

Precarity and Survival in Tara June Winch's *After the Carnage*

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THE SHORT STORY GENRE IS PARTICULARLY WELL SUITED TO CAPTURING 'fragmentation, displacement, diaspora and identity', according to Maggie Awadalla and Paul March-Russell (3). This claim seems to be borne out in a number of recent collections of Australian short stories by writers of non-mainstream backgrounds whose stories focus on exactly these issues. Examples include Nam Le's *The Boat* (2008), Roanna Gonsalves's *The Permanent Resident* (2016), Maxine Beneba Clarke's *Foreign Soil* (2014) and Tara June Winch's *After the Carnage* (2016), the latter being the focus of this essay. All of these writers display an awareness in their stories of 'entangled histories that precede and exceed imperial and national formations', to quote Dilip M. Menon (38). Menon, writing about the Global South and using Édouard Glissant's term, 'archipelagic thinking', coined in relation to the Caribbean, further explicates this kind of thinking as generative of 'maps of affinities' that recognise 'the fact that identities are conjunctural and oscillate between narrower and wider imaginings ... between local identities and international ones' (40). This essay takes up the concept of alliances and 'maps of affinities' as they are represented in and by Winch's short story collection. Winch is an Indigenous Australian writer of Wiradjuri, Afghan, and English heritage who is now based in France. Even this brief biographical information draws attention to the mobility of contemporary global identities and the shifting nature of national identification. Winch's own physical distance from Australia (she currently lives in Europe) has, she has suggested in an interview,

been helpful for her writing, enabling an outsider's view that has involved 'searching for [her] story amongst other people's stories' ('After the Carnage' n.p.). In dialogue with these fluid national identities and entangled histories are issues of intersectionality where race, class and gender impact on the themes of violence, disadvantage and precarity that bring different minoritised constituencies into proximity with each other. Winch, I argue, thematises the ways in which violence, gender, race, class and precarity may be seen to be intertwined. At the same time, her stories reveal moments of survival and resilience in the precarious lives of their characters. In writing not just of the Australian nation but also of the transnation(al), her stories draw attention to cross-cultural affiliations as well as to the ongoing inequalities that beset marginalised groups. Menon's concept of 'maps of affinities' is thus a useful lens through which to view these stories. This term aptly engages the ways in which Winch, in this collection, addresses the 'conjunctural' (40) interactions between the global and local, reminding readers of the ongoing global after-effects of colonisation, and the ways in which violence and survival are common to both.

Winch's thirteen stories in this collection range across a number of transnational geographical settings: from Australia to New York, Istanbul, Lahore, Guangzhou and Paris, among others, with some stories set in unidentified places. A number of the first- and third-person protagonists/narrators (male and female, straight and gay, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, Australian and non-Australian) of these stories are marked by their precarious lives, their poverty and their marginalisation; and violence of various kinds (intimate partner violence, family/domestic violence and global terror), is represented as impacting on these lives. What is relevant to this essay's argument that Winch's stories may be read as both transnational and 'archipelagic' is their engagement with such a wide range of characters and settings. The stories traverse not just inequalities arising from race, gender and class in Australia itself but those endured by precaritised people in Europe. The story, 'Last Class', for example, is about a disparate group of refugees fleeing 'from forty-one different countries' (23) taking French classes in Paris, who find common ground despite their different languages and cultures. In engaging with this broad canvas of displaced characters, who themselves form alliances of the marginalised (as in 'Last Class'), alongside the stories set in Australia or involving Australians travelling abroad (as in 'Baby Island' whose first-person narrator, Ming, is a Chinese-Australian who is in Guangzhou trying to recruit students to Australia), Winch invites her readers to make comparisons across national boundaries. Indeed, the collection's title, *After the Carnage*, emphasises the belated and ongoing effects of traumatic violence, whether that be interpersonal, colonial, and/or political: violence that is relevant both within Australia and outside it. In many of the stories in the collection, random acts of violence, either localised or in the form of news or memories from distant places, disrupt the surface normality of life, jolting the reader as well as the characters.

Yet one of the distinguishing aspects of these stories is Winch's representation of the determined survivalism and resilience of the victims of violence who take centre stage in her stories. The five stories discussed below provide examples of Winch's narrativisation of these intersecting themes.

The often-dangerous space for children of the Australian family is the setting for the interpersonal violence represented in the first two stories under discussion: 'Wager' and 'Mosquito'. The theme of precarity is immediately suggested by the title of Winch's first story in the collection, 'Wager'. The story is narrated in the first person by a young Indigenous university student, Tommy, who has come to stay with his mother and step-dad, Darryl, his first visit 'since high school' (7) when he was sent to boarding school in Sydney. He has, it becomes clear, never met his step-dad nor his little brother, Joe, even though he has visited his mother 'every other summer. Wherever she was' (4). While Winch does not mention the characters' Aboriginality directly, it is implied through a reference to Tommy's initiation (4), his mother's use of the Aboriginal-English term 'GUBBA-ment'¹ (14, capitalised in original) and to 'brothers and sisters' living 'on country' and being paid 'grog money' (13). The story paints a picture of a neglectful mother who has had multiple partners and led a chaotic and peripatetic life, but whom Tommy still loves, despite the rarity of her invitations to visit (1). But as the story unfolds—both through Tommy's memories of the past, including the still birth of a sibling ('I remembered everything my mother didn't' (3)) and through the rather clumsy narrative device of his mother's stories recounted to him again while mother and son are having dinner and drinking at the local RSL (Returned and Services League) Club—the reader shares the sad history of Tommy's mother (unnamed in the story) and her precarious existence. She re-narrates to Tommy her past employment history and how she moved from one menial job to another, mostly dependent on having board included as she 'didn't have no house' (9) after Tommy's 'real dad' (3) had left and their good life 'on our land' (4) ended. It is clear that she has been the victim of domestic violence at the hands of past partners, as she reassures her son that Darryl is 'nice' and 'not like the others, this one. Good as gold' (7).

The negative influence of alcohol has had an impact on the mother-son relationship. As Tommy reflects: 'In every memory, ever since I could remember, there was always a drink in the foreground' and 'I wished my mum and I could communicate in other ways' (16). She, for her part, is aware that she has been a 'no-good mother' (15) despite her love for him. In this story, Tommy's mother's excessive drinking is accompanied by gambling, led on by the older women around her. After winning on the poker machines, she refuses to stop despite Tommy's

¹ The Aboriginal English term 'gubbament' is a colloquial term for government. The word 'gubba' meaning 'white person' derives from this.

pleas: he wants her to use her winnings to fix up her Housing Commission house. The tragedy that ensues as a result of Darryl's leaving little Joe alone in the house in order to come to the RSL Club himself is sketched in quickly at the end of story: Tommy running back to the house while Darryl and his mother are laughing in the pub, a place that Tommy describes as 'a sort of asylum' (17). The last words of the story, 'Too late', refer as much to the potential rehabilitation of Tommy and his mother's relationship as they do to the tragic outcome of parental negligence.

The 'wager' of the title, then, has a number of implications: it is the precarity of their lives as Indigenous Australians still coping with the intergenerational trauma of colonial dispossession and of family disintegration as the result of government policies; the bet that Darryl has taken with little Joe's life; Tommy's mother's risk-taking behaviour; and perhaps also the 'wager' that denotes the gamble as to whether Tommy will succeed in life or not, despite the odds being against him in terms of his life experiences and his early encounters with violence and loss. Winch leaves this possibility open, but hints at Tommy's ability to resist being drawn into the seemingly destructive behaviour he identifies in his mother and Darryl. At the same time, the narrative provides enough of a 'back-story' to explain, if not excuse, his mother's retreat into risk-taking behaviour, at both a personal and historical level, as an Aboriginal woman who has had to cope with being left by her husband and having a number of abusive relationships after this, being homeless and having to scrape together a living in unskilled jobs, and eventually having a more stable home, partner and baby, only to have this taken from her in a reprise of the painful earlier loss of her still-born baby. As Winch has commented in relation to her previous book, *Swallow the Air*, about her main character, May Gibson: 'Her family and her family's history have so many parallels with the pain of not belonging to the land they inhabit, this transposes to the everyday shit, coping, alcohol and the mental effect of [sic] the next generations' (Byrne and Winch 130). Despite Tommy's focalised narration, it is, in the end, his unnamed mother who represents the ongoing suffering of Indigenous women in the aftermath of transgenerational colonial violence and dispossession. Tommy, one feels, will be all right.

Issues of sole parenting and family violence are the focus, too, of the story, 'Mosquito', which, while not mentioning race explicitly, suggests that its first-person narrator, Alison, is a non-Indigenous Australian. In this story, Winch represents domestic violence in what appears to be a white, middle-class setting, but that, as in 'Wager', hides a history of precarity and parental neglect. Alison, at the beginning of the story, is celebrating the thirteenth birthday of her son, James, whom she has brought up as a single mother. As Alison's narration records of her ex-partner, '*He was gone before the first ultrasound*' (129, emphasis in original). This birthday marks the family court decision that James is finally able to make as to which parent he chooses to live with, having being compelled to share his time

between his father and mother up till then. For Alison, it is also a time of burning bridges, of telling her ex-partner (who is referred to as 'he' throughout and never given a name, apart from 'the arsehole' (134)) how she feels about his violence and of confronting her childhood friend and one-time confidante, Kristie, with her betrayal.

The emotional and physical violence is described early in the story as Alison recounts a previous attempt to flee Australia after the three-year-old James had had his rib broken by his father. Alison realises that applying for an apprehended violence order and trying to get sole custody would just make James's father 'even more pissed off' (132) subjecting the child to further danger. Caught in the cycle of what Victoria Police now call 'intimate terrorism' rather than 'domestic violence'² (McCulloch et al. n.p.), and terrified for his safety every time James has to go to his father for a week, Alison plans to leave Australia for Bali, pretending to go on a holiday with her friends and taking James with her, but not returning. Confiding in her schoolfriend, Kristie, about her plan, she makes meticulous preparations for her flight, even having James tell his father that he would see him in a week's time. While seated on the plane, Alison is arrested by the Federal Police who have been tipped off about her planned escape with James. It takes her five years before she is able to get shared custody again (135). The tip-off came from Kristie, who did it, she later explains to Alison, because 'boys need their fathers, it's very important psychologically' (141). Alison's response is that, because of Kristie's 'stupid ideas on fathers' (141), James had been sent back every other week to 'his own little hell, which he'll have to remember, the broken bones, the head fucking, the bruises' (141), instead of being able to escape. Kristie's interfering and her entrenched notions of the importance of middle-class 'family values', then, have exacerbated the physical and psychological harm to both James and Alison.

What becomes clear in the story is that Alison's own childhood has also been a precarious 'little hell' in contrast to Kristie's unthinking middle-class privilege indicated in her family's 'private housing' (138). Ashamed to be dropped off by Kristie's mother at her own housing commission 'shithole' (138) which, she implies, is in such a poor state that if an inspection had been done 'they would probably have sent us kids to foster homes on the spot' (139), she pretends that a different house is hers. Like Tommy's neglectful mother in the previous story, Alison's mother is never at home (140). Despite this deprived childhood, Alison promises herself to provide her own child with a 'loving home, a nice house' (141) as she has, indeed, done for James. However, her inability to save her son from his

² The term 'intimate terrorism' was coined by American sociologist Michael P. Johnson, who proposed a typology of domestic or family violence in his 2010 book, *A Typology of Domestic Violence: Intimate Terrorism, Violent Resistance, and Situational Couple Violence*. Northeastern UP: Boston.

father's violence has caused Alison's thoughts of suicide (as she outlines at the beginning of the story) but, by the end, when shared custody has ceased, she feels the courage to tell James's father that she hopes never to have to see his 'rotten face' again (136) at the same time as she confronts Kristie with the consequences of *her* treachery. The image with which the story ends, and from which it takes its title, is that of a mosquito bite that is itchy but that, after a dab of calamine lotion, 'doesn't bother me at all' (142). The implication is that both Alison and James have escaped the 'little hell' of their family home, and that both will be able to move on from a past that has been precarious and violent but from which they will now be able to heal. The mosquito bite does not constitute a permanent wound. Like Tommy in 'Wager', Alison and James are survivors. By including these two stories of family violence—one in an Indigenous family; the other in a non-Indigenous family—it seems that Winch is emphasising their shared experiences of victimhood and survival across the racial, class and social divide while not attempting to make them equivalent. Tommy's resolve to escape the destructive pattern of colonisation, transgenerational trauma and dispossession in which his mother has been caught parallels Alison's determination to escape the family violence that has affected her despite her white privilege.

The next three selected stories from Winch's collection are set in Paris and New York and focus not on Australian protagonists but, respectively, on refugees fleeing violence, a United Nations intern who begins to question first-world charity, and a group of well-heeled New Yorkers whose lives seem very distant from global violence. This transnational perspective enables her to trace 'maps of alliance' as well as of differences as she measures the imbrication of her characters with close and distant violence, often hinted at as being the result of colonisation or war. In this way, her Australian characters and those from the stories set outside Australia share the ongoing after-effects of colonial, 'domestic' or interpersonal and/or political violence.

In 'The Last Class', Winch writes about the precarious lives of a group of refugees in Paris, each from very different places, backgrounds and cultures but who, as a result of the shared intimacy of their French classes, 'were joined forever in some way' (21). The lives of refugees perhaps represent precarity most clearly, as they, together with migrants, frequently experience 'multiple forms of vulnerability' (Paret and Gleeson 280), as this story illustrates. The story begins with the first-person narrator, who is unnamed and whose country of origin is not specifically mentioned although it is hinted at that she is of Arabic background,³ waiting in the unemployment queue and encountering a friend from her French class. They both recall (almost laughing at the memory) an incident with a student, Ahmedov, and

³ She says 'God willing' to her classmate, Kamla, and makes friends with two others as 'all three of us had known a little English and Arabic so we were drawn to each other for that reason' (20).

a knife: an incident that is revisited towards the end of the story once it has been given some context. This is the moment of violence that erupts into the everyday: here, it follows the announcement made by Martine, the French teacher, that the class will no longer be funded as their 350 hours of subsidised tuition have come to an end. The student Ahmedov reacts by holding a knife to his own throat, making a ‘deep “raah” noise from his stomach ... almost like he was speaking up for a feeling we had all been suppressing, some wordless, formless thing’ (32). In this moment of almost mocking self-directed violence, Ahmedov is physically enacting the harm he feels is being done to him and his fellow students by having their language classes terminated before they are fluent in French. It is, of course, this shared language that would enable them to become part of French society. In Fanon’s words from his classic 1952 text on racism, *Black Skin, White Masks*, ‘to speak means ... above all to assume a culture ... The black man ... becomes proportionately whiter in direct ratio to his mastery of the French language’ (8). At the same time, this image of potential self-harm captures the internalised self-directed racism that Fanon identified as one of the psychological effects of colonisation. As Ziauddin Sardar suggests in his Foreword to the 2008 edition of *Black Skin, White Masks*: ‘Direct colonial rule may have disappeared; but colonialism, in its many disguises as cultural, economic, political and knowledge-based oppression, lives on’ (Fanon xix).

The eruption of this act of potential violent self-harm is performative, too, of a broader feeling of frustration at the lack of recognition of the refugees’ plight. The narration of the events leading up to this event confirms the precarity in which the refugees have been living in France and provides some justification for why Ahmedov may have reacted in this way. For example, the limited choices the refugees have for working in France are referenced in a darkly humorous way when Amina, the narrator’s ‘closest friend’ (20), suggests that their employment visas should read not just ‘ABLE TO WORK’ but ‘ABLE TO WORK AS A CLEANER’ (20, capitalisation in original). The women ‘laughed about it then’ (20), united in their sharing of this ‘gallows humour’. They share their lives outside these language classes and compare the difficulties of negotiating a new culture and language ‘in translation, confusion’ (20). Their experiences of fleeing their own lands are similarly traumatic: they had come from ‘forty-one different countries’ (23), ‘by sea, by foot, by flight; some stowaway, some stamped. Some waited seven years ... Others had applied for asylum right away’ (21). The narrator’s own precarious journey, sleeping in the park with her children before finding the refuge (called the animal pound by the local people), is something that she carries in her ‘rib bones’ but doesn’t want to remember (21). The narrator shares the humiliating deprivations of her classmates, such as Amina who is unable to invite them to her apartment as she only has outdoor furniture to sit on, the housing association refusing to allow her to change it (25). Another student, Selma, is shocked, when, in a phone call with her younger sister who is still living in the

home town from which she has fled, her sister 'laughed about the bombs' (27) that had fallen on their grandmother's house, bombing now being 'so normal' (27). That those who have been victims of such suffering should now also be deprived of their opportunity to learn French and play a constructive part in the society they are seeking shelter in, is, for Ahmedov, the last straw.

For the narrator, this encounter with global terror shared in Selma's story puts into perspective her own problems of adjustment in her new home of exile. This sense of contrasting perspectives is encountered in the story's other violent incident in a Turkish café, when the narrator and her classmate, Sev, witness a (presumably French) woman repeatedly and violently pulling the ponytail of a young girl. They are both so upset by this incident that they are unable to finish their meal and both wonder whether they would have intervened if—ironically—they had spoken French more fluently. At the same time, they are aware of the difference in scale of their experiences of trauma: that they have 'seen war, people who stop breathing, buildings gone to rubble' and yet 'here cry over a girl's hair being yanked' (28). The suggestion is that they feel affinity with the suffering of the young victim, sensitised as they are to pain. On the other hand, one student in the language class is described as decrying their situation as refugees, even though they have escaped: '[Y]es we are here, yes there is no war in the street, but this isn't our home, we aren't really welcome' (29), concluding that 'we stay as nobody here' (29). Despite this sense of both loss and gain, the narrator's fluent acquisition of language—even though the French lessons have been ended—is indicative of her growing confidence and her determination to choose love over the hatred that seemed to be permeating 'the whole world' (32). The final image of the story, where she watches a video of monkeys in an experiment (they choose a soft-toy monkey rather than a wire monkey who offers them food) for her reinforces the video's title: '*How to prove love in the world*' (33, emphasis in original). It is this determined optimism, the story implies, that enables refugees to make new lives despite the deprivations, flashbacks and often negative attitudes encountered in their new home. It is this shared hope, too, that enables them to form alliances ('joined forever in some way' (21)) despite their very different backgrounds and nationalities. As Winch does not specifically name these national origins or the specific reasons for their having fled their homelands, the focus of their commonality is on their shared experience of struggling to survive in a land of exile. To repeat what Winch has said in relation to her character, May, in *Swallow the Air*, these global refugees share with Winch's Indigenous characters 'the pain of not belonging to the land they inhabit'. While the refugees have fled their homelands, the Indigenous characters in her stories have been dispossessed of theirs as a result of colonisation. By writing of these two groups of people in the same collection, Winch is underlining the commonality (though not the equivalence) of this shared experience of suffering, exclusion and survival.

Winch presents a more politically and ethically fraught picture of a foreign student's experience abroad in the story, 'Failure to Thrive', where a young Nigerian, Idriss, is working as an intern in New York at the United Nations. Here, the contrast between the Global North and Global South, rich and poor, is characterised by the visits to foreign missions that Idriss organises in his role as president of the mission committee. However, Idriss himself is highly ambitious, using this UN internship not like the other 'young bleeding hearts' (58) from more privileged backgrounds but as a stepping-stone in the hope of gaining an internship with Goldman Sachs. Raised alongside his brother (who is now studying international business in Germany) by his widowed businesswoman mother, he is taught by her to value money. His ambition is derived from wanting to make his mother proud and to 'make lots of money, big money, *genuine* Rolex watch money' (62) in New York.

While he himself is regarded as comfortably off in Nigeria compared to his classmates, in comparison with the students from the Global North, those 'rich kids from the European private schools' (67), Idriss is struggling. The gap in understanding between the haves and the have-nots, and what Idriss perceives as the blissful ignorance of the UN's aid programs—'not really understanding where it should all go, or who need to share it and who didn't' (69)—are the central concern of a number of incidents recounted in the story. Even in Nigeria, the privileged white teacher at Idriss's school had failed to understand the poverty of the children in her care. Taking her class to a local fast food outlet, 'the only one in the closest city' (68) and thus a very rare treat for the students, she could not understand why they did not eat their food or ice-cream. Idriss had to explain that, unlike he and his brother who were well fed at home, the 'tin hut kids' (68) would not eat 'without sharing it with their family' (69). Her embarrassment and sadness at being told that these children 'probably hadn't had meat for months' (69) reminds Idriss of his own responses to the UN work, 'like we were all just handing out half fried chickens to random people ... in good faith, but sometimes I felt like the problems were just too big to understand completely' (69). This comment underlines the impossibility of 'first world' understandings of the effects of 'third world' poverty, linking a white teacher in Nigeria who is ignorant of the living conditions of her students with philanthropic aid-workers as players in a pointless neo-colonial cycle that seems aimed at salving the conscience of former colonisers rather than ameliorating the after-effects of colonial exploitation. Winch is critiquing the discourses of aid and philanthropy through the narrative voice of a Global South character who has had lived experience of the effects of colonial exploitation. A similar disjunction between intention and effect, expressed through food and eating, is evident when Idriss comments that the Noodle Night organised by the interns running the Social Committee in New York is only attended by the 'clique' in 'Arms, Security and Finance' (67). It is a nicely ironic detail that only those in this particular sector of the organisation (whose very title

echoes neo-liberal discourse) can afford the inflated prices of the food. Winch is drawing attention to the ironies of the unthinking nature of first-world privilege, even among the 'bleeding hearts' (58) in a global organisation such as the United Nations, and to Idriss's 'third world' desire for wealth that makes him yearn to be part of this privilege.

Ironically, then, part of Idriss's 'failure to thrive', while emphasising the structural disadvantage that makes it so hard for him to succeed in the first world, also derives from his over-sensitivity towards injustice and racism, and the feeling that he and the other interns were 'utterly hopeless to do anything' (66). His 'strung out' (66) 'fugue state' (63), as he calls it, of memory-loss and psychological disorder as a result of exposure to trauma, makes him unable to enjoy life in New York city, as he watches the other interns 'laughing [in spite of] everything we know—all the shit in the world—and they were just drinking and laughing ...' (70). Despite being arrested for fighting and drunkenness, and deciding to leave New York for Abuja, as the story ends, he takes his brother's advice and decides instead to 'think about what to do tomorrow' (72). Some of the irony in the story arises from Idriss's 'failure' to be *insensitive* to the kind of unthinking racism that had one woman posting photos of Fijian children on Facebook under the title 'scrummy chocolate children' (60), a 'well intentioned' (61) but clearly deeply inappropriate response, 'like cannibalism' (61), as Idriss's brother jokingly suggests. This 'cannibalism' describes some of the attitudes of the Global North towards the Global South: feeding off poverty and inequality while appearing to be doing good, in much the same way that Idriss perceives as occurring in United Nations interventions.

The image of brotherhood with which the story ends is that of Idriss selflessly leaving the last remaining milk for his Brazilian flatmate's breakfast, and drinking water instead. It is an image of genuine care and respect for the other, something that the story itself has shown to be a problematic and morally fraught concept, illustrated by Idriss's disillusionment with the ability of the United Nations to 'fix' world problems. This small act of embodied kindness and solidarity between two representatives of 'developing' Global South nations, Nigeria and Brazil, contains the seeds of hope for more genuinely selfless global interactions. It is a moment of South-South solidarity and affiliation in the Global North that also re/members the forced historical dispersal of African people. Idriss and Pedro had initially bonded over their shared enthusiasm for Nollywood movies; and Pedro had remarked on the fact that there are 'lots of Nigerians in Brazil' (59), the two of them recalling the African roots of Brazil's Candomblé religion (59). This South-South solidarity is in stark contrast to the story's sceptical representation of the UN's potentially well-meaning but ultimately ineffective and ill-conceived efforts at providing Global North aid to 'developing' countries of the Global South. While there is minimal physical violence depicted in this story, unlike in the others, the violence

here is shown to be systemic and discursive, based on unequal power relations and the lure of neo-liberal values. Idriss's 'failure to thrive' in the 'centre' is, the story suggests, the result of these attitudes. Living in a society that is unable to comprehend his needs or responses, or to give up any of its power and privilege, like the 'developing countries' in his continent of Africa he 'fails' to 'develop' the kind of material advantage that he craves and that would make him more equal in the Global North. By representing the interactions between Global North and Global South in the story in terms of food, Winch underlines the limitations of the neo-liberal 'food aid' mentality of the Global North.

The story, 'Longitude', deals, too, with attitudes towards Global South countries in the Global North, set as it is among a group of 'trendy' people living in Brooklyn, New York and narrated in the third person by an unnamed character, 'the woman'. Winch juxtaposes the vapid private lives and half-hearted relationships of the privileged protagonists, he ('the man') an American singer in a band, she ('the woman') a British French horn player, and their friends (the men, 'careless, feigned as carefree' (146)), with violent images of war and suffering in the media. By contrasting their comfortable lifestyle in New York with the depredation caused by their nation's involvement in 'distant' places in the 'war on terror', Winch shows the hypocrisy of first-world attitudes. She writes with irony about the rich set pretending to be 'struggling' and 'shoe-stringing it' (153), wearing 'thrift' clothes bought at high prices from vintage boutiques, thereby both exploiting and commodifying poverty at the same time. And, as in 'Failure to Thrive', she draws attention to the double standards in 'first world' responses to world suffering, where the trope of distance is used as self-justification for their apathy. Thus, a man at the party in a newly-fashionable suburb of Brooklyn, attended by the woman and the man, watches images on a muted television of houses being blown up, in an unnamed war zone, and declares: 'From this distance nothing looks especially violent' (147). The woman eavesdrops on a central discussion of violence concerning the efficacy of war photography, with various party guests sharing opinions about how western media either provide an 'overload of [war] imagery' (149) or not enough of it. One person contrasts the current 'controlled' (148) coverage of war to earlier ground-breaking reporting by international media of 'the unfolding of millions and millions of people's deaths' (149) in the Sudanese civil war. One guest refers to a particular Pulitzer-prize winning photograph (entitled 'Struggling Girl') of a young Sudanese girl dying of hunger while a vulture sits nearby, mentioning in passing that the photographer later committed suicide.⁴ The guest suggests that this type of extreme reaction of

⁴ The photographer was the South African Kevin Carter who later committed suicide in 1994, not by shooting himself but by gassing himself in his car. His suicide note included the words that he was 'haunted by vivid memories of killings & corpses & anger & pain', suggesting a sensitivity towards his subject-matter that was the opposite of 'distance'. Winch uses the photograph's title

empathy (the photographer's despair) would not happen nowadays as people are no longer 'really shell-shocked [by such images] anymore' (150), immune as they are to what they conceive of as distant suffering. While shocking images—often, like this one, from the Global South—now have global reach, being televised into the very heart of first-world society (as at this party), the sheer volume of such images, it is suggested, has enabled the privileged middle class and 'the developed world' (148) of the Global North to distance themselves from the insistent proximity of such suffering, enabling them to mute its effects, despite their nation's complicity in the conflict.

Winch further problematises the notion of 'distant' violence by bringing it much closer to home in the final image of the story. The woman protagonist is witness to an image of gendered 'domestic' violence in the window opposite. The narrative describes a man grabbing a woman's neck and shaking her from 'side to side' (154) before turning to look out the window at the watching woman. Meeting her gaze, he keeps his hand 'tight on the neck' of the woman he is assaulting, 'as if from the distance the act was not so violent at all' (155). This image of careless complacency about close-to-home interpersonal violence links it to the way the friends at the party had observed global violence from a safe distance, able to mute the sound. But Winch's portrayal of this privileged group of people underlines that they are not immune from violence themselves, even while they wilfully distance themselves from it, both domestically within their own city and globally. At the same time, the story's title, 'Longitude', underlines the north-south axis by which map positions are measured, perhaps suggesting *both* the connectedness and distance of personal and global interactions. Unlike the other stories discussed here, this story does not end with an explicit image of hope but rather with the potential for an understanding that violence is not so easily avoided. While not suggesting an equivalence between global and domestic violence, both may be seen to be on an axis of vulnerability. This story's geographical metaphor can also be read as linking northern and southern spaces by means of 'maps of affinities', just as this collection of stories encompasses a transnational range of issues, characters and settings.

By setting this story (and two others in the collection) in the United States, and three others in Paris, Winch contrasts these Global North spaces with Global South perspectives, sometimes, as seen above in 'The Last Class' and 'Failure to Thrive', by having a character/characters from the Global South encountering barriers to belonging that they encounter in the Global North. Other stories are set in spaces outside Global North privilege such as Lahore, Guangzhou and Istanbul, the latter two ('Baby Island' and 'Meat House') narrativising young Australian women

('Struggling Girl') in her ironic portrayal of the privileged people in her story who imagine themselves to be 'struggling'.

whose travel to these 'distant' places brings about sudden and unexpected change in their lives. In 'Baby Island', Ming, the Chinese-Australian protagonist, is both transfixed and horrified by a particular district of the city where white first-world parents are playing with the Chinese babies they are adopting. Her unexpected action at the end of the story in 'rescuing' one of these babies registers her epiphanic moment of activism. In 'Meat House', Lane is on honeymoon with her husband, Luke, in Istanbul, questioning their relationship which is characterised by their 'fictional life' and 'fake adventures' posted on Instagram (109). Her decision to leave him is figured by her rubbing her finger in olive oil to remove her wedding ring, an image that is specifically linked to her understanding the negative impacts of her marriage, an awareness that has become clearer in this distant space outside Australia. Winch herself has identified how being away from Australia has been 'helpful' for her writing, so that she sees 'everything fresh again' ('After the Carnage' n.p.), as do these characters. The transnational reach of the stories in this collection positions Australian writing, and Indigenous writing in particular, in a global context.

This short story collection, of which the five stories discussed here form part, provides readers with snapshots of characters in various states of precarity and exposed to levels of violence and trauma, whether as a result of their diasporic, colonial or minoritised identity, Indigeneity, poverty, disadvantage and/or class, gender and race. The short story form lends itself to epiphanic revelatory moments as well as to seemingly slight glimpses into other people's lives. This collection enables both. The carnage of the title links each of the characters in some way: whether through what Winch has termed 'the carnage of everyday life' ('After the Carnage' n.p.)—as represented in the stories in this collection that deal with fraught interpersonal or familial relationships like 'Meat House', 'Easter' and 'It's Too Difficult to Explain'—or more extreme pain, grief and suffering as in 'After the Carnage, More' where the narrator has been injured in a bomb blast in Lahore and is desperate for news of his possibly fatally injured wife. The 'more' of the story's title implies the ongoing nature of his suffering and, indeed, in many of the stories, it is the violent inheritance of colonialism and global exploitation that, as in the story set in Lahore, causes both physical and psychic injury to the characters. Yet, without oversimplifying or underplaying their suffering, in many of the stories, the characters are able to, or attempt to, form alliances across cultures (Menon's 'maps of affinities') or to reconnect with friends or family, and to choose hope over despair. Maxine Beneba Clarke has suggested that 'Australian readers are hungry for new voices, and they realise that the "new Australian" has local grounding and a global perspective' (Shaw n.p.). This description chimes with Menon's definition of the Global South as 'a conception of territory as generated by the movement of people and ideas ... a supplement [to the concept of the nation] that acknowledges history and the persistent record of migrations and connections' (41). Winch's short story collection draws attention not just to this

outward-looking global perspective and to the 'asymmetrical planes' of privilege and disadvantage, in Elora Chowdury's phrase, but also to the 'cross-cultural alliances and solidarity practices' (Chowdury 9) that connect as well as separate those who are minoritised with those in the mainstream. That this connection may happen in the process of reading these stories is not beyond the realms of possibility.

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