized throughout the narrative "by dwelling both on his skin color and his religious practice, and by driving home the fact that both remain enigmatic" (Banerjee 2008: 19). The Eastern part of his identity – which he owes to his Egyptian father and which is made most visible through his faith in the Qur'an – keeps being rejected. It is for instance highlighted by his student record on which his father's name is left between brackets, as if it was not really accepted or worth mentioning (Updike 2007: 34). He is only granted full hospitality once "*these devils […] have taken away [his] God*" (Updike 2007: 310 – original emphasis). Even though some critics, like John-Paul Colgan, might consider this novel as another of Updike's critique of America[17] (racism and consumerism are often criticized in this novel), Freeman rightly argues that "this critical lens is ultimately neutralized by the implication that the West is better than a dangerously deceptive and elusive East" (Freeman 2011: 17). It can indeed be believed that Updike is ultimately unable to fully question the society he lives in since in the end Ahmad is the one who has to change, not the American society that excludes him.

As soon as he came to life, Ahmad entered an identity crisis and has been unable to find his place in the world: "Ahmad himself is the product of a red-haired American mother, Irish by ancestry, and an Egyptian exchange student" (Updike 2006: 13). Even though one could consider that his genetic inheritance would have easily connected the kid to both East and West, his mixed parentage actually makes it harder for him to find his place. According to Mita Banerjee, "whiteness [is] the racial ground zero of American self-definition" (Banerjee 2008: 15). Because of the Egyptian blood that runs in his veins, the color of Ahmad's skin is more mixed than white, hence making it more difficult for him to be granted the American citizenship. The main setback preventing him from acquiring it, though, remains his religious beliefs. Banerjee further argues that "[i]t may […] be Christianity which becomes the pivot of proving the whiteness of a given community" (Banerjee 2008: 17). When these two criteria are taken together, they strongly display Ahmad's isolation: "[t]hough he was not the only Muslim believer at central high, there were no others quite like him – of mixed parentage and still fervent in the faith" (Updike 2006: 177). His rejection from the American society powerfully portrays the rise of Islamophobia after the attacks of 2001. After the attacks, Muslims have been targeted and held responsible without trying to understand why the attacks had been carried

[17] John-Paul Colgan indeed argues that "*Terrorist* can […] be regarded as another of Updike's 'running report' on the state of his nation" (Colgan 2009: 129).

out. According to Michael Welch, who wrote the foreword of *Global Islamophobia: Muslims and Moral Panic in the West*, even "[t]en years after the attacks, we continue to witness the scapegoating of Islamic individuals, groups, and even nations accused of supporting terrorism" (Welch, in Morgan and Poynting 2012: foreword). Ahmad's relationship with America clearly shapes the one he has with his mother. Their bond weakens over time, because she represents everything he hates: "[h]is mother is, he sees now, looking back, a typical American, lacking strong convictions and the courage and comfort they bring" (Updike 2006: 167).

It should be highlighted that the novel seems to echo the discourse of the media, because Islam is primarily described as a religion of violence. Anna Hartnell notices that

> Updike's starting point is […] an initial alienation from Islam as a religion tainted by violence, and even though he does not quite say it, he seems to feel that this violence runs deeper than it does in the two other monotheistic traditions (Hartnell 2011: 485).

In that, it can be said that Updike reproduces some widespread stereotypes about the Muslim other which have been internalized by most Americans after the attacks. Even if Ahmad's life is completely shaped around his beliefs – he indeed decides to drop out of school because "[m]ore education, he feared, might weaken his faith" (Updike 2006: 216) – he can never entirely embrace that part of his identity either. Even though, as a Muslim, he is supposed to believe in every word written in the Qur'an, he formulates doubts, especially about the alleged afterlife. Deep down, he knows that

> [h]e will not grow any taller […] in this life or the next. *If there is a next*, an inner devil murmurs. What evidence beyond the Prophet's blazing and divinely inspired words proved that there is a next? Where would it be hidden? (Updike 2006: 5 – original emphasis).

These questions that arise within him are immediately related to an "inner devil" which, it could be argued, symbolizes the American part of his identity, which prevents him from fully embracing his Eastern inheritance. The whole novel therefore demonstrates the inner struggle faced by Ahmad. Because Ahmad constantly faces discrimination and is always set apart from everybody else, Updike's novel consequently pertains to represent a stereotypical conception of Islam in America – especially in the post 9/11 era.

Because he is as much excluded from Islam as he is from America, Ahmad also embodies someone who cannot find a place in the world because of his hybridity. Updike's novel could therefore very much be considered as a failed attempt to engage with the cultural other in America, because in the end, only Ahmad's guidance counselor seems to have an influence on the kid's behavior; and one should know that Jack Levy is a liminal character[18], just like Ahmad.

[18] In his analysis of the rites of passage – *viz.* rites through which an individual moves from one state to another – the anthropologist Victor Turner considers that the liminal period refers to a period of margin (Turner 1967: 93). Turner borrows the work of Van Gennep, who considered that each rite of passage could be divided into three

Jack Levy is eventually the one who prevents Ahmad from carrying out his suicide attack. The Jewish character of the novel also believes that there is something rotten in the American society, especially regarding the young whose questions are left unanswered:

> 'All I'm saying is that kids like Ahmad need to have something they won't get from society any more. Society doesn't let them be innocent any more. The crazy arabas are right – hedonism, nihilism, that's all we offer. […] Kids have to make more decisions than they used to, because adults can't tell them what to do. We don't *know* what to do, we don't have the answers we used to (Updike 2006: 205-206 – original emphasis).

According to Jack Levy then, kids in America have to grow up by themselves. They do not find guidance anymore. Using this as a starting point, one could argue that Jack's point of view pertains to show that perhaps kids should not be entirely held responsible for the mistakes they make, for in the end, adults are the ones who have failed to provide the young with proper models. The different generations presented in this novel tend to be rather separate, contrary to Nadeem Aslam's *The Wasted Vigil*. In the Pakistani novel, the author rather crates intergenerational connections because the characters from the old generation are aware that their actions will have an impact on the lives of the members of the following generations.

As *Terrorist* unfolds, one quickly notices that the novel does not leave room for hybridity. As stated by Herman, "the book ends with a lapsed Muslim joining […] the lapsed Jew (Jack Levy). In what may be the novel's sourest insight, it seems that selfish, materialistic America affords no place for any religion other than the 'born-again' Christianity" (Herman 2015: 707). In that, Updike's novel reveals some of the societal problems in America. It has already been mentioned that consumerism is strongly criticized throughout the novel – especially through the voice of the young Muslim boy. Moreover, because the non-Christians characters tend to be excluded, the novel also displays the rejection of hybridity in America. Ed Jonker indeed argues that even if "Americans are fond of *hyphenated identities*, made up of at least two components" (Jonker 2009: 54), the novel rather seems to reject these hybrid identities. Ahmad is clearly presented as an outsider right from the start. In "Open Doors, Closed Minds", Richard Gray even suggests that Ahmad "remains an outsider, not merely to those around him but also to the reader" (Gray 2009: 136).

In his work on the post-9/11 anglophone Pakistani literature, Khan suggests that post-9/11 novels can fit in two major fictional trends:

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phases (separation, margin or *limen*, and aggregation). During the second, liminal, phase, the subject "passes through a realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state" (Turner 1967: 94). In other words, when he enters this period of margin, the individual reaches an in-between state; it can thus be said that s/he neither belongs to the state s/he left, nor to the one s/he will attain. In *Terrorist*, both Jack and Ahmad can be said to be liminal characters, since neither of them truly belong.

> One trend has focused on the psychic and personal response of individuals to trauma; in this process, the internal responses to the tragedy are explored via images, fragments, sounds and flashbacks. In the other trend, based on a more panoramic view, trauma is seen as collective against a backdrop of a long historical duration (Khan 2013: 4).

It could be argued that these trends are not clearly distinguishable and rather function as two poles on a continuum, from most individual to most collective. Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, for instance, presents characteristics of both trends. The plot mainly focuses on Oskar, a young boy whose dad died in the attacks on the WTC. The whole novel describes his journey around New York and how his encounters allow him to eventually recover from his traumatic wound. This would therefore place the novel within the first trend. However, in *Extremely Loud*, the narrative incorporates the stories of Oskar's grandparents, which mention their own traumatic experiences. These two other voices allow the novel to shift from one trend to the other because these new stories refer to the bombings of Hiroshima and Dresden, hence connecting the past with the present and broadening the historical scope of the narrative. This novel consequently makes use of two features that are also characteristic of Aslam's *The Wasted Vigil*: polyphony and multidirectional memory. However, it should be highlighted that while the characters belong to the same family in Foer's text, they come from completely different backgrounds in Aslam's novel, which means that it will be easier for the latter to represent cultural differences.

In *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, Foer displays the difficulty of mourning because this process requires one's ability to put feelings into words. As highlighted by Anke Geertsma, this is something that the three main characters struggle with:

> Problems with the communication of trauma can be found throughout the novel: in Thomas Sr.'s notebook and his tattooed hands, in Grandma's ribbonless typewriter, in the 'Something' and 'nothing' place in their apartment, and in the bracelet Oskar makes for his mother, which is a translation of his father's last message into Morse code. All of these elements demonstrate that the characters cannot articulate their traumas (Geertsma 2011: 100).

Because they are unable to properly express their traumas, it could be argued that Foer's novel remains unable to go beyond melodrama, and consequently does not engage with the political issues that are at stake in the context of 9/11. Nevertheless, scholars like Ilka Saal argue that Foer's narrative manages to tackle more global issues through the concept of 'trauma transfer'[19], which strongly recalls what Rothberg calls 'multidirectional memory'. Ilka Saal indeed writes that

[19] Trauma transfer, according to Saal, refers to "the reading of [a] current trauma through the lens of a previous one" (Saal 2011: 454).

> bringing the trauma of 9/11 into conversation with other, older collective traumata suggests an attempt to engage the pain of others and to consider the myriad ways in which global power structures implicate one's own vulnerability in that of others (Saal 2011: 455).

However, it can still be stated that the whole plot focuses on the members of the same family who must all try to learn to live after losing someone they cared about. The novel does not really try to understand the political implications which might have led to 9/11, but rather uses the events as the starting point of a narrative in which Oskar will go through grief.

It can thus be suggested that Foer, through his main characters, shows that a thorough grief can only be reached through the use of language – and thus thanks to the Other. This is best demonstrated by Oskar, who is the only character who manages to mourn because he is eventually able to confide in others and therefore translate his feelings into words. According to Geertsma, language is what distinguishes mourning from melancholia:

> [t]he difference between mourning and melancholia is that the latter prevents one from moving on because it forces a psychological fixation on the (traumatic) past. Mourning suggests the process of moving on, literally working through the memory of the traumatic experience (Geertsma 2011: 99-100).

For this reason, it can be stated that acceptance – the last of the five stages of grief pointed out by Elizabeth Kübler-Ross – can only be attained thanks to the use of language. This is what Foer describes in his novel by contrasting Oskar's way of coping with loss with that of his grandparents. Even though both grandparents have been willing to deal with their loss by resorting to language – in its written form – they both remained unable to bring meaning to the words they use. The pages composed by the grandmother turn out to be completely blank (Foer 2006: 121-123) whereas the grandfather, on the contrary, has too many things to express, which makes his production completely unreadable in the end (Foer 2006: 277-284). As noted by Saal:

> [w]hile Oskar's narrative builds and progresses, eventually allowing him to work through his trauma and to regain a strong sense of self, his grandparents' voices merely record the very failure of such endeavour, their entrapment in perpetual melancholia (Saal 2011: 457).

After his father died, Oskar found a key in his parents' room. The novel describes his wandering around New York and his quest to discover what the key is supposed to open. Metaphorically, it could be argued that the key unlocks Oskar's heart, and enables him to open up to all the people he meets. This key consequently represents what sets Oskar in motion, what allows him to make new encounters thanks to which he eventually manages to acknowledge – and *accept*, to use Kübler-Ross's words – his father death. As he claims he in the novel, "it's the truth […] that he's dead" (Foer 2006: 321).

It should be highlighted that through its references to Hiroshima and the bombing of Dresden, Foer's novel considers the West as a perpetrator and consequently points to the Allied cruelty. This establishes a parallel between trauma theories and the literary responses to 9/11.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, in trauma studies, the emphasis was first put on the victims and then slightly shifted onto the perpetrators. Literature illustrates this evolution too. Among the first to ever take into consideration the point of view of the hijackers was Martin Amis with his short story "The Last Days of Muhammad Atta", first published in 2006. His text describes how Muhammad Atta, one of the hijackers of the 9/11 attacks, spent his last days, knowing what was about to happen. He was indeed aware that, after his mission, "they wouldn't let him [board a plane]" (Amis 2008: 98). Terrorists are often assimilated to crazy and irrational people – especially in the media – who do not care about the lives of others nor their own (Moghaddam 2006: 4). When described in the West, the terrorist figure often takes the shape of a monster. According to Richard Gray in *After the Fall*, such a description is given to Muhammad Atta in Amis's short story. Muhammad Atta is presented as a thoughtful man, who does not leave anything to chance. He prepared every detail of his operation, he trained for it, and he very much intends to succeed. Throughout his preparation, he appears as a man who does not find anything attractive in the world. In other words, for Gray, "Amis dehumanizes and, in doing so, puts the obscene acts of the terrorists beyond our understanding: they are acts performed by 'them', a demonized other" (Gray 2011: 175-176).

Because in his overview of post-9/11 literature, Gray decided to focus on novels which "present post-9/11 America as a transcultural space in which different cultures reflect and refract, confront and bleed into one another" (Gray 2011: 55), he privileges other works over those of Foer or Amis. As stated by Aaron DeRosa, "Gray certainly favors narratives of liminality that refuse to simplify the Arab Other, move national narratives into transnational spaces, and hybridize individuals and communities" (DeRosa 2011: 613). A question could then be asked: has such a book already been written? Perhaps has it been done by Eastern authors? This is, at least, the opinion of Madeline Clements who, in *Writing Islam From a South Asian Muslim Perspective*, claims that:

> the fictions in English produced by South Asian authors of Muslim background provide a nuanced perspective on contemporary Islam, unsettling crude stereotypes and pessimistic East-West binaries, and writing rather of a world defined by ambiguities and even – occasionally – of hope (Clements 2016: 158).

In his analysis of post-9/11 literature, Aaron DeRosa claims that Gray, in *After the Fall*, is looking for narratives that favor the concept of transculturality (DeRosa 2011: 612). According to DeRosa, dealing with the cultural is not the only method to make sense of it all; there is another way, which has actually been used by authors like DeLillo, Foer, or Spiegelman, who "present another path using *historical* intertexts regarding 1970s German terrorism, the bombings of Hiroshima and Dresden, and the Holocaust respectively" (DeRosa 2011: 614 –

emphasis added). Nadeem Aslam's *The Wasted Vigil* seems to overcome this tension between historical and cultural approaches by using both trajectories, hence providing a completely new approach among the literary responses to 9/11. In that, one could hold Aslam's narrative as a successful attempt at overcoming the limits highlighted by Khan in most of the Western novels on 9/11.

According to Gohar Karim Khan, Euro-American fiction mainly conveys a "discourse of hegemony and proves insufficient in representing terrorism and violence in their proper transnational and trans-historical dimensions" (Khan 2013: 5). Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* seems to completely challenge this Western hegemony. The novel begins with the arrival of Changez in Lahore, and his encounter with an American man who is sitting at a café. They immediately start talking – even though one should already mention the fact that the whole novel is a monologue of Changez, who relates his life story to the American. Through their conversation, the reader learns that Changez left his native Pakistan to move to America, where he received one of the best educations, and was eventually hired at Underwood Samson. His life is clearly presented as a success-story up until the attacks on the WTC, which changed everything – especially the way Changez was perceived in America. As stated by Sophia Arjana in *Muslims in Western Imagination*, "since 9/11 [Muslim men] have become less than zero". This is something Changez personally experienced. His encounter with the American man takes place after his return to Pakistan and places the Western man in the situation Changez had to go through while he was still in the United Stated: the American will therefore be placed in a position of inferiority. As highlighted by Wilson, "[t]he withholding of any voice from Changez' companion and the ventriloquizing of his presence through answers to his 'questions' seemingly 'others' the American, so reversing the dichotomized western/subaltern relationship" (Wilson 2012: 6)[20]. Moreover, this text also makes use of a historical approach since the main character, Changez, "becomes the vocalizer of the reality that 9/11 is but one marker of violence in the world" (Khan 2013: 158). Like Nadeem Aslam, Mohsin Hamid historicizes 9/11 and brings it together with (neo-)colonialism, which is made explicit through the novel's reference to one of the most famous books about colonization: Joseph Conrad's *Heart of* Darkness (Hamid 2008: 208). Even though Changez considers himself as an American – or at least as a New Yorker – he cannot retain a smile when he hears about what happened at the WTC. Sobia Khan argues that his behavior reveals a wound that has not healed, namely that

[20] In an article in which he investigates the notion of integration and alienation in Hami's novel, Avirup Ghosh shares this point of view. He indeed writes that "[t]he novel is wholly occupied by the overpowering voice of Changez" (Ghosh 2013: 48).

of the American invasion of his country: “[t]he smile indicates the baggage Changez carries of belonging to a previously colonized nation, which at the time of 9/11 was already dancing to the tune of American imperial policies” (Khan 2015: 143).

His attitude might seem surprising since right from the opening lines of the novel, Changez makes it clear that in his mind he belongs to both America and Pakistan, as demonstrated by the first paragraph of the novel, which describes the encounter between the narrator and an American man:

> Excuse me, sir, but may I be of assistance? Ah, I see I have alarmed you. Do not be frightened by my beard: I am a lover of America. I noticed that you were looking for something; more than looking, in fact you seemed to be on a *mission*, and since I am both a native of this city and a speaker of your language, I thought I might offer you my services (Hamid 2008: 1 – original emphasis).

It is worth noticing the use of the word “mission” in the passage above, which suggests how foreign nations – more precisely America in this case – still tend to interfere within the affairs of Pakistan.

Despite Changez’s personal wish to embrace both cultures, the novel “investigates the social and cultural complexities faced by individuals and groups who inhabit two cultures simultaneously” (Khan 2011: 90), especially after 9/11. While before the attacks Changez was described as a successful man who managed to climb the social ladder, everything changed for him on that morning. Because of the surrounding paranoia and his Pakistani origins, Changez, unlike his American colleagues, “is asked to strip down to his boxer shorts [at the airport checks]; an order that leaves him feeling humiliated, incensed and instantly less American” (Khan 2011: 93). He is not solely rejected by the American society, but also by Erica who refuses to make love with him. Erica can therefore be seen as an allegory of America, as written by Anna Hartnell: “Changez’s aborted attempt to make love to Erica is the corollary of what is clearly an aborted love affair with America itself” (Hartnell 2010: 343). The comparison between the woman and America goes further. It can indeed be said that they are both characterized by a strong feeling of nostalgia. Erica has lost her lover (Chris), and consequently lives in the past. Similarly, after the attacks on the WTC, America has turned its gaze backwards. According to Changez:

> America, too, was increasingly giving itself over to a dangerous nostalgia at the time. […] [He] had always thought of America as a nation that looked forward; for the first time [he] was struck by its determination to look *back* (Hamid 2008: 130-131 – original emphasis).

As the narrative unfolds, the reader becomes aware of Changez’s growing identity crisis, which reaches a climax at the end of the novel, which remains completely open. While the two protagonists keep on talking, Pakistani men gather around them, hence creating a rather

threatening environment for the American man who, in the end, reaches into his jacket. Changez notices a glint of metal, which could very likely indicate the presence of a gun (Hamid 2008: 209).

Because the ending remains blurry, the reader then becomes the 'moral third', the witness. It is up to her/him to decide what meaning the ending will take on. Incorporating the reader within his novel was Hamid's wish right from the start. In an interview with Claire Chambers, he clearly exposed his belief that the reader's personality would influence the ending of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*:

> In my novel, there is […] an attempt to fundamentally implicate the reader. So if you view the world as fundamentally as a world where there is a war between civilizations, then the novel is a thriller. If you don't, it is equally a random encounter between two separate guys who go their separate ways. So if it's a thriller or not depends on the preconceptions we bring to it as a reader (Hamid, in Chambers 2011: 178).

Even though it could be argued that because of the role s/he is given, the reader is put in a position in which s/he must carefully think about the potential consequences of her/his reading, one could still argue that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* does not have as strong an effect on the reader as the reader has on the story.

Another limit that could be ascribed to this novel is that the American man is never given a voice. The reader is only granted access to Changez's perspective, through which it is made clear that his hatred against America has only been increasing over the years – and all the more after 9/11. Even if one could empathize with the Pakistani man, it should however be noted that he remains a profoundly unreliable character. Lau and Mendes argue that the writing of the novel "is menacing and sinister, dependent upon an unreliable narrator whose voice dominates, and it holds its cards close to its chest instead of treating the reader as a confidant" (Lau and Mendes 2018: 81). According to Khan, the objective of presenting an unreliable narrator is twofold:

> by making his autodiegetic narrator deliberately unreliable, Hamid has not only created a productive distance between authorial and narratorial perspectives, but also made the relationship between America and Pakistan more nuanced than a simple case of postcolonial resentment (Khan 2013: 155).

In the novel, it is indeed a series of circumstances that led to Changez's identity crisis. That is why Khan perceives *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* as a bildungsroman, in which the narrator undergoes a metamorphosis. This Pakistani-born man moved to the United States for his education. When he comes back to Pakistan for the first time, he believes at first that his native country is not the same as before. However, he later realizes that he is the one who has changed:

> *I* had changed; I was looking about me with the eyes of a foreigner […]. This realization angered me; staring at my reflection in the speckled glass of my bathroom mirror I resolved

> to exorcize the unwelcome sensibility by which I had become possessed (Hamid 2008: 141 – original emphasis).

One can obviously notice the growing self-loathing of the narrator, who acknowledges that he came back to his native country with the eyes of an American man. This feeling will only increase as the novel unfolds. Changez – who now works for Underwood Samson; one should keep in mind the initials of this company: US – goes on a trip to Chile, where he encounters Juan Bautista, thanks to whom he realizes that he has become a "modern day Janissary"[21]:

> Juan Bautista's words plunged me into a deep bout of introspection. I spent that night considering what I had become. There really could be no doubt: I was a modern-day Janissary, a servant of the American empire (Hamid 2008: 173).

These experiences explain that Changez's identity crisis will never end. Throughout the novel, he will remain unable to affiliate with either America or Pakistan – because he wants to belong to both at the same time. While his disillusionment for America grows, he also remains attached to this country, and especially to the money he is allowed to earn there (Hamid 2008: 178-179). As highlighted by Khan, "[Changez] constantly challenges his previous identities and sense of belonging but at no point in the narrative does he arrive at a settled identity" (Khan 2013: 190). This ambiguity in Changez's character also adds to the openness of the novel's ending. The reader is fully aware of Changez's disillusionment, but also of his former admiration for America and the possibilities it brings, which makes it even harder to know if Changez is about to enter the realm of perpetration or not.

However, it has previously been argued that one should be extremely careful about an individual's voice since every narrator tends to elicit particular feelings from her/his audience. Here, Changez lays out a new kind of antagonism between East and West, in which it is the Pakistani rather than the American who occupies the position of power. It is indeed the American man who has "the right to remain silent" (Khan 2013: 155), since Changez is the only character who is given a voice. This perhaps represents the last limit of Hamid's narrative. By contrast, it could be argued that Nadeem Aslam's *The Wasted Vigil* provides a much more balanced and comprehensive perspective because it contains numerous characters, and that each of them is given a voice and a chance to be heard, no matter where they come from or which subject-position they occupy. Moreover, it is already worth pointing out that Nadeem Aslam's novel does not simply give a voice to the many characters it presents, but also allows other

[21] Janissaries were "Christian boys […] captured by the Ottomans and trained to be soldiers in a Muslim army, at that time the greatest army in the world. They were ferocious and utterly loyal: they had fought to erase their own civilizations" (Hamid 2008: 172). As stated in the novel, when he encounters Juan Bautista, Changez understands that this is what he has become: a man who has been used by a foreign nation to "ensure that [his] own country faced the threat of war" (Hamid 2008: 173).

authors to be heard through the many literary references that are included within the narrative. The presence of these authors is especially overwhelming in Marcus's house, in which books cover the ceiling of different rooms. Very early in the novel, one of the characters is compared to Prospero, one of Shakespeare's characters in *The Tempest*. Russian authors like Tolstoy or Marina Tsvetaeva are also mentioned. Later in the text, Marcus takes a book by Virgil, and starts comparing his own life with that of Aeneas. In the end, Homer's *Illiad* is alluded to, and the reference is once again used to add meaning to the story. It is indeed thanks to previous literary works which he mentions in his text that Aslam manages to reach a twofold objective: first, these references allow the author to create a bridge between different communities because two cultures consequently come into contact; and second, Aslam does not only borrow the words but also, at time, the protagonists – and, as a consequence, their values – of other writers to associate his own characters with specific characteristics. As will be discussed later, Aslam's mention of Orestes or Antigone, to cite only them, is full of meaning because it adds the features of these mythical figures – vengeance and resistance – to his own narrative. In other words, *The Wasted Vigil* is a book about other books.

Alluding to other literary works is a process referred to as "intertextuality". The word was first introduced in literature by Julia Kristeva after she devoted a lot of her time to the study of Michael Bakhtin's work. Throughout his career, Mikhail Bakhtin has argued that language – and therefore society – was fundamentally dialogical. Using this as a starting point, Bakhtin analyzed the literary genre of the novel. He indeed extended his concepts of dialogism and heteroglossia – a concept according to which "every utterance contains within it the trace of other utterances, both in the past and in the future" (Roberts, in Allen 2000: 213) – to literature, and claimed that

> [n]ovels are overwhelmingly intertextual, constantly referring, within themselves, to other works outside them. Novels, in other words, obsessively *quote* other specific works in one form or another (Holquist 1990: 88 – original emphasis).

In her essay "Word, Dialogue and Novel" (1986), Kristeva shows her agreement with Bakhtin when she claims that "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations" (Krisetva 1986: 37). It is worth highlighting the fact that according to Tzvetan Todorov (in *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*), when Bakhtin worked on the notion of dialogism, he was referring to an "intertextual dimension" (Todorov 1984: x). The adjective "intertextual" has to be understood here in its broad sense, referring both to the polyphony – deeply grounded within Aslam's novel, as stated earlier – and to intertextuality *per se*. In *L'Intertextualité: Mémoire de la Littérature*, Tiphaine Samoyault states that intertextuality can take two different shapes: either

a text A is present within a text B; or text A is transformed within text B (Samoyault 2010: 33). Gérard Genette contends that the notion of intertextuality only applies to the first category singled out by Samoyault, rather suggesting the notion of *hypertextuality* for the second variant. In the present dissertation, intertextuality must be understood as Genette sees it.

Through these concepts – *viz.* polyphony and intertextuality – *The Wasted Vigil* explores the complexity of the relations between different cultures and investigates the political implications of the events. Merging the voices of his characters with those of other texts allows Aslam to create bridges between different historical moments, which helps readers understand how history is a collection of events which are connected together through a causal relationship. In *The Wasted Vigil*, many links are established between different traumatic events. The characters enter the story with their own backgrounds, marked by their own scars. While "[i]n erasing and marginalizing the colonized victim of American aggression overseas, [some] texts […] represent a denial of the US's wider status as a perpetrator" (Gibbs 2014: 199), *The Wasted Vigil* provides a voice to these victims of colonial injuries, which explains why so many traumatic events are referred to in the novel: the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the rise of the Taliban, the American interventionism in the Middle East, but also the two attacks on the World Trade Center (in 1993 and 2001) among others.

In Aslam's novel, the Holocaust is not the main reference here. Even though offering a larger place to these events than to the Holocaust might appear as quite surprising given the importance the Nazi Genocide has acquired, Michael Rothberg highlights – in his work on *Multidirectional Memory* – the dangers there might be in considering the Holocaust as completely different and isolated from any other traumatic experience. According to him, when they considered the Holocaust as unique, some authors tended to remain unable to acknowledge the traumas caused by other atrocities which "were not measuring up" to this 'standard' (Rothberg 2009: 10). In *Post-Colonial Witnessing*, Stef Craps addresses some of the limits of trauma studies. He indeed writes that the founding texts of the 1990s, and even later ones like Rothberg's, "tend to show little interest in traumatic experiences of members of non-Western cultural traditions […] as well as postcolonial indigenous groups and disempowered racial and diasporic groups living in Western countries" (Craps 2013: 3). He suggests that this attitude reflects some kind of Eurocentrism in the field of memory studies (Craps 2013: 80). As he analyzes postcolonial narratives, Stef Craps claims that even if the Holocaust might be a touchstone for the West, it is not necessarily the case for the whole world, because "non-Western regions and nations tend to be preoccupied with historical traumas that they themselves suffered, in many cases those of Western imperialism" (Craps 2013: 80). That is why the

characters of *The Wasted Vigil* – which is set in Afghanistan – rather remember how Western powers (such as the USSR) gained control over the Afghan territory, how this situation led to the rise of the Taliban regime which brought with it an increase in violence in the region, and how the interventionism of America led to 9/11 as an act of revenge. In other words, the novel draws a picture of violence as a cycle in which individuals switch from one subject-position to the other again and again. The following chapter will further investigate Nadeem Aslam's novel and show how every aspect of the novel tends to put forward the circularity of violence by constantly linking the past with the present.

Chapter 3 – Nadeem Aslam's *The Wasted Vigil*

I. Witnessing Violence in the Layers of the Earth

It would be no surprise if the trees and vines of Afghanistan suspended their growth one day, fearful that if their roots were to lengthen, they might come into contact with a landmine buried near by.

– Nadeem Aslam, *The Wasted Vigil* (2009)

The Wasted Vigil is set in Afghanistan, a few years after the attacks on the WTC, and starts with the arrival of Lara, a Russian woman who travels to this region where her brother disappeared. The very first sentence of the novel immediately suggests that the whole story will develop around grief, a feeling shared by all of the characters: "Her [Lara's] mind is a haunted house"[22] (Aslam 2009: 5). Lara is staying in a house which belongs to Marcus, an old English man who has spent most of his life in Afghanistan after having married an Afghan woman: Qatrina. While Marcus is travelling to the city of Jalalabad, searching for his missing grandson, he meets David, an American man who has been in love with Zameen, Marcus's daughter who was kidnapped by the Soviets in 1980. Already, the novel seems to suggest that history is a perpetual repetition: the appearance of the characters indeed reminds the reader of how foreign political powers settled in Afghanistan. First, the Soviets (embodied here by Lara[23]) and then, the United States (represented by David). As the story unfolds, the focalization constantly switches from one perspective to another and thanks to this process, the reader is given access to the thoughts of most of the characters. Very quickly, the narration focalizes on Bihzad, a young boy whom Marcus believes to be his grandson. While the boy knows that it is not true, he still pretends to be who Marcus thinks he is because the young boy is hoping for a brighter future. As stated in the novel, "maybe he [Bihzad]'ll go to England. A chance at last to make something of his life" (Aslam 2009: 66). But as he is on a mission for the terrorist organization he is enrolled in – alongside Casa, one of the four main characters of the novel – Bihzad clearly figures out that he is rather moving towards death. When David hears the explosion of Bihzad's truck, he immediately understands that the school he financed in Jalalabad was the target of Bizhad's suicide mission. Violence has become part of everyday life in Afghanistan, which

[22] The fact that the first sentence already mentions the house is highly significant, especially when the house will acquire a central place in the novel as will be demonstrated later.
[23] One should still notice, however, that Lara is referred to as a Russian and not a Soviet in the text, an element which already hints at the constant links that will be made between the past and the present throughout the novel.

does not leave any room for uncertainty: "[e]lsewhere he would have thought it was thunder, but in this country he knew what it was, what it had to be" (Aslam 2009: 75).

Through the eyes of the characters who successively enter the narrative, the reader slowly becomes aware that they are the product of their pasts since they have all been shaped by the hands of war. This is something that humans and non-humans have in common: the characters, like the earth, have been destroyed and marked forever by several waves of violence. In the text, both humans and nature have been harmed by waves of violence. That is why one could easily replace the pomegranates of Casa's remembrance by human bodies, as similarly noticed by Chiroux: "[o]nce he had seen a mine detonating in a grove of pomegranate trees with such force that the skin of every fruit on every branch had cracked, the red seed spilling out" (Aslam 2009: 80). But according to Ivanchikova, one can see hope in this connection between the human and the non-human. There is indeed "a possibility of healing for humans by way of the earth" (Ivanchikova 2017: 303), especially thanks to the pomegranates, because their liquid is a great antiseptic (Aslam 2009: 8).

The ground also bears witness to the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan as well as of the American presence in the region. For instance, when Casa finds a mine buried in the ground, he immediately claims that "[i]t was from the time of the Soviets" (Aslam 2009: 80). Moreover, violence can be said to originate from the West since even the weapons and the tactics used by the Afghans were crafted in America or in the USSR. As a consequence, Soviet weapons have been used against the USSR by the Afghans to get rid of their domination (Aslam 2009: 122). David also remembers that back in the 1980s, resorting to suicide attacks was a strategy suggested by the Americans to be used against the Soviets. In order to oppose the Soviet armies, the Americans needed to destroy a tunnel, and "[t]he only possible way of collapsing the tunnel was for someone to blow themselves up in there" (Aslam 2008: 77). In her article on Nadeem Aslam's novels *The Wasted Vigil* and *The Blind Man's Garden*, Alla Ivanchikova writes that, in Afghanistan, "the[] ruins contain [evidence] of long historical processes of fast and slow violence" (Ivanchikova 2017: 294). She further argues that the novel could be linked with the Anthropocene, "a concept that […] binds humanity with Earth's history" (Ivanchikova 2017: 289). As stated by Marcus in the novel, each generation leaves an indelible imprint on earth before dying because "[w]hen you are dead you decay and become part of the earth" (Aslam 2009: 238). Consequently, by digging the soil, one can "go[] down a layer into the[] country's past" (Aslam 2009: 341). In *The Wasted Vigil*, Aslam also refers to the creation of the World Trade Center to express how each generation lives on top of the previous one and beneath the next, as can be seen when David talks with a fellow American, Christopher:

> [t]he workers digging the foundations of these buildings years ago had found ancient cannonballs and bombs, a ship's anchor of a design not made after 1750, and one small gold-rimmed tea cup made of china but still intact, with two birds painted on it (Aslam 2009: 201).

Through this extract, one can quickly realize that violence is not restricted to the modern era. When digging the soil, the workers found vestiges of weapons and other markers of violence. However, they also discovered beautiful objects. This already points to Aslam's writing style, which constantly brings together the destruction of war with the beauty of life.

In her analysis, Ivanchikova argues that the years of war in Afghanistan has left on the earth what she calls a "geological signature" (Ivanchikova 2017: 289). She consequently writes that "[c]ontemporary warfare must be addressed as a dramatic instance of terraforming" (Ivanchikova 2017: 289), therefore suggesting why the earth should be seen as a witness of this violence:

> the conflict in Afghanistan is refracted through the prisms of geology and archelogy, with the overarching motifs of earthwork […] dominating the plot. Intense interactions with the earth positions the earth as a medium of memory – a conductor of messages from the deep past and into the deep future (Ivanchikova 2017: 290).

Because Aslam gives so much attention to the earth in his writings (his following novel, *The Blind Man's Garden*, reproduces the same pattern) Ivanchikova places the writer in what she calls "the aesthetics of the geological turn", a concept that "crystallize[s] around the idea of deep time" (Ivanchikova 2017: 291). This concept, when used in geological studies, does not consider time as linear, but rather as vertical. By digging up the past, the story acknowledges how it is sometimes necessary to go back in time – sometimes into the "deep past" – to fully understand how history works:

> [w]orking within the *longue durée* frame […] allows a historian to detect patterns emerging over centuries and sometimes over millennia instead of focusing on rapidly changing events occurring within a short chronological pattern (Ivanchikova 2017: 291)

In other words, Alla Ivanhickova suggests that the Afghan soil is perhaps the main source of information if one wants to know everything about Afghanistan, including the violence committed there, because it conveys the memories of the past.

Digging the past is a constituent feature of the novel. For instance, right from the start, when Marcus finds a giant Buddha's head in the ground next to his house, his excavation of "a face from another time" (Aslam 2009: 22) simultaneously recalls the importance of Buddhism in the region a few centuries back, when it "was one of the most important pilgrimage sites in the Buddhist world from the second to the seventh centuries AD" (Aslam 2009: 22). Interestingly, this image, which appears at the very beginning of the novel, immediately implies how Afghanistan symbolizes "a meeting of continents" bringing together the East and the West because "[t]he Greeks in Afghanistan gave him [Buddha] the features of Apollo […] The only

Asian addition was a dot on the forehead" (Aslam 2009: 236). Under the Taliban rule, the Taliban wanted to destroy the Buddha, but to their surprise, gold poured out from the holes left by the bullets and scared them away (Aslam 2009: 43). The resistance of the Buddha's head, Alla Ivanchikova suggests, "signifies a part of the past that is indestructible" (Ivanchikova 2017: 297). It should be highlighted that reminiscences of the past do not simply appear when the characters see something. All senses trigger memories, especially smell, sight, and hearing. This is indeed suggested by the fact that the Buddha's head – which represents the past – is used by Marcus to build a perfume factory. Moreover, Marcus also finds some audio cassettes that had been buried in his garden. When he retrieves them, he calls them "sound fossils" (Aslam 2009: 21). He immediately starts listening to them. As the cassettes replace each other, it becomes clear that art is used by Aslam to connect East and West, because the song of "a bird known as Asia's nightingale […] was followed by Bach and then American Jazz" (Aslam 2009: 21).

It can be said that the five senses actually structure Marcus's house because its rooms are dedicated to a sense. In each of these rooms, Qatrina and Marcus decided to cover the walls with an image linked to the sense the room celebrated. When the Taliban gained control of Afghanistan, art was prohibited in the country. For this reason, the walls of the house had to be covered with mud, in order to prevent the Taliban from seeing the images. Similarly, Qatrina also decided to nail onto the ceiling the books she and her husband had devoted all their lives to collect. Consequently, it is already worth noticing that resistance is primarily connected to art. As the narrative unfolds, Marcus slowly cleans the mud away, piece by piece, in order to reveal these images that were buried in the past. Moreover, the novel follows the rhythm of "gentle literary rain"[24] represented by the fall of the books, whose nails become too weak to maintain them. Finally, Qatrina herself was an artist, who used to draw paintings. All of them represented livings things. But right next to them, Qatrina included the name of Allah in Arabic, which confused the Taliban when they saw the paintings: they "did not know how to deal with the pictures […] They wanted to tear out these details but couldn't because the various strokes and curves of the name took up the entire rectangle, reaching into every corner, every angle" (Aslam 2009: 241). It is therefore through art that the signs of resistance slowly start to emerge.

Because of the importance the novel gives to this excavating work, which metaphorically brings back to life fossils buried in the deep time, the past can be said to be the time of narration. Even though the characters are brought together in a *hic et nunc*, in which they share their

[24] These words have been uttered by Nadeem Aslam himself in an interview available at the following address: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B-6HQV2U7oM&frags=pl%2Cwn.

stories, they constantly invoke their past. Through their dialogues, people who are no longer alive are given a chance to add their perspectives to the narrative, alongside the four main characters: Lara, Marcus, David, and Casa. As stated by Ivanchikova, "[b]ehind each character there is a multitude of relevant pasts; in fact, each character is a host of stories and lives lived before him or her" (Ivanchikova 2017: 297). When brought together, all these perspectives seem to indicate that the situation in Afghanistan is not simply restricted to this country but rather extends far away from its borders. Once again, the reference to the Afghan soil tends to support this statement, particularly when the story mentions a diamond. According to Ivanchikova, the story is about the famous stone called Koh-i-Noor:

> Having originated in India, the fabled diamond changed hands many times. Its owners include Babur, an empire builder who conquered Afghanistan and India and established the Mughal Empire in 1526; a Persian shah, Nader Shah, who captured Koh-i-Noor and brought it to Persia in 1739; and later an Afghan emir, Ahmad Shah Durrani, who came into possession of the stone in 1747. […] Eventually ended up in Queen Victoria's crown, the diamond remains in England, weaving together the multiple forces that ruled over and passed through the land that is now Afghanistan (Ivanchikova 2017: 300).

However, in the text, the diamond which is mentioned is related to the scepter of Catherine the Great (Aslam 2009: 72). Even though one could question the fact that the diamond mentioned in *The Wasted Vigil* is a different one (because Koh-i-Noor has never decorated the Russian Imperial scepter), it nevertheless refers to a stone that has been owned by many hands, all of them originating from different parts of the world. In that, it can be argued that the diamond represents Afghanistan itself, which, just like the stone, has been under the control of various foreign powers. Over the years, the stone's size has diminished. Through these successive waves of oppression, Afghanistan too has been destroyed. In other words, Aslam, by evoking the famous diamond, suggests that just like it, Afghanistan bears witness to the multiple hands involved in its desolation. It is worth noting that both the history of the stone and that of Afghanistan have been shaped by different continents.

Similarly, David's watch, which he received from his late brother who passed away during the Vietnam War, also allows the narrative to move from America to Afghanistan, because one of the components of the watch comes from Afghanistan: its spinel. This connection to Afghanistan is precisely what made David decide to go to this country, in order to reconnect with his lost brother:

> The watch my father gave Jonathan when he left for Vietnam had a tiny spinel inside it, attached to one of the plates that held the mechanism. He said it was from Afghanistan. That was one of the reasons I came to this country, all those years ago. Always wanted to visit Afghanistan because of that small jewel (Aslam 2009: 110).

By evoking this symbolic item which reminds David of his brother, Aslam brilliantly manages to connect the contemporary situation of Afghanistan with the Vietnam war. Through a reference to the Afghan soil – *viz.* the spinel, a red stone which resembles a ruby – Aslam demonstrates how each conflict mentioned in the narrative is connected to another. The watch is indeed closely related to Vietnam, since David received him right before his brother left for war; and as the narrative unfolds, David realizes that what happened in Vietnam is perhaps more related to the Afghan conflict than he might have thought:

> maybe at some level it was the same war. Just as tomorrow's wars might be begotten by today's wars, a continuation of them. Rivers of lava emerging onto the surface after flowing many out-of-sight miles underground (Aslam 2009: 368).

Using this as a starting point of analysis, this study will consider violence, as presented within Aslam's novel, as a continuum – or perhaps would it be more accurate to talk about a cycle – since most acts of violence seem to be fueled by a strong feeling of revenge. Because pain engenders violence, it can thus be said that violence, within the narrative, is deeply rooted in the concept of retaliation. All of this is embodied by Zameen, who can be perceived as yet another figure who embodies Afghanistan: Zameen indeed means "earth" in Urdu. Through this allegorical representation of Afghanistan embodied by Zameen, Aslam binds once again together the human and the non-human. Zameen and the country in which she was born have been simultaneously harmed by different waves of violence. The damages of the Soviet Invasion are personified in the novel by Benedikt (Lara's brother), Zameen's rapist; she was then kidnapped by Afghan warlords (first Gul Rasool, and then Nabi Khan).

When he is told about this by Marcus, David starts his quest to find Zameen and her son, Bihzad, "[a]nd following the trail of her murderers, David would realize, he had been stepping on his own footprints" (Aslam 2009: 189). He thus understands that his own country's involvement and interference in Afghan affairs led to a series of events which ended with Zameen's death and Bihzad's disappearance. As stated earlier, David first decided to come to Afghanistan to reconnect with his lost brother, but his grief almost immediately transformed into anger against the Soviets, who, according to him, were responsible for his brother's death in Vietnam since they "had supported Vietnamese guerillas" (Aslam 2009: 152). His only wish then was to "do everything [he] c[ould] to fuck up the Reds" (Aslam 2009: 153). These elements tend to show that the conflict in Afghanistan is not as much a civil war as it is a global conflict. *The Wasted Vigil* demonstrates how, according to Khan, "the 'problem' of Afghanistan has never been one that implicated just one country; it was and continues to be a matter of transnational proportions, involving several nations and conflicting ideologies" (Khan

2013: 104). In her article "Global Civil War and Post-9/11 Discourse in *The Wasted Vigil*", Oona Frawley, lecturer at Maynooth University, writes that this argument is best demonstrated by the cast of characters presented in the novel. According to her, bringing the characters together in Marcus's home is a means for Aslam to "conjure[] the impact of political and social strife on a particular space over several generations" (Frawley 2013: 440). Because they all come from distinct horizons, the novel plays on the interconnection between different countries, all of which had an impact in the construction and/or destruction of Afghanistan[25]. Moreover, via constant references to the past, the civil war taking place in the narrative (between Gul Rasool and Nabi Khan, two Afghan warlords) is associated with twentieth-century imperialism, which is itself represented by each character. All of them can indeed be perceived as allegories of their native countries: Lara recalls the Soviet Invasion; David, the American presence in the Middle-East; and Marcus (like his father) even reminds the reader of the colonization of the country in the 19th century by the British Empire. These Western characters consequently embody the impact their countries had on Afghanistan[26]. All of this allows Frawley to conclude her article by stating that the current war in Afghanistan is not simply a civil war, but rather a 'global civil war', a concept she borrows from Hardt and Negri (Frawley 2013: 445).

II. Violence Breeds More Violence

> *It's October. The United States was attacked last month, a day of fire visited on its cities. And as a consequence Western armies have invaded Afghanistan.*
>
> – Nadeem Aslam, *The Blind Man's Garden* (2014)

In "Global Terror, Global Vengeance?", Marcel Hénaff argues that for the perpetrators of 9/11, the attacks can be considered as "a vast payback operation" (Hénaff 2008: 82), which follows the logic of reciprocity, perhaps best expressed by the *lex talionis*. Yet, the author highlights the fact that the very nature of the terrorist act – which is most of the time a suicide attack – puts this notion of reciprocity into question, since the culprit can never be the one against whom the retaliation is directed. Similarly, terrorists cannot directly target the ones they

[25] Alla Ivanchikova indeed argues that "[t]he international cast of characters allows Aslam to draw attention to the global nature of the conflict in Afghanistan", and what is more, "to the often overlooked role of the West in Afghan tragedy" (Ivanchikova 2017: 294).

[26] Oona Frawley indeed notes that "[t]hrough the character of the British-born Marcus, […] we receive references to the British colonial presence in the region in the late nineteenth century. Through David, […] we hear of the jostling for power that occurred between the Russians, the Pakistanis, and the Americans […] we also receive information about the subversive American presence in Afghanistan through the decade of Soviet occupation. Lara's quest to find her lost brother, Benedikt, allows the novel to delve into that decade of Russian occupation, from 1979 to 1989. The novel's present day […] includes the takeover by the Taliban as well as the occupation by the Americans and British coalition following 9/11" (Frawley 2013: 443-444).

consider guilty, because the origin of their resentment against the West would, according to Hénaff, finds its roots many centuries ago. In his article, he claims that over time, Europe (which was later followed by North America) gained power until it almost dominated the world[27]. This domination was best demonstrated in the waves of colonization – like Napoleon's conquest of Egypt, which dates back to the end of the 18th century, and which is also mentioned in Nadeem Aslam's novel (Aslam 2009: 209). According to Hénaff, retaliation in these cases – in which the culprit can no longer be reached – would then target a "generalized 'other' of the group considered culpable" (Hénaff 2008: 92). It could be stated that *The Wasted Vigil* represents this because it incorporates characters who represent larger groups, each of them being, in a way, held responsible – and at times feeling responsible – for the mistakes made by his/her ancestors.

In the novel, each character's decision seems to be triggered by his/her past. It has already been mentioned that David's presence in Afghanistan was strongly influenced by his connection to his brother, and his wish to avenge him from the Soviets. As for the young terrorists of the novel, Casa and Bihzad, it can be stated that the conditions in which they grew up decided the men they would become. Their earliest memories were marked by death and violence. Bihzad and Casa's joining the terrorist organization can be related to their difficult childhood:

> the hunger, the refugee camps, the deaths one by one of the adults around them due to various causes, the orphanages, the beatings and worse, the earning of daily bread as beggars or labourers in the bazaars (Aslam 2009: 68).

They do not have any real identity, and consequently live on the margins of society. After Bihzad has carried out his mission, David and Marcus learn that the young boy's parents had died in the Soviet attack on a refugee caravan in the 1980s (Aslam 2009: 76) and his sister was killed because of the Americans (Aslam 2009: 64). Those events are used by the organization to convince the boy of carrying his mission and intensify his thirst for revenge. The first years of his life have been filled with traumatic experiences, which relates him to Zameen's son, also called Bihzad, who "was born more dead than alive" (Aslam 2009: 343). Likewise, since his youngest age, Casa has never truly experienced joy or love:

> [b]y the time he was about ten he had endured every kind of assault on his body by men or stronger boys, and – because the only way to feel any control was to distress or wound others

[27] In "Global Terror, Global Vengeance?", Marcel Hénaff argues that Muslim and Christian societies have been put in a position of rivalry because they are both "defined by a call to universal proselytism" (Hénaff 2008: 88). From the eight to the thirteenth centuries, there was a feeling of equality between the two groups – Hénaff suggests that Muslim societies had the upper hand "in terms of culture, knowledge, technology, and commercial exchanges" (Hénaff 2008: 88). However, around the fourteenth and fifteen centuries, the situation started to change, and the forces switched hands. That is how Europe's domination started to develop, especially on the basis of colonialism. "[T]he terrorists [then] chose to seek 'reparation' through an act that was primarily symbolic – to randomly punish those belonging to the supposedly guilty civilization" (Hénaff 2008: 89).

> – by the time he was about fourteen he had done the same to younger or weaker boys. At the very core of him was the belief that human beings had little to offer beyond cruelty and danger (Aslam 2009: 221).

This explains why the smallest affection he receives makes him uncomfortable (Aslam 2009: 190). This passage is especially relevant in that it juxtaposes Casa's early youth as a victim and the following years in which he entered the realm of perpetration. As such, this extract shows that he became violent because he had been harmed before, and also because he had never experienced anything else. In many ways Casa's character emerges as a product of the (neo)colonial history of Afghanistan. In his paper on the postcolonial implications for terrorism, Adrien Chiroux argues that "Casa's terrorist life and skills are the consequence of a conflict between two foreign nations that have nothing to do with Afghanistan" (Chiroux 2017: 6). It has already been stated that because of the Cold War, many Afghans fled their countries. Among these refugees were the ones who would later found terrorist groups like the Taliban, and it is in groups like these that Casa has been trained to become a terrorist:

> Cyanide can be extracted from apricot, Casa knows. […] Pencils. Lemons. Corn syrup. Dye. As he walks through the street he knows he could fabricate explosives from many things on the cart and in the chops around him. Sugar. Coffee. Paint. He even knows how to make a bomb out of his urine (Aslam 2009: 121).

According to Chiroux, without the existence of these camps – which have emerged because of the Cold War – Casa would probably have never been able to see these basic elements as "raw materials for explosives" (Chiroux 2017: 6). All the violence Casa witnessed and endured has decided the path he would later follow: that of revenge. This attitude could be related to Sophia Arjana's concept of "environmental determinism", which expresses "the idea that one's natural surroundings determined his or her entire being" (Arjana 2015: 9). Even though he has only been directly harmed by the Americans, Casa has discovered traces of the violence committed by other nations in Afghanistan – especially the Soviets. Because of that, his wish for revenge is not solely directed towards the Americans – whom he can blame directly for his wounded arm (Aslam 2009: 122-123) – but also against the Soviets. As stated in the novel:

> [h]e has often wished he had been alive back then [in the 1980s], to be able to kill a Soviet soldier. But he reminds himself on those occasions, I am alive now and able to kill Americans, infidels all (Aslam 2009: 407-408).

Interestingly enough, Aslam also manages to incorporate the East within the construction of Casa as a terrorist figure, as demonstrated by Chiroux through his analysis of Casa's name.

As the novel unfolds, the reader learns that Casa has been named after Casabianca – a young boy who fought during the Battle of the Nile, in 1798 and whose story was then used by Felicia Dorothea Hemans to write a poem in 1826:

> Casa got his name from a poem about a boy who died in 1798 at the Battle of the Nile. Giocante Casabianca. The twelve-year-old son of a French admiral. He was on board the *L'Orient*, the principal ship of the fleet that carried Bonaparte and his army to Egypt. Cannon fire set the *L'Orient* ablaze […] but Giocante Casabianca remained on the burning deck, unwilling to abandon the post without his father's permission (Aslam 2009: 209).

Casa thus acquired his new name for the bravery he displayed in his youth. Chiroux, however, reminds us that the Battle of the Nile did not directly involve the East, since it mainly opposed the French and the British. Using this as a starting point, he argues that:

> there is a clear discrepancy between the meaning that lies behind Casa's naming-process (a reward for his devotion and duty to Islam against the colonizer and Christianity) and the factual event from which his name is drawn (an eminently colonial battle for the domination of the East by Western countries) (Chiroux 2017: 12).

As aptly observed by Chiroux, even the terrorist who gave Casa his name remembers – almost immediately after he renamed the boy – that he had become familiar with this poem when he was attending a Western-style school and that for this reason, the "principal character could easily be Christian or Hindu. Not minor characters, not villains. But heroes!" (Aslam 2009: 210). This explains why the young boy's name has been shortened to Casa, because the complete version of the name was too much related to the West. Chiroux consequently argues that Casa has very quickly entered an identity crisis, since "Casa is forced by the East to hate the West", but paradoxically "exists thanks to the West" (Chiroux 2017: 13). All of this indicates that "Casa's adhesion to a terrorist organization and a terrorist way of life are far from being a personal choice" but rather "stem[s] from post-colonial politics and all the consequences it entailed" (Chiroux 2017: 9).

Throughout the narrative, the Eastern characters are not only keen on denouncing the violent behavior of the West, but also its hypocrisy. After they carried out the school explosion, the members of the terrorist organization wish to:

> point out the hypocrisy of the Americans who condemn this killing of the children but whose president had shaken hands with the people who in the 1980s had blown up a passenger plane as it took off from Kandahar airport, carrying Afghan schoolchildren bound for indoctrination in the Soviet Union (Aslam 2009: 109).

Even if this statement could be questioned because it is formulated by the terrorists themselves, the reaction of David when Lara asks if it is true does not leave any room for doubt, the American man indeed remaining silent as if he could not contradict the organization's statement. It is worth noting that Aslam places once again the East in comparison with the West, and states that to some extent, the Taliban too show some hypocrisy. Even though they do not authorize entertainment, they bend the rule when the subject suits them:

> [o]ne of the rare entertainments allowed the children was the acting out of a sketch about a holy warrior captured by the Americans, the prisoner's invoking of those English phrases so frustrating to the captors that they were reduced to banging their fists helplessly on the floor,

> to much delighted laughter from the audience, the prisoner eventually walking free to continue on the path of armed jihad, having executed the Americans before leaving (Aslam 2009: 222).

Aslam constantly suggests that wrong has been done on both sides, and this is best demonstrated in Dunia's speech with James, which once again reveals that hypocrisy – which is invoked to hide one's real motives – can very much used to compare Americans and terrorists.

> 'We [the Americans] are here to help your country. We came to get rid of the Taliban for you…'
>
> 'Please, stop,' she tells him. 'The Taliban regime had been in place for years and no one was particularly bothered about getting rid of it. You are not here because you wanted to destroy the Taliban for us, you are here because you wanted retribution for what happened to you in 2001' […] 'You are as bad as he [Casa] is' (Aslam 2009: 374-376).

In this passage, Dunia seems to believe that violence truly is a matter of vengeance, since she considers the coming of Americans in Afghanistan as a "retribution" for 9/11.

Each wave of violence therefore seems to be, according to Aslam, the consequence of a previous one. Khan makes the same observation when he writes that "Aslam 'unites' Afghanistan with the rest of the world and posits causal relationships between the acts of terror witnessed in contemporary world with those experienced decades, and even centuries ago" (Khan 2013: 110). This impression of circularity is clearly intensified by the repetitions of the novel. In *At Freedom's Limit: Islam and the Postcolonial Predicament*, Sadia Abbas, Assistant Professor at Rutgers University, argues that "repetition […] is the novel's structuring principle" (Abbas 2014: 200). This idea of repetition enters the novel right from the start because Lara – who opens the novel – enters the narrative while she is rereading a letter. According Abbas, this impression is reinforced when we, readers, are also "caught in a cycle of rereading" since, as stated by Aslam himself, *The Wasted Vigil* is a book about other books.

The fact that the novel repeats itself means that each episode of violence will be mentioned more than once. In other words, violence too will always repeat itself in the narrative, consequently presenting it as a never-ending phenomenon. If violence is presented as a cycle, does Aslam believe that it can be stopped? And if it does, how far will it go until peace settles in? The intertextuality of the novel allows the reader to see it more clearly. Aslam mentions the figure of Orestes, whose bones were discovered by Lichas (Aslam 2009: 400). In Greek mythology, Orestes followed the order of Apollo, and avenged his father. As such, this reference expresses the importance of vengeance in *The Wasted Vigil*. Moreover, because Orestes is a Greek reference used in the context of Afghanistan, its mention can also be seen as a means for Aslam to suggest that retaliation was the key word for both East and West. However, as stated above, the novel does not simply invoke Orestes, but also the one who found his remains: Lichas. Therefore, it can be said that Aslam uses the figure of Lichas to illustrate

that vengeance only brings death: Orestes indeed enters *The Wasted Vigil* in the shape of a dead man. One can thus read here a warning from the author.

Even though Marcus claims that "only the dead have seen the end of war" (Aslam 2009: 37) and that violence seems to be a never-ending phenomenon – "[o]nly twenty-nine years in the entire human history ha[s] been without warfare" (Aslam 2009: 270) sadly notes the author – Aslam also leaves room for optimism especially in the shape of the characters' resistance. This value, in Aslam's narrative, is characteristic of both West and East, as demonstrated by the comparison drawn between the terrorists and the passengers of flight 93, who tried to take back the control of the plane:

> does no one remember what happened on board flight 93? A group of Americans – 'civilised' people, not 'barbarians' – discovered that their lives, their country, their land, their cities, their traditions, their customs, their religion, their families, their friends, their fellow countrymen, their past, their present, their future, were under attack, and they decided to risk their lives – and eventually gave up their lives – to prevent the other side from succeeding. He [Casa] is not wrong when he thinks that that is a lot like what the Muslim martyrdom bombers are doing. (Aslam 2009: 250).

Aslam therefore claims that "[w]here there is power, there is resistance" (Aslam 2009: 261). Here, too, a mythical figure is alluded to in order to convey the value she embodies. A reference to her is made twice. First, she is directly cited, and then, even though her name is not explicitly mentioned, one can quickly imagine who she is when Benedikt's story mentions this little girl who "wanted to collect as much of the remains as she could, to provide a grave for [her father and brother]" (Aslam 2009: 364). This wish to provide a tomb for her family obviously relates that girl to Antigone. According to the myth, Antigone's two brothers went to war against one another and both died. Antigone (the daughter of Oedipus) buried Polynices, her brother, even though her uncle, Creon, forbade her to. Antigone, because of her bravery and respect for the sacred traditions (*viz*. burying the dead), was sentenced to death by Creon, who decided to bury her alive. According to Sadia Abbas, the figure of Antigone would allude to the impossibility of people to mourn the dead in times of war ("mourning the dead is a luxury unavailable to most in war" (Abbas 2014: 189)). Yet, what should be put forth is that even though Antigone's attempt is not successful, her devotion is what truly matters in the narrative. She is willing to do everything she can to honor her brother, and because of that, Antigone embodies both resistance and sacrifice – two important features of the novel, as will be demonstrated later. By means of this intertext, Aslam manages to bring some hope in a world devastated by war, in which optimism is thus, at first, hard to perceive.

III. Bringing Light to Darkness: Resistance and Feminism

Where there is power, there is resistance.
– Nadeem Aslam, *The Wasted Vigil* (2009)

Even though the novel evolves around the notion of violence and considers it as a never-ending phenomenon, Aslam still manages to bring some light within this darkness. This is metaphorically expressed in the novel by the arrival of Lara in Marcus's house. The house is at first designated as a place of darkness, only illuminated by candles, since the generator's batteries stopped working. Lara, on the contrary, brings light (and life) to Marcus's house. Because she wears white, even a small candle's light gains in intensity when refracted on her clothing. Through this character, even though she is herself "in a time of darkness" (Aslam 2009: 53), Aslam therefore manages to bring comfort and human warmth within the desolation of Afghanistan. This is also expressed by Aslam's writing style, which can be referred to as "poetic realism". As emphasized by Khan, "even the ugliest moments he describes are redeemed, at least partially, by some beautiful factor" (Khan 2013: 102). Beauty consequently always opposes war throughout the novel, as demonstrated by Aslam's style. This proximity between what is destroyed and what is full of life is, according to Aslam himself, very much representative of Afghanistan, which "is a beautiful country, but it is a beautiful country that has been torn to pieces" (Aslam & Sethi 2008: 351). Via Lara who carries light, Aslam allows the reader to perceive hope in human interactions. The novel therefore puts forth the possibility of working through trauma thanks to other human beings, and especially to the dialogue of cultures.

As previously hinted at, the reference to Antigone conveys the idea that hope can also be perceived in the characters' resistance[28] to opposition. Marcus and his wife, Qatrina, offered extraordinary resistance in face of the Taliban domination. For example, Marcus indeed became a teacher for the young kids of his village. At first, he was only supposed to tutor some pupils

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[28] It should be noted that the earth itself could be perceived as the very first resistant of the novel. As stated earlier, the Afghan territory has been utterly destroyed by foreign forces and can thus be seen as yet another victim of war. Even though Afghanistan "became a land whose geology was fear instead of rock" (Aslam 2009: 241), Aslam still presents the earth as extremely rich. The Afghan soil is indeed a great source of envy and jealousy from the West because it is full of wealth, like the lapis lazuli for instance, which "was always desired by the world, brushed by Cleopatra onto her eyelids, employed by Michelangelo to paint the blues on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel" (Aslam 2009: 18-19). Moreover, the ground in Afghanistan is also full of gemstones; David actually claims he also came to Afghanistan for this reason: rubies, emeralds, sapphires, opals (Aslam 2009: 78). While it could be argued that these references to gemstones actually put forward the Western plundering of this wealth, this, according to Ivanchikova, sets the novel apart from any others, claiming that "Aslam's approach is unique as it undoes the discourse of impoverishment by summoning the land's hidden riches" (Ivanchikova 2017: 294). In that, instead of presenting a country completely torn apart by the successive wars it witnessed, Aslam nevertheless aims to demonstrate that violence might have destroyed everything that was on the surface of the earth, but the soil is still full of wealth.

whose parents did not want them to forget the knowledge they acquired before the Taliban rule. But it was not long until his house became a school. This form of resistance was very well organized in order to avoid being noticed by the Taliban police. Marcus decided to divide the forty children he was to teach into two arrays – one for the morning, and the other for the afternoon – and his students were to come in small groups (two or three at a time) in order to avoid suspicion (Aslam 2009: 262). He and Qatrina also provided their services as doctors to heal the wounded. Even though the Taliban had forbidden doctors to attend patients of the other gender, "Qatrina and Marcus continued to see patients of either gender in secret whenever they could" (Aslam 2009: 241). Moreover, Qatrina also displayed resistance in her strong feminist beliefs. Under the Taliban rule, women were disregarded, and their living conditions were harder than those of men. As explained by Zameen: "The shrines of the Muslims saints were places journeyed to more by women than men, […] their despair greater, their lacks more essential and urgent" (Aslam 2009: 173). Women were the first ones to whom school attendance was denied. Violence against women was not rare during the Taliban era, and Lara has experienced it upon arrival. After leaving the bus which took her to Afghanistan, she found herself lying on the ground, her feet facing Mecca. Because of that, she was beaten up by one of the passengers who wanted to punish her for her disrespect, therefore confirming that "everyone […] had the right to make an example of an unwise Afghan woman"[29] (Aslam 2009: 8).

Qatrina's first act of resistance as a feminist takes place during her wedding with Marcus. Then, she indeed agreed to marry the English man under one condition: a woman had to conduct the ceremony. They had "to help change things" (Aslam 2009: 39) as she said. Even though her decision will later be used as an argument for the Taliban to consider Marcus and Qatrina's union as invalid, it also portrays her as a strong character who is not afraid to challenge authorities. Qatrina later rebels against the mosques because they do not protect women enough. She is indeed furious about the fact that women have no access to birth control, hence putting their health in danger. When Marcus describes her wife's behavior to Lara, he claims that

> [w]omen were always dying in repeated childbirth because the husbands didn't listen – Qatrina had to struggle with the mosques because they said birth control was the West's attempt at reducing the number of Muslims in the world (Aslam 2009: 95).

Qatrina's strongest display of opposition to the regime occurs when she is forced to cut off Marcus's hand. She was indeed recruited by the Taliban to carry out amputations on people

[29] Even though Lara is not an Afghan, she decided to dress like one upon arrival. She even believes that none of this would have happened had her face been visible because she would have then "been forgiven as a foreigner" (Aslam 2009: 8).

who were considered as criminals. One day, Marcus is brought to her and she quickly realizes what she is expected to do[30]. At first, she refuses even though she knows that if she does not do it, her own life will be threatened. But the Taliban are resourceful, and quickly discover what will make her change her mind:

> [t]hey now held a gun to her head – 'Do it!' – so that Marcus had to plead with her to go ahead, knowing they would kill her without thought. He picked up the scalpel and pushed it into her hands, tried to close her fingers around it. But she kept saying no, enraging them with her defiance, shaming them in front of the crowd. She lifted her burka and looked into the eyes of the boy in front of her. The crowd suddenly silent.
>
> 'Go ahead and kill me. I said I am not going to do it.'
>
> […] The gun was taken off her head and moved to Marcus's temple.
>
> 'Do it, or we'll kill *him*.' (Aslam 2009: 243-244 – original emphasis).

Through this extract, one can easily notice Qatrina's strong feminist ideals. She is indeed willing to fight for what she stands for, and what she believes is right. Even a threat to her own life does not seem to be enough to bend her will. All of this allows Marcus to know that, had she been alive, she would have stood up against Casa when he blames his host for disdaining the Holy Book. While Marcus almost apologizes, he knows that "Qatrina, of course, would have gently but firmly challenged him" (Aslam 2009: 229).

Because she is quite a rebellious character, Qatrina can be related to Lara's mother – even though the comparison starts at first on the basis of their similar mental issues: Lara's mother was diagnosed schizophrenic, and Qatrina lost her reason after she had to cut out Marcus's hand. However, we simultaneously learn that "she [Lara's mother] was a civil rights activist and […] participat[ed] in a demonstration" (Aslam 2009: 117). Both of them can therefore be seen as rebellious figures. Qatrina's resistance to the Taliban will last until her final breath:

> [a] man at the mosque was sent to see her, to ask if she would beg Allah's forgiveness for a lifetime of sin. She wouldn't respond to him. But as she sat there she sometimes raised her burka and pursed her swollen lips and spat out something white into a corner. Maggots had developed in her nasal cavity and were dropping into her mouth (Aslam 2009: 267).

Even though she is about to die because she has just been publicly stoned in the streets of the city, she still challenges the Taliban regime one last time by refusing to convert to Islam. Whereas Qatrina's resistance has only been directed against the Taliban, it could be argued that Zameen has faced the three main oppressors that ruled over Afghanistan: the Soviets, the Americans, and the Taliban. As highlighted by Khan, Qatrina's "daughter takes th[e] struggle a step forward" (Khan 2013: 140). She even becomes a leading figure for the female condition, when she welcomes Afghan women in her house to embroider in secret (Aslam 2009: 169).

[30] Through this, we can relate Qatrina to the Jews mentioned earlier in Primo Levi's *The Drowned and the Saved*. Here too, her becoming a perpetrator is forced upon her, and is used as a tool for her victimization by the Taliban.

Similarly, Dunia (the young Afghan girl who later arrives at Marcus's house) can also be compared to Zameen and Qatrina. The woman became a school teacher, hence allowing her to "change things" as her father puts it (Aslam 2009: 289), which was Qatrina's wish too. Her will to change things therefore embodies the continuity of Qatrina's resistance, and therefore suggests that the new generations seem to be deeply influenced by the actions of their predecessors. Eventually, like Zameen, Dunia challenges James and Casa. Through these female characters, it is therefore quite clear that women are presented as powerful individuals in the narrative, hence challenging their condition in the Afghan society under the Taliban rule as well as those of the Soviets and the Americans. Perhaps these women are even stronger than men, because as noted in the novel, "a woman decides who deserves to be called a man" (Aslam 2009: 227) which therefore suggests that women are the real judges of masculinity. The superiority of the female characters is best conveyed during Dunia and Casa's dialogue, in which "Aslam silences Casa, letting Dunia have the last word" (Khan 2013: 143).

Another aspect worth pointing out is that even though Qatrina did not want to carry out the amputation, Marcus forced her to, because he did not want to lose her. His reaction consequently offers a glimpse of another important feature of the novel: the characters' sacrifices for others. Privileging the protection of another instead of their own is a recurrent attitude among the characters of *The Wasted Vigil*. At times, this attitude can be synonymous with hiding information from them, which they know would only make them suffer more. For example, David knows a lot more about Zameen's connection with Benedikt than Marcus. When Marcus asks him if he knows anything about Lara's brother, David fakes that he does not, even though "Zameen had hidden nothing from [him]" (Aslam 2009: 54). He cannot stop thinking about what Lara has revealed to him about Benedikt's assault on Zameen (unaware at the time that she herself knows nothing about it), because he is afraid that "the shock would be devastating to him" (Aslam 2009: 54). By doing so, by omitting to tell what he believes to be truth, David actually tries to protect Marcus. Similarly, even if in the end Marcus and David decide to tell Lara[31] what they learnt about Benedikt's death, they waited until they were absolutely positive that everything was accurate; David indeed did not want "to worry her if it [wa]sn't true" (Aslam 2009: 130).

[31] In this case, David claims that he has had no other choice that to reveal her the truth because he discovered Benedikt's story in the company of Marcus. He claims that he would probably have remained silent if he had been alone, in order to spare her this devastating news (Aslam 2009: 368). However, he also acknowledges that he himself would love to know what happened to his brother Jonathan in Vietnam.

However, Marcus's sacrifice is far more explicit, and implies that he is willing to endure violence instead of seeing his someone else suffer. Marcus is not afraid of losing his hand, as long as it keeps his beloved wife out of harm's way. He therefore becomes some kind of shield which absorbs the violence that would have otherwise been directed onto Qatrina. According to Alex Houen, "that readiness to exchange lives for reciprocal violence" (Houen 2016: 585) is a recurrent feature of Aslam's fiction. When Benedikt decides to defect from the army and takes Zameen with him – therefore saving her from exsanguination – he is determined to protect her. As they were heading for Usha and ended up in a field, Benedikt told Zameen to stay where she was while he was going further to see if there was any danger forward, but he never came back (Aslam 2009: 56). It should be noted that his sacrifice can be seen as a way for Benedikt to redeem himself. Zameen's salvation clearly presents Benedikt as a complicated character, who has been harming the young Afghan woman while she was detained, but who has also helped her escape. His ambivalence is powerfully expressed through her victim, Zameen, who has mixed feelings about him. For what he has done to her, Zameen would have loved seeing him pay, but in the meantime, "[h]e may have saved [her] life" and that is why she "hope[s] he's all right, wherever he is" (Aslam 2009: 99). When the narration stops on Benedikt, the reader discovers these parts of light and darkness within him:

> [d]uring the daylight hours he was ashamed of what he did to her, but again and again in the darkness he found himself approaching her, ready to subdue, dizzy and almost sick with longer and desire and power (Aslam 2009: 55).

In the above-mentioned passage, it is made evident that light and darkness respectively symbolize peace and violence. Benedikt's life is filled with both light and darkness, which clearly relates him to Levi's concept of the "gray zone". He is neither a completely good, nor a completely evil character, but rather a complex character whose behavior constantly changes. Similarly, Casa is presented as a character who lives in the darkness, especially after his confession, as will be demonstrated later.

It has already been mentioned that in *The Wasted* Vigil, violence takes the shape of a cycle which follows the principle of retaliation. This notion could very much be linked to that of justice: "[j]ust as every public gift requires a counter-gift […], likewise a public offense […] calls for a response in order to restore the honor of the offended" (Hénaff 2008: 84). It is because the victim wants justice to be done that s/he retaliates. In his study on the killing of Osama bin Laden, in which he wonders if it should be considered an act of revenge or one of justice, Paul Dumouchel reminds us that the Greeks had two goddesses for justice: Dike and Themis. While

Themis represented the justice within one group, Dike embodied the justice between different groups (Dumouchel 2012: 9). Using this as a starting point, Dumouchel claims that:

> vengeance is, or was, exclusively the province of *dike*, but within *themis* there was no place for revenge. Vengeance was reserved for relations between groups or families; inside one family or household, revenge was unacceptable (Dumouchel 2012: 10).

According to Dumouchel, only sacrifice seems to bring retaliations to an end. He indeed writes that "[a] sacrifice is what brings 'closure' to a cycle of vengeance and pacifies (at least for a while) the relation between enemy groups. It is what temporarily unites them into a unique group" (Dumouchel 2012: 12). This is precisely what takes place in Nadeem Aslam's novel, when Casa and David die together, "[t]he blast [of Casa's explosion] open[ing] a shared grave for them on the ground" (Aslam 2009: 423). Adrien Chiroux even noticed that the setting of this passage "is typographically neatly arranged so as to resemble an epitaph or a grave" (Chiroux 2017: 17). Even though one might perceive this death-passage as fundamentally pessimistic, since it indeed suggests that revenge would only allow West and East to unite in death, the fact that it does not close the novel should not be forgotten. Aslam consequently presents David and Casa's death as a warning of what could happen, but also hints at the possibility of moving beyond that, by giving his novel another chapter; and, what is more, one that ends with Marcus's ultimate hope of finding his grandson back. *The Wasted Vigil* consequently suggests that death is not necessarily the only outcome of violence: as strange as it may sound, people could also unite in grief as will be demonstrated in the last section of this chapter.

David's sacrifice for Casa – which is his last action[32] – echoes the notion of post-traumatic growth, which "refers to the positive psychological changes an individual can experience when coming to terms with a challenging and often traumatic life experience" (Blackie, Hitchcott and Joseph 2017: 64). Laura Blackie, Nicki Hichcott and Stephen Joseph suggest, via this concept, that perpetrators can evolve and change after committing violence: "post-traumatic growth is […] a transformative experience that redefines an individual's personality" (Blackie, Hitchcott and Joseph 2017: 75). In *The Wasted Vigil*, David could be said to embody this change in perpetrators. Lara indeed compares the American man to an eraser because he behaves like a repentant: "the soles of his shoes are worn the way the edges of erasers become rounded with use. As though he walks around correcting his mistakes" (Aslam 2009: 88). One could argue

[32] It is worth noting that Benedikt's sacrifice for Zameen is also his very last action, since it will later lead to his death.

that his wish to finance schools in Afghanistan portrays this attitude[33]. As the story unfolds, David slowly becomes aware of the mistakes he has made, of the "mayhem [he] helped unleash" (Aslam 2009: 111). It is especially his relationship with Zameen which helps him develop, as it helps him understand how the West had a devastating influence on the East. *The Wasted Vigil* consequently suggests that change is ultimately made possible thanks to love, as shown by David and Zameen's connection. Even Casa, whose God "does not wish him to have any ties" (Aslam 2009: 395) starts to care about other people, especially Dunia, a young Afghan girl, although he would prefer not feeling anything. As stated by Marcus, "love is still a possibility in a land such as this" (Aslam 2009: 358). The Englishman himself also develops a relationship with Lara. Their ties keep intensifying and growing stronger throughout the narrative as much as Lara encourages him to leave the country, which has already taken away so many people he cared about:

> 'This land and its killing epochs', he had been saying earlier […]. 'The Soviet Invasion took away Zameen, the Taliban era swallowed up Qatrina. I fear that this new war will take someone else away'. […] 'You have to go away, Marcus. Go far away from this place' (Aslam 2009: 415).

Love, in Aslam's novel, is perceived as a powerful emotion. When he is referring to love, Marcus claims that it requires the "eradication of selfishness" (Aslam 2009: 358). Love might therefore be hard to perceive in a country like Afghanistan, where selfishness has often been synonymous with survival (Aslam 2009: 358). However, by putting this emotion forward, Aslam suggests it might provide the perfect answer to violence. Love is indeed the emotion thanks to which the whole world could be connected: "[t]his is among the few things that can be said about love with any confidence. It is small enough to be contained within the heart but, pulled thin, it would drape the entire world" (Aslam 2009: 414-415). Because it refuses selfishness, love therefore hints at the possibility of a new kind of solidarity which would be transnational.

It has already been noticed that the novel, through its constant references to the past, enables the reader to acquire a more complete understanding of how each historical event is inextricably connected to another. What has not been stated yet, though, is that bringing up the past also allows Aslam to remind the readers of a time when borders did not exist – or at least not in thir current shape. Ivanchikova notes that:

> [o]ne of the consequences of Aslam's restoring Afghanistan to its deep past is doing away with the recent boundaries of the nation-state. Nations have not only spatial but also temporal

[33] Yet, it is worth highlighting that his financial support can be said to reproduce some kind of imperialism. The school he is financing is indeed called "Building the New Afghanistan", as if only the Americans were able to help Afghanistan to get better.

> borders: as we move back in time, the borders eventually disappear and there emerges a world of blurry boundaries, shifting alliances, the movements of conquering and conquered armies, and radiant centers of power (Ivanchikova 2017: 296).

In other words, going back in time gives Aslam an opportunity to convey unity because space changes along with time, as pointed out by Michael Bakhtin in his essay "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel", in which he coined the concept of "chronotope" – *viz.* the interconnection between time and space. In her groundbreaking essay *At Freedom's Limit*, Sadia Abbas also notices that:

> Aslam addresses the chronotopic challenge of novelistic narrative, of finding a formal correlative for the particular kind of time/space compressions required by stories he wishes to tell, by putting Islamic […], formal literary, and Cold War histories in play with each other (Abbas 2014: 186).

As the novel constantly moves back and forth in time, past, present and future constantly echo each other. Alluding to the past as a time when borders did not exist can consequently be perceived as a message for the future generations, because it represents what Aslam hopes for: a world in which transnationalism is praised and celebrated.

In the novel, references to time are not always directed towards the past but also, at times, towards the future. Through his references to the future, Aslam suggests that violence can be stopped. His novel can be considered as a warning which represents what will happen if things do not change. David and Casa have been building together a canoe that resembles those of the Native Americans (Aslam 2009: 254)[34]. After their death, "Marcus drowns the canoe in the lake, hiding it from view and instantly fossilizing it for future Afghan generations to discover" (Ivanchikova 2017: 299). The link with the future is perfectly represented in the novel by Marcus's quest for his grandson, Bihzad – which suggests that in the end, Marcus remains hopeful that he will find him, and reconnect with the last member of his family – but also by Marcus himself, who, even though his attitude recalls that of an old "prophet in wreckage" (Aslam 2009: 6), is also compared to a childlike figure by Lara:

> Something is there in children and the young that makes them trust others. The horrors of life haven't yet perfected their aim. At times this seems to hold true even here in Afghanistan, in this land torn as though by God's own hatred. The young everywhere, she suspects, would prefer to live in houses that consist only of doors. And Lara had detected it in Marcus also, in the way he welcomed her into his house, though he has seen the worst that life can offer (Aslam 2009: 280).

One could therefore believe that hope lies in children and the brighter future they represent. However, Lara immediately adds that in Marcus's case, "it's not due to age, it's his character" (Aslam 2009: 280). It is therefore not age that matters, but rather the innocence that

[34] It is worth noting here that this reference establishes once again a link with the colonial past of America.

characterizes childhood. Aslam consequently suggests that hope can be found everywhere and is not restricted to the young. Every character, even if he did something horrible in his past, is capable of changing to become better, as illustrated by David's post-traumatic growth, which eventually enables him to say that because Casa "is the child of a human, […] he has a choice and can change" (Aslam 2009: 413).

Last but not least, hope can also be perceived – perhaps paradoxically – in grief and sorrow, an element which is once again noticeable thanks to the intertextuality of the novel. Through the motif of the tear, which is also the translation of the name of the village where Marcus resides (Usha indeed means "teardrop"), Aslam manages to create a strong feeling of community, especially via his reference to Homer's epic poem. The tear, even if it symbolizes sadness, also embodies the acknowledgment of Others' suffering and pain in *The Wasted Vigil*. "Both sides in Homer's war, when they arrive to collect their dead from the battlefield, weep freely in complete sight of each other. Sick at heart" (Aslam 2009: 426). It is because one sees the other crying that one can truly understand his sorrow. Acknowledging the other's pain is also a way to unite with him. In the novel, every character has lost something. Because of that, pain is something they all share, and sorrow can thus be used as another conveyer of community – even if it is rather more pessimistic than the others mentioned above. And this is something Marcus wishes for: "the tears of one side fully visible to the other" (Aslam 2009: 426); and so does Lara in a way, when she quotes Anna Akhmatova: "*As if I was drinking my own tears from a stranger's cupped hands*" (Aslam 2009: 108 – original emphasis), hence suggesting that healing is only truly possible with the help of someone else.

IV. A "fellowship of wounds"

> *Solidarity […] is a frequent – if not guaranteed – outcome of the remembrance of suffering.*
>
> – Michael Rothberg, "Between Memory and Memory" (2010)

Even though each character has a distinct story leading to his or her trauma, Nadeem Aslam manages to unite them all physically but also psychologically (mainly through grief) in Marcus's house. Each of them enters the narrative in a traumatic state. Lara has lost her brother, Benedikt; Marcus only has one hand left, and lives alone since Qatrina's death and Zameen's kidnapping: "A daughter, a wife, a grandson, […] you could say this place took away all [he] had" (Aslam 2009: 86); David must go on living with Zameen's ghost; Casa never knew his parents and must live in a world torn apart by violence. Because each of their lives has been torn apart and filled with grief, the characters unite in a "fellowship of wounds" (Aslam 2009: 10). For each character, the death of the people they loved was synonymous with the start of a

new life. For Marcus, time completely stopped. He even decided to put all the clocks and watches he owned away in order to "remove[] the sense and measurement of time from his surroundings" (Aslam 2009: 40). Moreover, his life was no longer filled with joy, but rather with sadness, just like Lara who the "world's darkness had attempted to enter" (Aslam 2009: 8). Furthermore, for the Russian woman, "the day Stepan [her husband] died had become the first day of the rest of her life" (Aslam 2009: 140). Similarly, for David, since Zameen died, "sorrow […] has been the principal weather of his soul for a long time" (Aslam 2009: 332).

Right from the start, the connection between the characters is linked to literature – and art in general. As stated earlier, Marcus would like for everyone to be able to see the sorrow of others. He believes that thanks to this, a new kind of community could emerge. For him, the symbol of this connection would be a book. As stated in the novel:

> [w]hen she [Lara] leaves, she should take a volume from the impaled library. Perhaps everyone who comes here should be given one so that, no matter where they are in the world they can recognise each other. Kin. A fellowship of wounds (Aslam 2009: 10).

Just like the books – which represent most of the world's civilizations – have been brought together on the ceiling of the house in order to evade the damages of war, Aslam suggests, through Marcus's voice, that people should unite to move beyond violence and rather focus on each other's grief.

Human connection is often related to art, which is at the heart of the novel, recurrently appearing by means of intertextuality, as stated earlier. References to other writings tend to connect different communities because they range from Homer's Greek epic poems to less known Russian authors like Tsvetaeva: "Qatrina and he [Marcus] had built up this collection over the decades and it contained the known and unknown masterpieces in several languages" (Aslam 2009: 20). The importance of art is made explicit in the novel when it reveals how it is the only thing that remains alive when everything else has been destroyed: "so much destruction and yet this had survived. A four-line poem in Dari" (Aslam 2009: 23). Similarly, the fact that Marcus manages to find back Qatrina's paintings which had disappeared suggests that art has the capacity to live on, even when people wish to see it vanish. Art – and especially literature – is what resists throughout the novel. Earlier, it has been noticed that the Buddha's head was a first evidence of resistance to oppression because gold has been pouring out of the holes left by the Taliban. Literature, which is represented by the books in Marcus's house, is associated with the same phenomenon by Lara. She indeed "imagines that being nailed to the ceilings in the house had made the books drip brilliance onto the floors in each room" (Aslam 2009: 164). It can therefore be said that life pours out of the books, just like the Buddha "had been granted

life by the bullets" (Aslam 2009: 126). Through art, Aslam therefore puts forth the possibility of survival even in the most desolated places of the earth because it binds people together rather than tear them apart.

The characters' unity is demonstrated in the novel's circularity, since both its beginning and its end refer to Marcus's quest for his grandson. However, while Marcus talked about "a fellowship of wounds" at the beginning of the narrative, the text rather mentions "a kinship of wounds" (Aslam 2009: 430) in the end. It could be stated that the slight difference of sentences allows Aslam to keep putting forth the possibility of overcoming one's traumatic experience in *The Wasted Vigil* because the novel is therefore not a full circle anymore – which means that change is possible. Something has actually changed since the beginning: as expressed by the shift from "fellowship" to "kinship", the characters have become increasingly united[35], which suggests the possibility of moving on. Moreover, while Marcus believed that literature could bring unity – he indeed thought that Lara should take a book with her when she leaves Usha – Lara rather takes a piece of the mosaic in Marcus's house:

> [a] letter came from Lara in July. The fragments of painted plaster she arranged on the floor in the golden room are still there. Looking at the mosaic after she went back to St Petersburg, he realized that one piece was missing, the piece on which the faces of the two lovers made contact. She had taken it with her to Russia. A kinship of wounds (Aslam 2009: 430).

Both the books or the pieces of mosaic can be seen as what unites people. According to Marcus, owning such an object would bring people together because they would then all be able to recognize in each other the burden of grief. Through these objects, the characters thus create a web of relationships which strongly echoes Rothberg's notion of "*noeuds de mémoire*" because he indeed sees "acts of memory as rhizomatic networks of temporality and cultural reference that exceed attempts at territorialization" (Rothberg 2010: 7).

It is not simply the fact that they mourn simultaneously which holds the characters together. They also bond because they learn how their own behavior has harmed others. When the perpetrators acknowledge their wrongs, and confess to their crimes, they can start behaving differently – this change of attitude being often simultaneous with their challenging their own governments' policies. It can indeed be said that Benedikt, once he leaves the Soviet army – and saves Zameen – becomes another person; one who is willing to sacrifice his own life for the young girl's even though she belongs to a nation against whom his country is at war. Even

[35] While "fellowship" refers to the "relationship between fellows", "kinship" rather implies a more intimate connection since it is defined as the "relationship acquired by descent" (The Oxford English Dictionary Online, accessed on August 13, 2018). One could therefore consider this mention of a "kinship of wounds" at the end of the novel as an indicator of how the characters have managed to create a new family, which highlights Aslam's wish to promote new forms of solidarity.

though his behavior changes, Benedikt never *explicitly* formulates a real confession or asks for his victim's forgiveness. He only realizes how much harm he has inflicted on Zameen because he reaches a similar situation once he is captured. He knows that "she had been chained in a room like" the one he is into (Aslam 2009: 363). Casa, on the contrary, wishes to write down everything that happened in his life, including the violence he perpetrated:

> He waits until the darkness is perfect around him and then, having also removed his clothes and cast them onto the floor, he begins to write, beginning at the top right-hand corner of the right page and intending to stop upon getting to the bottom left of the facing page. Sentences about himself. The truth. He can only say it in the dark. […] When he lights [the lamp] he sees that the pages are still blank, that for some reason the pen had held onto its ink. He knows the reason. Allah doesn't want him to. […] He knows not to flick or shake the pen to get the ink flowing. He continues to write however – no pigment, just pressure – until both pages are filled and several more. Finishing, he rips them out and folds them carefully […] and […] drops them into the stone pit of the ear and extinguishes the flame (Aslam 2009: 377-378).

It could be claimed that his confession does not allow him to grow and change his behavior because he has no one to share it with. He is a lonely man, isolated from the other characters. Because his God does not want him to have ties, no dialogue is made possible for him, and this leaves him completely unable to start behaving differently, remaining in complete darkness – which, as stated earlier, is synonymous with war and violence. According to Morag, perpetrators "may present [a hidden demand for forgiveness] during the confessional act" (Morag 2013: 20). Because no one can listen to or hear his demand, Casa consequently remains unable to grow out of his status of perpetrator: "[w]ords that can't be seen. A silent cry, and an ear that can't hear. Nothing but the maelstrom of his breathing in the darkness now" (Aslam 2009: 378). His loneliness and his isolation do not allow him to move on, because this ability requires the Other, as demonstrated by David's post-traumatic growth.

As discussed earlier, David needs Zameen to change. Thanks to his relationship with her, David eventually starts questioning his own nation: "[w]hat did they, the Americans, really know about such parts of the world, of the layer upon layer of savagery that made them up?" (Aslam 2009: 184). What Aslam's novel ultimately conveys is that it is eventually the dialogue between different cultures that will help put an end to the disastrous situation in which Afghanistan has been placed. It is the encounter between different cultures – and the fact that through this process, each character becomes aware of the sufferings of the Other – that informs the characters that they do not simply share grief, but also guilt. This is best demonstrated by Marcus who is from the very beginning of the novel the most explicitly connected to both horizons: he was born in Britain and moved to Afghanistan (where he met and married Qatrina). Marcus, who has lived in the West and in the East, acknowledges that "the West was involved in the ruining of this place, in the ruining of [his] life" (Aslam 2009: 87). Marcus's point of

view is especially illuminating especially when the reader knows how Islam might be responsible for his father's death. His father was a doctor who was killed by a Muslim man whose son was interested in Christianity. He tried everything he could to change his son's beliefs, but nothing worked. He therefore murdered his son, and then "set out to take revenge on the doctors at the missionary hospital where the boy had come into contact with ideas that made an unbeliever of him" (Aslam 2009: 41). Even though he might resent the East for his father's murder, he still believes that the East is not solely responsible. Furthermore, one should still notice how literature supports this argument since it is also through reading that one can discover other cultures. First, "the Street of Storytellers" mentioned in the novel is described as a connecting point between East and West – because "[i]t extended from east to west in the heart of the city" (Aslam 2009: 155) – as if stories were the only way to connect these opposites. Moreover, once the characters meet each other in Marcus's house, everything changes in the story. It is worth noting that this house is presented as "a house of readers" (Aslam 2009: 87), and that it symbolizes the place where dialogue is finally made possible between the main nations that have been involved in Afghanistan: Britain (embodied by Marcus), Russia (Lara), America (David), and Afghanistan (Casa).

Each of the characters can be said to represent a relative to another. First of all, Lara represents both Zameen and Qatrina for Marcus. Their connection is, at times, almost intimate, as if they were lovers. When Marcus and David come back from Jalalabad, Lara, relieved to find out he is safe and sound, jumps into Marcus's arms (Aslam 2009: 85). During the night of their return, she even holds Marcus's hand, "her fingers interlaced with [his]" (Aslam 2009: 86). Yet, at other moments, she can be seen as Zameen's double – it is worth noting that they were both born on the same year (Aslam 2009: 21). David also seems to believe so. He sometimes wishes to touch the young girl and feel her presence (Aslam 2009: 194). Their connection seems to be so strong that "[i]t's almost as though David [was] listening to her thoughts" (Aslam 2009: 308). Similarly, David reminds Lara of Stepan, her lost husband, especially when their bodies come into contact: "David's hipbone is like a warm stone against her thigh. A sensation she has not received since Stepan's death" (Aslam 2009: 312). Next, it can also be noticed that Lara embodies a mother figure for Casa. The boy, because he has never really known his mother, envies the kids he sees walking with their mothers. Casa imagines how Lara could be a mother to him, hold him in her arms, and make him feel what true love is:

> [w]omen of Lara's age are what he looks at most closely when he gets a chance. […] A residue from childhood – when he was without any sense of time, when he thought adults had come into being the size they were – there is a faint trace of envy in him even today

> when he sees a boy accompanied by his mother. […] A wish in him to prolong the tenderness he is suddenly experiencing in his breast. A mother.

The ties they create resemble those that unite a family. Casa, according to Adrien Chiroux, could be seen as the child of this new family, especially when he brings them a birds' nest he has discovered. In his analysis of this passage, after noticing that Aslam's choice of a nest is eminently symbolical of the notion of house and family (thus creating a *mise en abyme* of what is happening in Marcus' house) Chiroux indeed writes that Casa's attempt to hide a smile mimics the attitude of a child filled with pride (Chiroux 2017: 15). David and Casa also develop strong emotional bonds, which resemble those of brotherhood – hence connecting Casa to Jonathan, David's brother, since David reveals that he has previously built a similar canoe with Jonathan (Aslam 2009: 283). Their connection is made most apparent when they build a boat together. Even though Casa only proposes to help David because his new acquaintances represent his only protection again Nabi Khan (an Afghan warlord) – Casa indeed knows that he must be very careful with what he says to his hosts, because without them "he'd have no safety" (Aslam 2009: 232) – it nevertheless brings them together. The canoe represents their collaboration, and symbolically, the joining of East and West[36]. Moreover, David is the one who will save Casa from the torture that awaits him when he is captured by the Americans (Aslam 2009: 410). In the novel, Marcus compares his own life to that of Aeneas: "Aeneas is accompanied by his young son – a path to the future – and is carrying his aged father over his shoulder – the reminder of the past" (Aslam 2009: 112). When he reads Virgil's text, he sees himself as the father of Aeneas, whom he associates with David. Using this as a starting point, one could therefore see David as Casa's father – who was indeed compared to a child before[37]. The characters' strong bonds seem to confirm that one needs others in order to grieve thoroughly and move on with life without constantly reiterating violence. Casa is not able to do that, because he constantly feels alone. He himself "wish[es] [he] didn't feel alone all the time" (Aslam 2009: 318).

Even though each character could be seen as an embodiment of her/his nation, Aslam summons other points of view, hence suggesting that generalizations should not be made too hastily. Oppositions between people who come from the same backgrounds can be found throughout the narrative, especially between David and James – two Americans – and Casa and Dunia – two Afghans. By confronting diverging points of view originating from the same

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[36] When Casa asks the American when they will be able to have the boat on the water, David's reply clearly shows this unity: "*You and I*, we'll have it on the water in a few days" (Aslam 2009: 253 – emphasis added).

[37] Moreover, the reader knows that Casa is not his true name. One could thus imagine that Casa actually is Zameen's son – Bihzad – whom David considered as his own child.

country, Aslam implies that an individual can evade society's expectations. Lara indeed wonders if her life has truly been influenced by her country; perhaps it's just who she is (Aslam 2009: 311). This belief could relate her to a few lines of William Henley's poem *Invictus*: "I am the master of my fate: / I am the captain of my soul" (ll. 15-16), since she expresses a strong wish to take her own decisions, independently of the country she belongs to. Belonging to a nation should thus not impose a certain behavior on anyone, as demonstrated in *The Wasted Vigil*. David strongly opposes James when they talk about the way Americans should act around the world. James's opinion about Eastern nations is quite stereotypical: he indeed believes that they are violent because they lack education (Aslam 2009: 331). Moreover, James believes that only *they* should be held responsible for the violence that has been unleashed in Afghanistan:

> "[w]e [Americans] are not responsible for this […] it's not our fault. And those hundreds who died by chance in our bombing raids, and those who are being held in Guantanamo Bay and in other prisons – none of it is our fault. Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda and their Islam are answerable for all that" (Aslam 2009: 414).

David's disagreement with James is best displayed when David frees Casa from the hands of the Americans. When James tells him that Casa confessed working for Nabi Khan, David defends him. He indeed sees – and knows – the instrument of torture, and consequently claims that he too would have confessed under such circumstances: "Bring that thing near me and *I'll* confess" (Aslam 2009: 410 – original emphasis). Similarly, tensions also arise between Casa and Dunia, since they do not share the same opinion about the West. While Dunia's critical mind strongly blames both parts of the world ("You [Americans] are as bad as he [Casa] is" (Aslam 2009: 376)), Casa only criticizes the West, blaming the Soviets and the Americans for what their countries brought to Afghanistan. Their differences of mindset can be perceived in their behaviors. Dunia is not afraid of asking her hosts not to drink alcohol. In that, she both challenges the West – because she is willing to ask Marcus and David to change their behaviors in her presence; and she simultaneously challenges the East, because, for the Taliban, women are not supposed to assert themselves as powerfully as Dunia. On the contrary, Casa assured the two Westerners that he did not mind their drinking, and therefore remained unable to openly oppose the West.

Even within the same family, different states of mind can emerge. For instance, Zameen and Qatrina do not agree with each other when a culprit has to be found. When David asks Zameen if she is going to be all right, her answer displays her hatred against the West: "'I have to be, don't I?' […] 'We have to be, don't we? Just as long as you Americans and Soviets can play your games over there – nothing else matters!'" (Aslam 2009: 179). On the contrary, Qatrina argues that Afghanistan has to be held responsible, because everything would have

happened the same way even if Afghanistan had had to face other countries, as expressed through Marcus's voice:

> 'The cause of the destruction of Afghanistan […] is the character and society of the Afghans, of Islam. Communism wasn't the ideal solution to anything but, according to her, her fellow countrymen would have resisted change of *any* kind' (Aslam 2009: 90 – original emphasis).

Because it keeps bringing these diverging perspectives – which sometimes emerge from people who are not that different – the novel demonstrates that everyone is different. As such, *The Wasted Vigil* criticizes the post-9/11 tendency to consider all Muslims alike. For Aslam, birth does not decide your destiny. As stated by Marcus, an individual's life depends upon a series of factors:

> [w]ho knows how the boy [Casa] ended up with these opinions? What small thing could the others in the world have done differently for a happier outcome, what small mistake was made? (Aslam 2009: 230).

Through this passage, Marcus suggests that an individual's identity is actually constructed by the Other. For this reason, it can be said that *The Wasted Vigil* eventually "invites us to look for the truth in others" (Kiran 2018: 262) and therefore celebrates a new form of solidarity, which extends over national borders. The text consequently praises the concept of transculturalism because, as each character belongs to a different nation, Kiran argues that it "successfully breaks the territories" (Kiran 2018: 261).

Conclusion

Aslam's text can be seen as an attempt to create a third space […] by extending the global social space to create a new human geography.

– Ayesha Perveen, "A Postcolonial Critique of *The Wasted Vigil*" (2015)

According to Edward Said, some hypocrisy often surrounds one's perception of terrorism since "'we' are never terrorists no matter what we may have done; 'they' always are and always will be" (Said 2001: 154). This tendency to consider the actions of someone else as worse than our own is expressed in the way the bombings of civilians by the allies in Hiroshima, Nagasaki or Dresden have been referred to as "strategic bombings" (Chaliand 2016: 7) in the West; even though they look a lot like events considered as terrorist when the West is their target rather than their perpetrator. The present dissertation has discussed how Nadeem Aslam's *The Wasted Vigil* manages to challenge these discourses by presenting violence as a circle in which subject-positions constantly oscillate. Going back to colonialism enables Aslam to present the rise of the Taliban and the 9/11 attacks as resulting from the 19th century imperial intrusions. As highlighted by Mudasir Altaf Bhat in "Counter-Hegemonic Discourse in *The Wasted Vigil*", "[t]he interconnectedness of the wars that have so deeply affected these characters is apparent" (Bhat 2014: 104) in the novel. Because of the "nods" – to use Rothberg's term – he creates between these traumatic memories, Aslam makes it impossible for the reader to discover where the blame lies:

> [i]n Aslam's fiction the 'world' reader is invited to […] bear terrible, tragic, global witness to the human toll taken as a result of a seemingly eternal clash, if not of warring faiths then of Western and Eastern imperialist regimes, in which each side is significantly wounded, each significantly to blame (Clements 2016: 120).

For this reason, one of the sentences of the novel could be applied to any character: "[h]e was not innocent but he was not guilty" (Aslam 2009: 398).

Even though it could be argued that Casa is perhaps the most likely to be considered as the terrorist figure of the novel, Madeline Clements argues that

> [a]s near mirror-opposites, Aslam's militant Americans are indeed almost as zealous, robotic and – despite their claims to the moral high ground – as to blame for the brutalisation and destruction of Afghanistan and its people as their Islamist counterparts (Clements 2016: 109).

In that, Western characters are also portrayed as perpetrators in the novel, which already sets the novel apart from widespread dichotomic post-9/11 narratives. As shown in my analysis, because of its constant play with time, the novel blurs the limits of the realms of perpetration and victimhood. Some scholars like Ayesha Perveen believe that the Taliban is the only

devastating actor presented in the novel and consequently argue that Aslam reproduces some kind of 'demonization' of the Muslim other. Perveen indeed writes that "[t]he novel's discourse […] represents [a] Western vision of [the] Taliban and nowhere shows the other side of the picture" (Perveen 2015: 7). On the contrary, this dissertation has actually demonstrated that Aslam's novel also presents Western forces as perpetrators, as pointed out by the female characters' resistance to authorities: while Qatrina's challenged the Taliban rule, Zameen and Dunia also opposed Americans.

Through these female characters – as well as through the figure of the earth – the present dissertation has also argued that Nadeem Aslam's novel offers a possibility of hope even in a country like Afghanistan. Although Sadia Abbas argues that the title itself immediately "obviates the possibility of hope and presents any waiting that might attend it as simply a devastating waste" (Abbas 2014: 210), my analysis opposes this pessimistic understanding of the novel according to which East and West only unite in death, as suggested by Casa's death. It is indeed my contention that even though destruction and death are omnipresent in the novel, the characters' wish to keep a vigil should not be forgotten. The characters do care about each other, as demonstrated by the importance given to love in the novel. This feeling, it has been demonstrated, has the capacity to bring people together. It is only David's love for Zameen that enables him to grow throughout the narrative, and to eventually acknowledge the mistakes he (and by extension his country) has made in Afghanistan. As stated by Perveen, "love for each other, love for humanity, irrespective of boundaries, nationalities, geographies, and gender […] is the only remedy to a world fraught with wars and hatred" (Perveen 2015: 10). All of this is powerfully embodied by Lara's words towards the end of the novel ("*[i]t all depends on how big you think your family is*" (Aslam 2009: 417 – original emphasis)), which, according to Kiran, "emphasize the need to deterritorialize America to include the traumatic experiences of the rest of the world and to look for more compassionate, sympathetic and human solutions than war" (Kiran 2018: 262). As argued throughout this work, Aslam's novel can be seen as an attempt to put forth a form of community which, according to the author, can emerge out of common wounds; Aslam indeed writes that people should eventually "make links out of separations" (Aslam 2009: 87).

Each character discovers the grief of others once they reach Marcus's house. This house acquires a significant importance in Aslam's novel because it is the place where the suffering of others is made apparent and where solidarity eventually appears: when a character crosses the threshold, s/he symbolically enters a new family. The main characteristic of this human gathering is its hybridity, which is metaphorically represented by the novel's structure itself:

the house is filled with many nationalities, just like the text contains different literary genres. Because of its intertextuality and its aesthetic density, the narrative is indeed filled with verses of poems or even musical scriptures (Aslam 2009: 263). The house consequently embodies a "third space" where people forget what sets them apart, and rather focus on what brings them together. In order to promote his wish for transculturalism, Aslam has written a novel which takes the shape of a warning. In an interview, Aslam himself claims that "[w]riting this novel is a way of warning" (Aslam, in Kiran 2018: 262). As discussed in my analysis, Casa's death can very much be considered as a way for the author to portray what will happen if people remain unable to move beyond the borders of their nations and embrace people's 'otherness' since, as pointed out, Casa's final action can be seen as an outcome of the other characters' inability to listen to his confession. For this reason, it can be argued that *The Wasted Vigil* puts forth a conception of terrorism as a phenomenon which depends upon a network of factors, including international relations. An individual does not *decide* to become a terrorist, s/he is rather shaped as one by the countries' past and present decisions which impact her/his individual life.

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