

Introduction

HISTORY, NARRATIVE, AND THE WAR ON TERROR

ON SEPTEMBER 11, 2001, General Mahmud Ahmed, director of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence, was visiting Washington, D.C., as a guest of George Tenet, director of the CIA. Following that morning's attacks, the general's itinerary changed; he was summoned not to the office of his host but to that of Richard Armitage, George W. Bush's Deputy Secretary of State. As Armitage recalled the meeting, "I literally took [Ahmed] privately to my room and said: 'No American will want to have anything to do with Pakistan in our moment of peril if you're not with us. It's black or white.' And [Ahmed] wanted to tell me about history. He says, 'You have to understand the history.'" One can speculate as to the histories Ahmed had in mind: the British Raj, Partition, civil war in Pakistan, war between India and Pakistan, the role of Pakistan as a proxy for U.S. power in the region—the braided stories, in other words, of empire and its aftermaths in South Asia. But Armitage's focus was already fixed on the military project that would come to be known as the "War on Terror." He was firm in his response. "No," he insisted to his guest, "history begins today."¹

In the days and weeks following September 11, the refusal of history became a central trope of George W. Bush's fast-building case for war. But the notion that history began on "9/11" was more than just a calculated neo-conservative mantra. The idea was echoed, that autumn and thereafter, by columnists, critics, and cultural producers from across the political spectrum. In an essay published in the *Guardian* on September 14, 2001, the writer Jay McInerney foreshadowed the founding conceit of his own "9/11 novel" and so many others: "I have a feeling," he wrote, "that everything will be 'before' and 'after' now. As I walked through the streets at midnight, I thought of

Frank O'Connor's line at the end of *Guest of the Nation*: 'And anything that ever happened to me after I never felt the same about again.'² In accord with the "before and after" frame signaled by McInerney, the scholarly response to the War on Terror has accented radical newness above continuity or genealogy. Since the opening stages of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, for example, countless critics have highlighted the emergence of a new "state of exception"—a diagnosis that reinforces the notion of the post-September 11 world as a time apart.

This book aims to resist and redress this assumption of historical rupture. It endeavors to show how the central political forms and ideas of the War on Terror both derive from, and reveal the persistence of, what I term the "long history of colonial modernity": the five-hundred-year history of European empire and its afterlives. Comprising a history of the present, this book also examines how our present's history is registered and reckoned with in contemporary culture. I begin by developing parallel genealogies of security and terror. I then turn to the question of how these conjoined paradigms—and the colonial rationalities and processes with which they intersect—are historicized in, and denaturalized by, works of theory and fiction.

In one such novel, Teju Cole's *Open City*, the narrator Julius, pausing from his contemplative walks around New York City, visits often with his friend and mentor Professor Saito, a Japanese-American veteran of an Idaho internment camp. Professor Saito is dying, and during one of their last conversations, the elderly man, looking back on the tumults of his lifetime, reflects on the confusion of war, the struggle to grasp the immensity of the suffering as it happens and the struggle to preserve it in memory: "There are towns," he observes, "whose names evoke a real horror in you because you have learned to link those names with atrocities, but, for the generation that follows yours, those names will mean nothing. Forgetting doesn't take long. Fallujah will be as meaningless to them as Daejon is to you."³ The prosecution of imperial violence in the present, Professor Saito's words intimate, is conditioned by the elision or disavowal of imperial pasts. This is a truism of which Armitage was keenly aware when he eagerly declared the advent of history in 2001. And this is the cycle of imperial erasure and reproduction that this book labors to counter—by tracing the imperial origins of contemporary political and cultural forms, and by reflecting upon the strategies of representation that bring those origins into relief.

SECURITY, TERROR, AND COLONIAL MODERNITY

When in 1492 Christopher Columbus set out for Asia but instead happened upon the Bahamas, Cuba, and Hispaniola, his error inaugurated a specifically colonial modernity. Columbus's "discovery" of the New World helped precipitate the capitalist mode of production, the liberal state, new typologies of racial difference, and the discursive construction of Europe—and later "the West"—as the center of the world, the source and vanguard of historical progress.⁴ Today, in the moment of imperialism's putative aftermath, the fundamental material and symbolic architecture of colonial modernity endures. The routes of continuity between the colonial past and postcolonial present are evidenced with an especial clarity, I want to argue, by the conjoined conceptual paradigms of security and terror.

"Security" is the keyword of contemporary governance. Economic security, financial security, national security, food security, social security, border security, job security, human security, environmental security, energy security, homeland security, and so on—security pervades political discourse. A basic human want, a normative social good, security is also a mode of power. Provoked by the advent of Homeland Security in 2001, scholars have in recent years offered an extensive critique of the violence done by and in the name of security. This critique, however, has centered on the political forms of the present, and has—with few exceptions—left unexamined the relationship between contemporary security formations and the longer history of the modern security project.

The security project emerged in the context of the settler-colonization of the New World and the innovation of capitalist social relations within Europe. One fundamental imperative of the nascent modern state, as John Locke affirmed, was to secure the processes of primitive accumulation—the extraction of resources, traffic in slavery, and enclosure of the commons—in both Old World and New. In accordance with Locke, Thomas Hobbes foresaw that the bourgeois logic of perpetual accumulation would require a corresponding, and likewise perpetual, expansion of political power—the limitless growth, in other words, of the security state. Writing in the mid-twentieth century, Hannah Arendt observed that the early modern vision of Locke and Hobbes still obtained. "Lest the motor of accumulation suddenly die down," she wrote, "the original sin of simple robbery" must be constantly repeated;⁵ and the endless accumulation of capital, Arendt saw, necessitates the endless acquisition of political power. This truism is again brought into relief by the

forms of “accumulation by dispossession,” to borrow David Harvey’s phrase, that prevail in the neoliberal moment—the forcing open of markets, the privatization of everything, the deliberate devaluation of assets and labor, the creation and manipulation of crises, the redistribution of wealth upward.⁶ All of these strategies of dispossession, which engender ever more pervasive social and economic insecurity, are made possible by the threat and actuality of state violence. In one definition, neoliberalism signifies the extension of market rationality to all spheres of human social life. Relatedly, neoliberalism describes the invention and intensification of methods of “securitization”—the seizure or fabrication of non-capitalized space, and the transmutation of non-colonized entities and geographies into a concern of the security state.

The contradictions generated by processes of capitalist securitization are legitimated by, and deepen the effects of, racial thinking and practice. In its colonial origins, as David Theo Goldberg has observed, modern racial thought combined “naturalist” and “historicist” theories of difference.⁷ The Spanish theologian—and humanist—Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda insisted, in the sixteenth century, that the indigenous people of the Americas were incapable of civilization. His compatriot Bartolomé de las Casas—an historian and Dominican friar—countered that the Indian, if lagging behind culturally and spiritually, could, in time, attain membership in universalisms both secular and theological. The debate between Sepúlveda and las Casas has been rehearsed repeatedly in the centuries since, as colonial methods of exclusion and extermination have coincided with narratives of development, modernization, and assimilation. In the context of the War on Terror, the ostensibly discordant but frequently symbiotic interrelation of naturalist and historicist racisms is on stark display. The “clash of civilizations” thesis, first enunciated by Samuel Huntington in 1992 but recited with new volume at the onset of the War on Terror, condemns the other to eternal confinement in a space outside of history. What Mahmood Mamdani has described as the “good Muslim, bad Muslim” thesis, meanwhile, suggests that privileged subjects from the “backward” regions of the world are capable of modernity. Today as in the past, these two racial imaginaries work together to mark the line between inside and outside and condition the uneven distribution of social and economic security within the realm of political belonging.

Both the securing of capitalist accumulation and the racial clarification of political order are enabled by the imagination and enactment of “emergency”—the politics of exception. Modern sovereignty emerged in response to the emergency of the “state of nature.” The savages who inhabited this constitutive

outside—what would become the colonized world, the “zone of exception par excellence,” in Achille Mbembe’s words—could be killed with impunity. The extralegal violence honed in the colony was subsequently sublimated in the legal apparatus of the modern state. The United States, for example, has been governed under one emergency or another since 1933, when President Roosevelt declared a national emergency to shore up the banking system. The conditions that might provoke the declaration of emergency today are multiple, ranging from financial crisis, to social unrest, to natural disaster, to foreign or domestic war. In each case, it is “security”—the security of the body politic, or the security of capitalist order—that permits the suspension of the law, by the law, in the name of the law. In the context of the War on Terror, the politics of exception operates in the name of security and under the euphemistic guise of terms such as “battlefield detainee” and “extraordinary rendition.” As in the early modern era, the terror inherent in and expressed by civilization’s others provokes the perpetual interventions of the security state, the violent conduct of which is compelled and concealed by the invocation of “emergency.”

Chapter 1 examines these intersecting modalities of the modern security project—capital, race, and emergency—in turn. More specifically, I locate these political forms within two imbricated genealogies—the long history of colonial modernity, and the recent, twentieth-century, history of the U.S. security state. Though my emphasis here is on the latter-day and *longue-durée* continuities of the security project, I do not aim to deny the uniqueness of Homeland Security. My intention rather is to demonstrate that the particularities of the Homeland Security moment are elucidated when their contiguity with the long history of security thinking and governance—as with the more recent formations of Social Security and National Security—is brought into the analytic foreground. And inversely, I am concerned to convey how those same particularities clarify the essential and enduring rationalities of the modern security project.

The trope of “security” has long been joined to the trope of “terror.”⁸ In Immanuel Kant’s formulation, the sublime terror of the non-civilized world demands a countermovement of Enlightenment reason and rationality, which will secure the European subject against the corporeal and metaphysical threat of barbarism. Terror, in other words, is a pretext for the security state. Terror is also a method of state power, as the history of Europe’s modern empires reveals with a particular clarity. In 1919, at the highpoint of the British Empire, Winston Churchill argued for the use of poisonous gas in

“[spreading] a lively terror” amongst “uncivilized tribes” (specifically, in this case, the Kurds).⁹ In 1936, during the war waged by Italian fascism on Ethiopia, Benito Mussolini advised his military commander to “pursue a systematic policy of terror and extermination against the rebels and all accomplice populations.”¹⁰ Though not meant for public reception, the words of Churchill and Mussolini nonetheless represent unusually open acknowledgments of an otherwise unspoken truth: terror—terror as a method and effect of violence—is fundamental to the practice of colonial governance, and to the modern state more broadly. The centrality of terror to the modern state was brought into especially stark relief by the events of the French Revolution. In that moment—the moment of the liberal state’s emergence—the dialectic of security and terror was articulated in the vocabulary of necessary intimacy rather than essential opposition. The Jacobin Reign of Terror was carried out by the Committee of General Security (along with the Committee of General Safety). Terror, Maximilien Robespierre put it, “is nothing other than prompt, severe, inflexible justice; it is therefore an emanation of virtue; it is less a particular principle than a general principle of democracy, applied to the most pressing needs of the nation.”¹¹ In the period of the Thermidorian Reaction, when Robespierre himself met a prompt and severe end, terror was recast as the enemy of the state rather than a central element of its constitution—as the antithesis of security rather than its guarantor. The *narrative* of the War on Terror conforms to the latter paradigm; but the *conduct* of the War on Terror again reveals the ways in which terror is a fundamental technology of the modern security state, its imperial form in particular.

One basic argument of this book is that the intersecting genealogies of security and terror are obscured by the assumption that September 11 constituted a historical rupture. Chapter 2 demonstrates that the history and contemporary articulation of terror in particular—and the dialectic of security and terror more broadly—are concealed as well by cultures of erasure that are fundamental to modernity itself. As the conjoined concepts of fetishism and reification clarify, the commodity form renders invisible its own social history. The state likewise labors to elide its violent origins—to make its existence appear natural and fixed rather than historically produced and contingent. The critical historicization of capital and the modern state uncovers instead the terror that founds modernity’s essential political and economic forms. But the latter critical revisions often reproduce aspects of the historiographic omissions they work to resist. Karl Marx, for example, imagines the terror

of capital's birth as eventually giving way to the "silent compulsion" of economic relations. And meditations on the centrality of terror to the invention of the modern state—from Kant and G. W. F. Hegel to Hannah Arendt—tend to cast to the historiographic margins both the colonial conditions of that terror and its endurance beyond the moment of putative foundation. Chapter 2 counters these conjoined tendencies by highlighting the continuing centrality of state terror to extant processes of primitive accumulation.

Focusing on terror as a pretext for and method of the imperial security state, my inquiry is additionally guided by a third primary modality of terror—terror as a form of resistance to imperial power. The slaves that authored the Haitian Revolution intimated, in the act of violent revolt, that the seeds of a radical—anticolonial and universal—humanism would necessarily be sown in soil nurtured by the ashes of the plantation and the blood of its masters. In the mid-twentieth century, Frantz Fanon and other anticolonial thinkers avowed, in a kindred vocabulary, that the terror of colonial order would only yield when confronted with a counter-assertion of revolutionary violence. And today, the figure of the suicide bomber distills into subjective form the objective necropolitical logic of contemporary imperial power. The imperial state explains these instances of violent resistance as the expression of an essential native savagery rather than as a rational political response to, or reflection of, the terrors of empire. This is as true in the moment of the War on Terror, when terms such as "Islamic barbarism" enjoy a mainstream political currency, as it was in the sixteenth century.

During the course of the twentieth century, rightist parties across the world met the emergence of socialist and anticolonial internationalisms with a fluid synthesis of fascism, authoritarianism, and market fundamentalism. The ascent of the latter in particular coincided with the increasing prominence of "security," and correlatively "terror," in state discourse. With the imposition, proliferation, and intensification of neoliberal forms of accumulation, governments around the world today acknowledge and present security as the primary reason of state. The global disorder occasioned and exploited by neoliberal processes—characterized by profound *insecurity* for the bulk of the world, recurring economic crises, and endless war—demands the regulatory and punitive powers of the security state. Since the later stages of the Cold War but especially in its aftermath, any violent resistance—occasionally even nonviolent resistance—to neoliberalism is labeled by the state as "terror" and met with the securing "counterterror" interventions of the police or

military. This logic is clarified by the declaration of a so-called War on Terror. The War on Terror, I argue, represents the latest iteration of a paradigm fundamental not simply to the neoliberal moment but to colonial modernity itself—a paradigm in which the imperial state, in the name of security, posits, generates, and violently responds to the terror resident in and emanating from its internal and external others.

Locating the moment of the War on Terror within deeper historical time, this book critically converges with an expanding field of contemporary historiography. In the early years of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq—a high point for neoconservative ideology—a series of academic and popular books affirmatively tied America’s existential struggle against terror to a tradition of confrontation between Western civilization and its others. Rightist intellectuals such as Niall Ferguson, Philip Bobbitt, and John Gaddis—seeking to defend both the War on Terror in particular and empire in general—highlighted the legal, philosophic, and military threads that connect the contemporary security apparatus with the *longue-durée* history of European and American imperialism.¹² Gaddis’s *Surprise, Security, and the American Experience* (2004), for example, traces the Bush doctrine of preemptive war—according to which “security” is achieved through imperial expansion—back to the Indian wars of the nineteenth century. Another constellation of works offers a more critical historicization of the present. In *Cultures of War* (2010), the historian John Dower elaborates a series of analogies between the War on Terror and the Pacific Theatre of the Second World War, reflecting on the destructive consequence of imperial hubris in either historical moment. Writers such as Chalmers Johnson—in his *Blowback* series (*Blowback*, 2000; *The Sorrows of Empire*, 2004; *Nemesis*, 2008)—place the War on Terror on a single line of geopolitical cause and effect, examining the relationship between the late twentieth-century assertion of U.S. power abroad and the resistance to which it has given rise. My own approach shares with Dower and Johnson a basic insistence on the urgency of historical explanation. I am principally concerned, though, with genealogy above analogy or causality. The genealogical method, as theorized by Michel Foucault, avoids the search for causation and labors instead to apprehend and understand the present through an analysis of the complex, multiple, and contingent—never inevitable—historical contexts and processes from which it emerged. Thinking genealogically, this book situates the conceptual paradigms and political forms of the War on Terror within the long, planetary history of colonial modernity.

THEORIZING THE COLONIAL PRESENT

For the guardians of established political order, the terror of revolution is defined not simply by physical or corporeal destruction but by the capacities it contains for *abstraction*—the totality that is revealed within and by the collective self-consciousness forged in the moment of struggle. Edmund Burke condemned the revolution in France because of the blood it shed but also because of the “doctrine and theoretick dogma” it projected toward the world. Though the histories of “terror” and “theory” are inextricably bound, terror has been under-theorized. So too has security. In contemporary theory, the tropes of security and terror are—with important exceptions—approached obliquely. Their theorization is less a discrete analytic pursuit than an adjunctive product of three intersecting critical strands: the critique of spectacle; the critique of the politics of exception; and the critique of empire qua global capita.

Chapters 1 and 2 foreground the continuity across time of colonial rationality, as expressed by the dialectic of security and terror. Considering how the critiques of spectacle, exception, and empire illuminate the longer history of the colonial present, chapter 3 persists in this basic route of inquiry. But I am simultaneously concerned here to emphasize and reflect upon the *geographic* implications of the contemporary reproduction of colonial political and economic forms. In a basic and important sense, the processes of combined and uneven development unfolding in the postcolonial moment are contiguous with the colonial era. Now as then, the imperial state enables the violent application of commodity rationality in the global South, thereby reproducing the geographic asymmetry between metropole and postcolony.¹³ I also want to highlight, though, the inverse trajectory, the boomerang return—“choc en retour,” in Aimé Césaire’s phrasing—of colonial rationality to the advanced capitalist world. In his *Discourse on Colonialism* (1950), Césaire sought to shed light upon the colonial origins of intra-European genocide, a genealogy also identified by Arendt. More broadly, Césaire accented how the prosecution of colonial power disfigured the humanity of the European subject and deepened the terminal sickness in European civilization. My use of the concept is yet more expansive. Choc en retour, as invoked herein, signifies the reenactment in the postcolonial metropole—including the “Homeland” of the U.S. imperium—of various modes of governance and accumulation that were innovated or perfected in the space of the colony; it names, even more capaciously, the contemporary reverberation,

in the global North and South alike, of intersecting, often unacknowledged imperial histories.

The critical theorizations of spectacle, exception, and empire, I contend, are conditioned by—and symptomatic of—this boomerang return. The critique of spectacle is responding to what Guy Debord termed the “colonization of everyday life,” the turning inward of capital’s imperial predations. The critique of exception is an effect of the enactment of “emergency” governance—ever the basic mode of colonial rule—within the juridical sphere of the liberal democratic state. And the critique of empire (qua global capital) is symptomatic of the return of colonial methods of accumulation to the economies of the advanced capital world. In more synthetic terms, these three instances of “return” evince the global normalization, in a moment marked by permanent war and perpetual neoliberal crisis, of emergency governance and economic insecurity.

If conditioned by this *choc en retour*, however, the intersecting critiques of spectacle, exception, and empire are unevenly revelatory of the colonial origins and essence of contemporary political and economic forms. This unevenness, I argue, is owed in part to theory’s symptomatic tendencies—the ways in which certain works or premises of critique reprise not simply the vocabulary but the formal logics of their object. The contributions on which I focus in chapter 3 exemplify this formal echo. As authored by Jean Baudrillard and Slavoj Žižek, the critique of spectacle mirrors the ahistoricity of the image. In his 2002 essay “Welcome to the Desert of the Real,” Žižek observes that the attacks of September 11, 2001, entered the world as narrative, as symbol—not as event and later as image, but as an “image-event.”¹⁴ In Baudrillard’s reading, the event is taken hostage, consumed, by its image—and thus cleansed of any historical content.¹⁵ In highlighting this evacuation, the critique of 9/11-as-spectacle itself struggles to look off screen—away from the “unforgettable incandescence of the images”¹⁶—and toward the concrete historical forces from which the event emerged. Similarly, the critique of exception—for which the work of Giorgio Agamben acts as a touchstone—often reinforces the assumption of rupture, the exceptionalism of the “post-9/11” state of exception. In *Precarious Life* (2004), Judith Butler reflects, in a largely ahistorical manner, on the “new war prison” and new juridical concept of “indefinite detention.” Agamben’s work, by contrast, is profoundly genealogical. In *Homo Sacer* (1998), for example, Agamben identifies the Nazi concentration camp as the space wherein the *conditio inhumana* is most absolute.¹⁷ But in the context of “a new kind of war,” Agamben’s *State of*

Exception (2004) describes the U.S. military prison at Guantánamo Bay as the space wherein “bare life reaches its maximum indeterminacy.”¹⁸ This appeal to the exceptionalism of the “post-9/11” moment, however subtle, compounds the absence, in Agamben’s historical framework, of a sustained engagement with the colonial origins of the politics of exception. The tendency of theory to mimic the form of its object is likewise evidenced by the third intervention I examine in chapter 3, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s *Empire* trilogy. Hardt and Negri’s theorization of the new global imperial order emulates key tropes of the triumphalist enunciation of “globalization”—the idea that there is no longer a constitutive outside, to capital or to the space and subject of sovereignty, and the related assumption that the political and economic forms of this achieved globalism originate within and emanate from the advanced capitalist world. The universality of contemporary imperial order is evinced, in Hardt and Negri’s account, by the “qualitative hegemony” of biopolitical production—forms of immaterial and affective labor that are ascendant in the post-Fordist economies of the global North but shape the cultural logics of production everywhere—and by the planetary projection of U.S. constitutionalism. My own argument in this chapter foregrounds the inverse trajectory—the return to the global North of colonial modes of governance, methods of accumulation, and conditions of social life—and accents more broadly the contemporary iteration of a colonial rationality that Hardt and Negri consign to the past.¹⁹

*

The tendency of left critique to conform to the logics of its object was observed by Walter Benjamin, in his “Theses on the Philosophy of History” (1940). In that enduringly resonant text, Benjamin highlighted the pitfalls of social-democratic historicism—a quasi-religious belief in the idea of history as progress, and an impulse to array unique moments of the past on a single chain of cause and effect, like the “beads of a rosary.” Benjamin argued instead for an understanding of history as catastrophe, and a concomitant apprehension of the “constellation” that connects one’s present to other epochs across time. This conceptualization of history’s substance and shape is clarified by what Benjamin termed the “tradition of the oppressed,” which teaches us—upon its own return—that the state of emergency within which we live has long been the rule in the colonized world. The postcolonial reverberations of Benjamin’s interlocking insights will be audible, I hope, throughout this book.

RUPTURE AND THE PROBLEM
OF REPRESENTATION

The conjoined political formations of the War on Terror and Homeland Security sanction a multitude of social processes—from war and occupation in Iraq and Afghanistan, to extrajudicial incarceration in Guantánamo Bay, to the militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border, to an assault on civil liberties and democratic culture within the United States. These formations also represent the state’s attempt to discursively frame the world, and U.S. power in the world, at the dawn of the twenty-first century. Following the denouement of the Cold War two decades ago, the United States struggled to devise and impose an interpretive schema that equaled, in its binary simplicity and ideological force, the opposition of the capitalist “free world” to its unfree communist antithesis. Indeed, the ascendant post-1989 idea of the “end of history”—or “New World Order,” as George H. W. Bush had it—announced an era beyond ideology. (And if history is over, narrative becomes somewhat redundant too.) The administration of George W. Bush and its enablers saw in the rupture of September 11 an opportunity not only to institute particular policies, but to compose a vocabulary and narrative that would guide U.S. global supremacy in the coming decades—that would herald not the end of history, but its urgent beginning (or resumption). The basic structure of this narrative predated the moment that conditioned its application. In 2000, the neoconservative think tank Project for the New American Century (PNAC) published an influential—and subsequently infamous—report entitled *Rebuilding America’s Defenses: Strategy, Forces and Resources for a New Century*. This document outlined the necessity of an emboldened U.S. military apparatus, which would secure the “American homeland,” wage “multiple, simultaneous major theatre wars,” and perform “‘constabulary’ duties associated with shaping the security environment” in strategic regions across the world.²⁰ Technocratic language about defense spending dovetailed with more grandiose, and manifestly imperial, appeals to the righteousness of a “global security order” shaped in the image of “American principles and prosperity.” The report regretfully acknowledged that the transformations in U.S. military infrastructure and attitude it called for would not be realized in the immediate term—“absent,” that is, “some catastrophic and catalyzing event—like a new Pearl Harbor.”²¹ Not simply in the aftermath of, but indeed *during*, the “catastrophic and catalyzing” event of September 11, 2001, neoconservative officials and pundits imposed a narrative of imminent and interminable war.

They fashioned this narrative out of materials already on hand—the strategic and ideological substance of documents such as *Rebuilding America's Defenses*—and abiding colonial tropes of absolute civilizational difference and the white man's burden.

Across the aesthetic disciplines, the indistinction of the event and its narrativization provoked an acute crisis of representation. How to resist the calcification of the event into ideology? How to undo the fixity of the meaning attached to it by the security state? The early and still emblematic instances of the 9/11 novel responded to these questions by refusing any political or historical employment of the attacks. Works such as Jay McInerney's *The Good Life* (2006), Lynn Sharon Schwartz's *The Writing on the Wall* (2005), Helen Schulman's *A Day at the Beach* (2007), and Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007) revolve around the intimate lives of bourgeois citizens of New York City struggling, in the days and weeks following September 11, with the intersections of collective trauma and interpersonal—often specifically sexual—discord. Dust from the Twin Towers in a downtown loft or actual fragments of a victim's body lodged underneath the skin of a survivor symbolize the sense that a certain security—the private, the corporeal—has been violated. These transgressions serve as metaphor for a greater violation—of the seemingly stable boundary between inside and outside, oneself and the world. The standard reaction to this violation is, in these fictions, to look and move inward—to retreat into the layered domestic spheres of self, home, city, homeland. This inward turning is joined to a corresponding temporal myopia, an unwillingness to look beyond the moment of putative rupture toward the histories to which it belongs.²²

The title of DeLillo's *Falling Man* refers to an artist who haunts the city, and enacts its collective trauma, with his unannounced restagings of a body arrested in flight—a performance that evokes the bodies that fell to their deaths from the upper floors of the World Trade Center towers on September 11, captured in iconic photographs against the buildings' austere geometry, or beheld in person. Like the spectacle of the attacks, the falling body is suspended outside of time. Just as each televisual repetition of the towers falling reinforces the event's historical dislocation, the *Falling Man* keeps our vision fixed on the moment of rupture, away from both past and future.²³ DeLillo's novel has a similar effect. Encountering the same aporia as Žižek and Baudrillard, fictions such as *Falling Man* both evince and struggle to evade the ahistoricity of the image-event.

Escaping assimilation by the conjoined logics of historical erasure and geographic myopia requires a different framing of, less than a different

answer to, the problem of representation. It requires, more specifically, reckoning with the ways in which it is not only the terror of the singular spectacular event that incites the crisis of representation, but the terror of the society of the spectacle, or indeed capitalist modernity, broadly conceived—not only the towers coming down, in other words, but their existence in the first place.

How to articulate unique moments of catastrophe with the catastrophe of history itself? How to grasp, in Benjamin's words, "the constellation which [our] own era has formed with a definite earlier one"? These questions are posed and engaged by an emerging formation of postcolonial American novels, which locate the colonial content of the contemporary United States within hemispheric and global imperial histories. Chapter 4 focuses on three such works. Traveling across space and time, from post-September 11 New York to postcolonial Nigeria to Germany during the Second World War, Teju Cole's *Open City* (2011) excavates buried histories of violence and reveals their imbrication, aboveground and below. Articulating the long global history of uneven development with militarized neoliberalism, Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) highlights the "atavistic and newfangled" nature of contemporary imperial forms—the concurrence of retrograde racial imaginaries and crude methods of accumulation with hyper-modern information technologies and financial instruments.²⁴ The eponymous narrator of Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) describes his native Santo Domingo as the "Ground Zero of the New World"—the site of modernity's foundational terror, the reverberations of which remain, to borrow Édouard Glissant's phrase, "obsessively present."²⁵ Tracing the routes of contiguity between the fifteenth century and the twenty-first, the Dominican Republic and New Jersey, Díaz's novel reflects upon the modes of collection and transmission—the fable or the rumor; the body; the written word—through which the long history of empire and its afterlives might be made visible.

The term "postcolonial," read literally, denotes the time beyond modern colonialism. In a different interpretation, however, the postcolonial names the resumption or rearticulation of colonial culture, in the metropole and the colony, after the moment of formal independence. As Simon Gikandi defines it, "postcolonialism is a code for the state of undecidability in which the culture of colonialism continues to resonate in what was supposed to be its negation."²⁶ This definition describes precisely the (post)coloniality of the United States, which is at once the first postcolonial nation and the first

neocolonial nation—an “infant empire” in the moment of independence and a fully mature, even declining, empire today. But as Jenny Sharpe has observed, when applied to the contemporary United States, the term postcolonial usually has a more limited resonance: “postcolonial,” she writes, “does not name [the United States’] past as a white settler colony or its emergence as a neocolonial power; rather, it designates the presence of racial minorities and Third World immigrants.”²⁷ In dialogue with writers such as Cole, Hamid, and Díaz, this book does not simply *designate presence*, but *excavates the past in the present*. I endeavor, that is, to illuminate how overlapping imperial histories—the settler-colonization of the New World, European colonialism in Africa and Asia, and more recent projections of U.S. power across the formerly colonized world—imbue and shape the cultural formations and social relations of the present, within and beyond the boundaries of the United States.

Demonstrating the possibilities of historical recovery, Cole, Hamid, and Díaz possess a concomitant sensitivity to enduring modes of concealment and forgetting. *Open City* meditates on the ways in which the coloniality of the War on Terror is both obscured and enabled by the elision of imperial histories. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* reveals how the futurism of finance capital and nostalgia of militaristic nationalism disable critical reckoning with the history of the present. *Oscar Wao* implies that the silencing of the past makes possible its eternal return. This attention to cultures of archival erasure is expressed, moreover, by the form and not merely the content of each novel. All three texts self-reflexively perform their own inability to completely transcend—or indeed their own complicity in—the silencing of the past and its presence. In *Open City*, Julius’s narrative voice is affectively deadened, performing the repression that the intellectual substance of his historical insights aims to undo. The monologic form of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* stages an attempt at historical edification—as the Pakistani narrator Changez labors to educate his American companion on the extant history of Euro-American imperialism—that is not met, in the novel itself, with any gesture of empathetic recognition. And the unilateral narrative voice of *Oscar Wao*’s Yunior calls attention to those voices that remain silent, that do not possess the power of self-narration and can only be made audible through the extrinsic act of fictive imagination.

In my readings of fiction, I am especially concerned with how novels betray and, often, self-critically address their own capacity as one origin and repository of historical narrative—one site, among the manifold formal and

informal venues of historical production, wherein both archival presences and absences are created. Reflecting upon and dramatizing the politics of narrative form, self-reflexive novels in particular can help us think about the dialogue between two moments of representation: the naturalization and deconstruction of various structures of dominance. Through what narrative strategies, for example, is colonial rationality—the ideological frameworks that order the peoples and places of the world within hierarchies of race, culture, and time, and that guide imperial methods of governance and accumulation—established and normalized? And through what narrative strategies might colonial modes of reading and writing the world be exposed, undone, and countered? The novels that I consider are engaged, in specific ways and to varying degrees, with these essential questions. But in the broadest sense, I am interested in their close attention to the production of “history” as narrative—an attention, crucially, that includes a fundamental concern with those archival silences that either evade or are an effect of the act of representation.

Both the potentialities and pitfalls of literary witness are confronted with a particular urgency by the writer whose work I examine in chapter 5, Roberto Bolaño. In accord with the fictions of Cole, Hamid, and Díaz, Bolaño’s work—which was ecstatically received across the Anglophone world upon its translation, beginning in 2003—defies the trope of rupture.²⁸ Bolaño’s counterpoint to the historical myopia of the “post-9/11” lens, though, is found in his rendering of another epochal September 11—September 11, 1973, the date on which a military coup overthrew the elected president of Chile, Salvador Allende, and installed in his place the rightist dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. Using September 11, 1973—in conjunction with an allied moment of rightist reaction, the brutal state response to student demonstrators in Mexico City in 1968—as a prism that refracts the planetary history of modernity, novels such as *Amulet* (1999) and *The Savage Detectives* (1998) imagine the space of ostensive rupture not as a wall that blocks off the past and the world but as an opening that brings deeper histories into view. Confined to a bathroom stall during the army’s occupation of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), accompanied only by a book of poems, the narrator of *Amulet*, Auxilio, perceives the imbrication of past, present, and future. “The year 1968 became the year 1964 and the year 1960 became the year 1956. But it also became the years 1970 and 1973 and the years 1975 and 1976.”²⁹ In *The Savage Detectives* this trans-temporal recognition is joined to a de-territorial consciousness and desire; Arturo Belano (Bolaño’s fictional alter

ego) and his comrades move from the space and time of catastrophe in Mexico and Chile in 1968 and 1973, to postcolonial Africa, post-Franco Catalonia, and Sandinista Nicaragua (among other places). This global imagination is realized with especial scope and depth in Bolaño's magnum opus *2666* (2004)—a novel that traces two intersecting genealogies of the present: the late twentieth-century history of neoliberal transformation in Latin America, which leads from Chile in 1973 to the U.S.-Mexico frontier at the turn of the millennium, and the longer history of permanent global war, which unites colonialism, fascism, and militarized neoliberalism on one spatial and temporal map. *2666*'s rendering of these histories highlights the mutual inherency of civilization and barbarism, security and terror. One correlate of Bolaño's expansive historical and geographic consciousness, in other words, is a heightened sensitivity to the affiliation of security and terror—the terror, and the insecurity, that accompanies the modern security project. This abiding theoretical concern is central as well to *By Night in Chile* (2000) and *Distant Star* (1996), two novels set in Chile, in the era and aftermath of Pinochet, that meditate on the complicity of literature and state violence. The latter intimacy is defined by a kind of formal mimicry. Like the novels of Cole, Hamid, and Díaz I discuss in chapter 4, Bolaño's fiction self-reflexively dramatizes the problem of reprisal—the ways in which the technologies of erasure or “semblance” intrinsic to capital and the state are reproduced by the apparatuses of representation, literary and otherwise. But literature, Bolaño's work demonstrates, is also capable of formal transcendence—the blasting open of, rather than confinement by, the trope of historical rupture.

*

Just as the War on Terror's prehistory was elided by the mantra “post-9/11,” the continuance of its narrative frameworks and political forms was obscured by a conjuncture of putative endpoints. First, the 2008 election of Barack Obama communicated, among many other political feelings, popular discontentment with the Bush administration's military adventurism. In the months following his inauguration, Obama oversaw the drawdown of the U.S. military presence in Iraq, and outlined a more protracted schedule for eventual withdrawal from Afghanistan. The Obama White House made a point of retiring the phrase “War on Terror,” tacitly replacing it with the more technocratic heading “Overseas Contingency Operations.” Second, the “Arab Spring” of 2011 demonstrated to a global audience that progressive

political transformations in the Middle East and North Africa would be brought about not via aerial bombardment by U.S. warplanes, but from below, through popular struggle. The critique emanating from Cairo's Tahrir Square and indeed across the region voiced a rejection of both the War on Terror and the neoliberal imposition with which it is bound. Third, in May 2011, U.S. Special Forces assassinated Osama bin Laden, an extrajudicial killing that was consumed by much of the U.S. public as a cathartic conclusion to the decade of militarism occasioned by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Though the killing of bin Laden was not the primary goal of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the achievement of the former nonetheless served to signal the redundancy of those conflicts.

Mirroring and magnifying the false rupture of September 11, the "sense of an ending" implied by this series of events encouraged the concealment of imperial histories and obfuscation of extant imperial processes. In texts such as Kathryn Bigelow's acclaimed but controversial 2012 film *Zero Dark Thirty*, which chronicles the pursuit and assassination of Osama bin Laden, we can perceive the outlines of a narrative framework that will displace the ongoing disasters of Iraq and Afghanistan—the brutality that unfolded and continues to unfold therein—with the ultimate triumph of bin Laden's assassination. We can discern, in other words, the techniques of historical distortion that will work to absolve the War on Terror of its own manifestly imperial substance, thereby creating the conditions for future reenactments of colonial rationality.

There do, however, exist myriad examples of cultural texts that counter the cycle of historical erasure and imperial reproduction, by excavating buried histories and by reminding us that the War on Terror is a present-tense phenomenon. Notably, a growing body of War on Terror veterans' narratives illuminates the lingering effects of war's traumas, summoning a tragedy we have learned to forget. Ben Fountain's novel *Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk* (2012)—unfolding over one day, and centering on the jingoistic pageantry of the Dallas Cowboys' Thanksgiving Day game—chronicles the surreal immersion of Bravo Company in the commercial spectacle of the War on Terror's domestic production. And Atticus Lish's novel *Preparation for the Next Life* (2014) follows Skinner, a veteran of the Iraq War, and Zou Lei, an undocumented immigrant from China's remote northwest, as they fall in tragic love, wander the far reaches of New York's outer boroughs, and struggle to survive in a Homeland defined by pervasive insecurity and quotidian terror. In conversation with these two texts, I offer in the epilogue a summary

reflection on the false beginning and false endings of the War on Terror—the ways in which the assumption of rupture enables the resumption of colonial culture and process.

There is one moment of historical rupture that I am concerned to avow—the “discovery” of what would become the Americas, an event that founded the colonial modernity within which we still live. The political and ontological forms born of or conditioned by that moment continue to shape the world in profound ways. The articulation of capital and state terror, which was clarified by the plunder of the New World and institution of chattel slavery, and which was accelerated by later manifestations of European imperialism in Africa and the Indian sub-continent, endures. And today as in the early modern era, the terrors of the security state are justified and obscured by a particular way of imagining the world and its inhabitants—one that assumes “the West” is a synonym for, or privileged exponent of, the universal; and one that marks political boundaries, and polices their internal contents, via appeal to the idea of race and other modes of difference. Confronting the presence of these colonial forms, this book submits, requires that we register and reckon with their long history.