

# The Lawyer's Scarf, the Banker's Waning Testosterone:

*A Most Wanted Man* and the Post-9/11 Politics of Emotion

ITAKURA Gen'ichiro

Though often pigeonholed as a spy novel, John le Carré's *A Most Wanted Man* (2008) provides an insight into the post-9/11 intellectual climate. As if to confirm the author's place on the political spectrum, the novel unequivocally condemns 'American justice' that condones the indefinite detention of Muslims of the 'suspect' categories and Britain's role in creating the political chaos in Chechnya. While reviewers praise it as 'one of the most sophisticated fictional responses to the war on terror', critics detect le Carré's inability to imagine Islam beyond the Western conceptions—Muslims as meek victims, yet staunch misogynists. The absence of a Muslim perspective, however, does not really discredit this novel as an important post-9/11 text. With le Carré's almost exclusive focus on Western characters, *A Most Wanted Man* manages to hold up the mirror, cracked as it may be, to the emotional life of the guilt-ridden, educated Western middle class during this time of disruption.

Interestingly, the novel ends with Tommy Brue, a middle-aged Scottish banker, putting his arm round the shoulders of a young German lawyer named Annabel Richter. At one level, it signals the defeat of their brands of liberal humanism and left-liberalism as the by-products of guilt, shame and love. Annabel's idealism does not really save Issa Karpov, the eponymous Chechen refugee, any more than her headscarf, an ostensible sign of her respect for his culture. The story of Brue's emotional attachment to this young woman comes close to a sentimental scenario of a father's reconciliation with his daughter. At another level, however, the novel underlines the significance of such personal feelings that at once bind us to moral imperatives and create meaningful connectedness during divisive times.

キーワード : *A Most Wanted Man*, Muslim diaspora in the West, war on terror, Chechnya, affect/emotion

## 1 Introduction

On 13 April 2022, a few weeks after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Lana Estemirova, a journalist and political activist of partly Chechen origin, contributed to the *Guardian* an article reminding us of the atrocities perpetrated in Chechnya. While violence, ranging from looting, rape and torture, was normalised in the guise of counter-terrorism, the journalist's mother, a human rights activist herself, was kidnapped and shot dead in 2009, years after the official end of the second Chechen war. The perpetrators went scot-free (Estemirova 2022). Through the current military adventures in Ukraine, Estemirova went on, Vladimir Putin is trying to create a gigantic copy of Chechnya, or 'a declawed, subdued place with its population broken and terrorised into submission by the brutality of its regime-friendly leadership' (Estemirova 2022).<sup>1</sup> While her article called for solidarity with the Ukrainians and Chechens as victims of Russian aggression and alerted us to possible dire consequences of Russia's military operation, it unwittingly reawakened an unwelcome memory—the West has not kept a constant vigilance over human rights violations in Chechnya, as it initially promised (Evangelista 179; cf. Pelton 1999). Rather, most nations supported Moscow's view of the Chechens as 'terrorists' in the wake of the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001. 15 days after the attacks, German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder publicly conceded the need for 'a more differentiated evaluation' of Russia's wars in and rule of Chechnya, allegedly in deference to the US government (Evangelista 180). The following year, both the European Parliament and the United Nations Commission on Human Rights failed to pass a substantial resolution regarding human rights breaches in Chechnya (Evangelista 187). For the Americans, the Boston Marathon bombing of 2013 further consolidated the image of the Chechens as extreme Islamists, possibly affiliated with al-Qaeda (Cooper, Schmidt and Schmidt 2013) and equipped with 'weapons of mass destruction' (Markson, Horwitz and Johnson 2013).

This bizarre combination of sympathy and hate dominates the post-9/11 cultural landscape explored in John le Carré's 2008 novel *A Most Wanted Man*. His post-Cold War

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1) Estemirova made this remark apparently in response to the Moscow-backed Chechen military leader Ramzan Kadyrov's social media posts in March 2022, widely covered in the Western press (e.g. Barnes 2022).

novels, such as *The Constant Gardener* (2001), address our anxiety over ascendant global capitalism. Similarly, *A Most Wanted Man* encapsulates our complex—mostly negative—feelings about social security and human rights since 9/11. As novelist Hari Kunzru puts it, the novel can be read as ‘one of the most sophisticated fictional responses to the war on terror’ (Kunzru 2008). This is certainly not simply because of the key issues explored. Le Carré’s scathing critique of ‘American justice’, or the extraordinary rendition of Muslims of the ‘suspect’ categories (le Carré, *A Most Wanted Man* 415), engages with ‘the most pressing moral and political concerns’ (Cumming 2008) from an ‘impeccably European and left-liberal’ perspective (Abbas 51). Beneath his account of a deceased banker lies his indictment of Britain’s complicity with war crimes and the rise of warlords in Chechnya, a variation of his recurrent theme of the moral bankruptcy of the ruling classes.<sup>2</sup> Set in Hamburg, ‘[t]he other ground zero’ created by 9/11 (le Carré, *A Most Wanted Man* 68),<sup>3</sup> *A Most Wanted Man* also grapples with the Westerners’—or the educated Western middle class’—frustration with the post-9/11 condition of Europe. Critics like Sadia Abbas—and Peter Morey, to a lesser extent—criticise the book’s lack of Muslim perspective, particularly of Muslim women’s (Abbas 52-53), and the stereotypical representation of Muslims, including Issa Karpov, the novel’s ‘most wanted man’ (Abbas 53; Morey 162), dismissing it as nothing but an expression of the European ‘left-liberalism’s intense anxiety about doing right by Muslims’ (Abbas 53). That is exactly the focus of the novel. It is an analysis of middle-class guilt, anxiety and love, in post-9/11 Europe—and the finest of its kind. As part of his research for *The Little Drummer Girl* (1983), le Carré met with Yasser Arafat (Sisman 428-30; le Carré, *The Pigeon Tunnel* 94-106) and perfectly understood that not all Muslims were passive victims and slaves to fate, even though Issa may look like one. During his visit to Russia in 1993, he interviewed Muslim minorities, including a high-profile Ingush politician to learn about their predicament at first hand (Sisman 501-2). After he met Murat Kurnaz in 2006, he passionately supported the cause of this German-bred Turkish—like Melik of *A Most Wanted Man*—who was arrested

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2) This can be traced back to le Carré’s shock at the news of Kim Philby’s treason that led to the creation of Bill Haydon of *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* (1974) (Cobbs 106). For a more nuanced discussion of the theme of decay, see Monaghan 47, 48, 85, Lassner 191 and McCarthy 123-24.

3) Needless to say, this refers to the fact that Mohamed Atta formed what came to be known as the ‘Hamburg cell’ and led four other members to hijack an aircraft.

and detained in Guantánamo on account of being a Muslim and looking suspicious (Sisman 573). His account of these encounters in his autobiography *The Pigeon Tunnel* (2016) testifies to his knowledge of diversity within Islam (71-76). This suggests that his lopsided focus in this novel is a deliberate choice. Instead of presenting the entire panorama of multi-ethnic Hamburg, *A Most Wanted Man* maps out the ways middle-class white Europeans, across nationalities, professions and generations, feel and act in response to affectively charged events against the backdrop of post-9/11 securitisation and Islamophobia.

This essay, then, seeks to comprehend le Carré's engagement with emotional responses among such ordinary, university-educated, middle-class Europeans, or more precisely, a young female lawyer and a middle-aged male banker. Unlike Anton Corbijn's 2014 film adaptation, le Carré's *A Most Wanted Man* does not even centre on Günther Bachmann of the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV). Moving freely through various characters' points of view, the novel closes with an odd snapshot of Annabel Richter, the lawyer, and Tommy Brue, the banker, standing before the forecourt of his bank. Although all three agreed to give Issa a new identity to live safely, Bachmann's plan turns into a fiasco. Ambushed CIA agents intercept the Chechen boy and Faisal Abdullah, an Islamic scholar to whom he consigns his inherited fortune. Left in the forecourt, Annabel reties her headscarf, which she wears as a mark of respect for her client's culture, and turns an indignant gaze upon Bachmann, visibly trembling (le Carré, *A Most Wanted Man* 416). The narrator suddenly shifts the focus to Brue's hand, with which he is holding her gently, and which he knows she does not even notice (416). Certainly, this finale marks not only the failure of Bachmann's European counter-terror strategy, which the CIA agent Newton dismisses as 'softball spy games' (415), but also that of Annabel's left-liberalism and Brue's more old-fashioned liberal humanism. Their choices are, as gradually revealed in the late le Carré's circuitous style, not as much predicated on rational thinking as on feelings of guilt, shame and love, arising from their 'scabs of class and status' and the 'wounds beneath' (Kunzru 2008). This makes them look more humane and even nobler than the shady victors. Moving away from the generic conventions of espionage fiction, le Carré's text reminds us that, not *Realpolitik*, but affective and emotional responses to pain and nobleness in others can guide us in the right direction, facilitate moral action and liberate us from the narrow confines of national interests and/or identity politics.

## 2 Annabel Richter's Affective Politics

In *A Most Wanted Man*, Annabel's headscarf, which she wears 'wound round her head and neck' in her first appearance (39) and lifts up and reties round her neck towards the end (416), serves as a more complex signifier than it may look. At first glance, it is a mere sign of her respect for her client's culture or more simply, compliance with his request that she should 'wear a headscarf' and 'respect his traditions' (86). However, it has attracted criticism. In *At Freedom's Limit: Islam and the Postcolonial Predicament* (2014), Sadia Abbas condemns le Carré's emphasis on the young female lawyer's headscarf as 'an extension of an implicit distaste for Western norms of sexual objectification' (51)—the veil is the ultimate symbol of female subjugation in the Western imagination (Scott 4)—and 'an erasure of struggles over patriarchy and misogyny in Muslim contexts' (Abbas 53). This 'erasure' is, she contends, complete with the novel's stereotypical representation of Muslims, such as Leyla, the headscarf-wearing devout mother of Melik, and the oddly ascetic Issa (Abbas 52; cf. Morey 162). Annabel's choice may look atypical in the German context, too, as in the 2000s, the defenders of the headscarf in the cause of cultural diversity were often accused of endorsing the patriarchal oppression perpetrated in the name of Islam (Korteweg and Yurdakul 159-60). Respect for cultural diversity had not gained general currency in the German media until 2009—one year after the publication of *A Most Wanted Man*—when a white German named Alex Wiens murdered the three-month-pregnant Marwa el-Sherbini in the courtroom because of her headscarf (Korteweg and Yurdakul 164-68).<sup>4</sup> However, such criticisms misrepresent le Carré's text. Instead of propagating a particular stance on Islam by using Annabel as the author's mouthpiece, the novel provides a story of her emotional life that begins with her sense of shame and eventually leads to her compassionate involvement with Issa. In this regard, her headscarf is not so much an emblem of her multiculturalist politics as an object that encapsulates previous episodes of her emotional life.

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4) Even after el-Sherbini's tragic death, however, many politicians and commentators expressed their desire for *Leitkultur*, the dominant culture, and a homogeneous Germany (Korteweg and Yurdakul 166-68). Annabel's headscarf is more understandable in the British context in which the headscarf debate has always concerned multiculturalism and the integration of its Muslim population since its first incidence in 1989 (Joppke 81-94).

Annabel's political activism is rooted in her feelings of shame. At first look, she seems like a quintessentially good female character in the mould of Tessa Quayle of *The Constant Gardener* (Cumming 2008), who is partly modelled on Yvette Pierpaoli, the French philanthropist to whom le Carré originally wanted to dedicate that novel (Sisman 534). Both Tessa and Annabel are willing to bear every risk to save people in precarious conditions and indict social injustices perpetrated in the guise of pharmaceutical advancements and national security respectively. Although born into a wealthy, and possibly charitably-minded, family, Tessa tries to combat 'the irresponsible quest for corporate profit' and exploitation under the pretence of humanitarian aid (le Carré, *The Constant Gardener* 173), partly because of her dissatisfaction with what her husband Justin stands for—the diplomatic elite who 'are paid to see what's going on, and prefer not to', and 'walk past life with our eyes down' (153). Annabel is also from a privileged family. More rebellious than the diplomat's wife, she pursues her career in law, following her parents' path, yet in order to 'demonstrate her difference' and 'wrench the law out of the grasp of the rich and easy', or the likes of her parents (le Carré, *A Most Wanted Man* 154-55).<sup>5</sup> While Tessa's rebellion is 'a mission' (le Carré, *The Constant Gardener* 156), Annabel's work as Issa's counsel is more emotionally motivated. Asked if she should appeal to emotion, she tells Brue that the 'compassion card' would not work—or did not work one year earlier (le Carré, *A Most Wanted Man* 113). While she speaks of the case of Magomed, a young Chechen asylum seeker whom she failed to protect, her body reacts in a way not yet comprehensible to Brue:

She *blushed*, unaccountably, and took a breath:

'In my law school we talked a great deal about law over life,' she said. 'It's a verity of our German history: law not to protect life, but to abuse it. We did it to the Jews. In its current American form it licenses torture and state kidnapping. And it's infectious. Your own country is not immune, neither is mine. I am not the servant of that kind of law. I'm the servant of Issa Karpov. He's my client. If that embarrasses you, I'm sorry.'

But it seemed to embarrass her, for she *was by now scarlet in the face*. (113-14; emphases added)

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5) Annabel's conflicted relationship with her conservative parents echoes Charlie's in *The Little Drummer Girl* (1983).

Significantly, shame slides between the private and the collective here. At first, shame resides in her own 'failure to live up to a social ideal', to borrow Sara Ahmed's phrase (106), because as an affect intertwined with guilt (Tomkins 118; Sedgwick 62), shame presupposes the self that judges the self (Tomkins 135) or 'the Other' within that disciplines the free self (Levinas 86). Even though *personally* motivated to 'demonstrate her difference', she pursues a *social* ideal, or the interest of the unfairly deprived, marginalised people. Earlier in the novel, she compares Issa to 'the Wretched of the Earth' (le Carré, *A Most Wanted Man* 44), the traumatised victims of colonialism that impedes a 'true liberation of mankind' (Fanon 200). As implied in her reference to Frantz Fanon, resentment is salient because she feels that her ideal is imperilled by the German authorities.<sup>6</sup> Although incomprehensible to Brue, she strives to defend the ideal by deliberately digressing into the Holocaust and then into post-9/11 torture and kidnapping, the sources of shame for the Germans in the postwar era and the Americans and their allies after 9/11, respectively. Hence, she conjoins her personal shame and anger at once with the German national shame and a widely shared sense of shame—and resentment—about post-9/11 torture and indefinite detention. As the young lawyer's personal feelings now slide into a collective sense of failure to live up to the social ideals, the novel mobilises a positive script of shame—or its cousin, 'guilt'—if not yet on the part of the Scottish banker, definitely on the part of its target readers. To restore self-esteem, both at the individual and the collective level, one has to fashion themselves a visibly and tangibly different 'new self' who can renounce and redress the wrongs perpetrated by 'yesterday's self' (Tomkins 139), or the country or community to which they belong.

The dialogue cited on the previous page ends with Annabel's second blushing, which divulges her clandestine, repressed love for her client, Issa—another basis for her moral action. Later in the novel, she remembers Issa's testimony of his torture and the peculiar sensations it brings to her:

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6) This is deliberate, as she could cite—and le Carré could have cited—Giorgio Agamben's more relevant discussion of *homo sacer*, a person legally barred from any form of cultural, political life, in relation to the condition of asylum seekers like Issa (131-35) or Judith Butler's observation of post-9/11 indefinite detention as the creation of such 'bare life' (67-68). Both *Homo Sacer* (1998) and *Precarious Life* (2004) came out several years before the publication of this novel.

Whenever it was, it was the moment when she felt most inclined to fall in love with him, when intimacy on such a scale became an act of stupendous generosity, and her whole being was responding to him: he is owed everything, he is humiliating himself so that I can know and heal him: what have I to give him in return? But no sooner had the answer threatened to present itself than she felt herself recoil absolutely, because that way lay the negation of the promise she had made to herself: to put his life—and not his love—before law. (Le Carré, *A Most Wanted Man* 213-14)

As the novel slips in and out of free direct speech, she is torn between love and political commitment. Believing that this ‘intimacy’ exacts a great level of commitment, she feels tempted to reciprocate his affection as it is easier. When she thinks of this possibility, the novel returns to an omniscient narration to show her conscious effort to contain her love. Interestingly, his candid account of his own pain appears indicative of his ‘stupendous generosity’ towards her. The story of his pain slides into that of a gift that enables her to ‘know and heal him’ and thereby to live up to the social ideal, or ‘the promise she had made to herself. By rejecting this temptation to read his story of pain as an emotional appeal and abandoning what Snyder calls an ‘ethic of empathy’ (103), she wilfully misinterprets it as a call for—and channels her emotional intensity towards—political action because the most ethical response to pain in others is a demand for politics that makes it possible for us—every individual—to live with others while opening ourselves to be affected by their pain, which we cannot understand or share ‘through empathy’ (Ahmed 39).

The failure of Annabel’s affectively charged political activism, then, illuminates the current political climate we live in. While we can easily detect her—as well as le Carré’s—limitations as critics have done, we do not yet know how to turn our shame, guilt and love into politics of collective resistance in an effective and meaningful way. Halfway through the novel, she is abducted by two women from the BfV and incarcerated in the harness room of a riding stable (le Carré, *A Most Wanted Man* 238-39). As if to forcibly harness an intractable horse to a carriage, Günther Bachmann, aided by another BfV agent Erna Frey, emotionally blackmails her and tries to tame her into a docile collaborator in their plot that would, according to Bachmann, ‘sav[e] a whole heap more innocent lives than ever [she] would feeding the fucking rabbits at Sanctuary North’ (243). They serve as stand-ins for Annabel’s



parents, who have been her 'handlers' (245); Bachmann turns up with 'the same cigarette her father had smoked' and Frey has eyes in which Annabel detects 'the same sagacity' as her mother (240). Reminiscing about her confrontation with her parents, she realises a need for 'friends not enemies' to achieve her own end (246). She chooses to overcome her shame and appropriate the power of her *handlers* in her favour instead of playing the role of a melodramatic, solitary rebel. Thwarted by the CIA, their plan turns into a fiasco, crushing whatever is left of Annabel's pride. Retying her scarf absent-mindedly, she turns to the taxi and stares at its driver Bachmann (416). The fallen scarf—which she wears round her neck (369) but rearranges round her head just for Issa (372)—underscores his absence and refers us back to the promise she has tried to keep at the cost of her own feelings of love. In this regard, her repeated failure points to the fact that we are still unable to mobilise such feelings as guilt and love to redress injustices normalised under the pretext of national interests.

### 3 Tommy Brue's Family Romance

Tommy Brue's story also revolves around feelings of guilt and love concerning family, though in a different trajectory. At first glance, he is everything that Annabel Richter is not. A middle-aged owner of a four-generation-old Austrian private bank, he works for wealthy clients in an office with an antique bookcase filled with masterpieces of world literature he has never read. He considers himself—or rather, he convinces himself into believing that he is—a 'worthy descendant of this noble lineage' and 'dying species': a courteous, sociable gentleman with good manners and a wholesome aversion to pretentiousness (le Carré, *A Most Wanted Man* 24, 25). However, his life of comfort is violently disrupted when Annabel mentions Lipizzaner over the phone. Lipizzaner horses are 'born jet black and only [turn] white with age' (33); it is thus an apt name for a bank account that his father Edward Amadeus Brue created to launder unscrupulous clients' dirty money. Despite Annabel's intention, the word does not open 'all doors' to Issa (45). Rather, it turns Brue adrift to confront the shameful activities of his late father, for whom he has contradictory feelings. As a conflicted elite comparable to George Smiley and Jerry Westerby (Cumming 2008), this Scottish banker occupies the novel's moral centre (Kunzru 2008). This quasi-Oedipal drama is complicated by the presence of Annabel, both due to her physically attractive and her

similarities with Georgie, a daughter from his previous marriage, who is now pregnant and diagnosed with depression (Le Carré, *A Most Wanted Man* 366). As if to appease his guilt for not giving Georgie enough affection, he asexually falls for Annabel and commits himself to helping her, fully aware that the young lawyer will never return his love or even notice it.

Brue's initial reaction of fear of exposure to Annabel's voice messages recorded on the phone soon subsides into a sense of shame and guilt for his father's and his own wrong choices. Hearing the messages, he subconsciously searches for an 'escape' (32) and finds himself overwhelmed by the thought that she may be divulging, with her 'choirboy purity', his late father's involvement with Russian mafia leaders (33). Instead of turning her away, he confronts his father in his imagination. He virtually accuses him of opening bank accounts for Russian criminals at the risk of his and the bank's reputation, offering 'safe haven to their ill-gained loot' (33) and boasting of his confidence in laundering money better than the Swiss (34). At this point, his dilemma is similar to George Smiley's towards the end of *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* (1974) (374). Intellectual men of the old school as they are, they feel a sentimental attachment to and disgust at what they are supposed to protect, or what is left of British imperialism (Smiley) and gentlemanly capitalism (Brue). Interestingly, before he even meets Annabel in person, Brue suddenly—'out of nowhere'—remembers his conversation with Georgie just before the divorce:

'If you'd only got one Austrian *Schilling* left in the whole world, what would you do with it?' she demanded, thoughtfully scratching [her puppy's] tummy.

'Why invest it, of course, darling. What would *you* do?'

'Tip someone,' she replied.

Mystified more by himself than by Georgie, Brue tried to work out why he should be punishing himself with the story now. Must be the similarity of their voices, he decided, with an eye to the swing doors. (Le Carré, *A Most Wanted Man* 37)

Needless to say, this conversation is not as irrelevant as it seems at first. Brue is not only ashamed of his father's moral corruption and inability to be a role model for him. As he finds himself more perplexed by this sudden flashback, he is sure how he feels about nine-year-old Georgie's reply: he is now ashamed of his lack of moral fibre. As Annabel's voice, with its

rather childlike 'choirboy purity', resembles his daughter's, his accusation of his father bounces back to him. Crushed by shame and guilt, he feels as if a part of him—or what Levinas calls 'the Other' within—were 'punishing him'. Before he decides to comply with her request, he secretly hopes that she wins (53). Confounded by himself, he refuses to discover what has instilled him with such an idea, trying to convince himself that his father would have liked Annabel's persistence (54).

While Annabel situates her shame in a wider context herself, Brue's shame inevitably refers him back to the historical roots of the problem. As an MI6 agent Foreman calls him 'our shit' (193), Issa's father, Grigori Borisovich Karpov, is a monster that both the Soviet Union—and Russia—and the West have created in tandem on the Chechen soil. A leader of a Red Army mafia, he makes a fortune through all sorts of illegal businesses. Moscow assigns Karpov first to Afghanistan and then to Chechnya, which he plunders, '[b]ombing, boozing, raping and looting' and '[s]yphoning off the oil and selling it to the highest bidder' (196). By the time of the first Chechen war, as le Carré observes, organised crime and violence had spread into every corner of the country where it was no longer easy to find such 'morality, pride and humanity' as we find in Dostoevsky's oeuvre (le Carré, *The Pigeon Tunnel* 139, 148). The West turns a blind eye to Karpov's crimes because of the military secrets he sells to its secret services and the affluence he brings to its business elite; in short, because of *their* moral atrophy. Indeed, the US and its allies did not initially denounce the Samashki massacre, let alone lesser war crimes, during the first Chechen war, as if to say, 'You there, straighten things out quickly please, while we close our eyes a little' (Evangelista 148). Soon after, Karpov becomes besotted with a Chechen girl. Giving birth to Issa, she is killed by her brothers who want to preserve the family's honour (le Carré, *A Most Wanted Man* 197). This honour killing, too, is a part of the history of radicalisation in Chechnya. Radical Islam began to dominate the region when Moscow's pressure left the secular Chechen military and political leader Dzhokhar Dudayev no choice but to rely on Islamic forces for support (Evangelista 72) and accelerate the conflation of radical Islam and nationalism (Souleimanov 53). While Issa is neither a spy nor a 'could-be' Muslim terrorist, he is an heir to his own father's dirty money and thus implicated in this 'untidy history', a chain of disgraceful events that none of the parties involved wants to bring to the light of day (le Carré, *A Most Wanted Man* 206). Brue realises that like Issa, he is 'jointly culpable' for the crimes of his father and

what he stood for (206). Through this sense of joint culpability, he feels obliged at least to get the best out of his position and resources—or ‘tip someone’—so that he can somehow extricate himself from the pangs of conscience.

While attempting to alleviate his own shamefulness, Brue comes to terms with the burgeoning feeling that he has long avoided: love. After he wards off inquisitive British agents and defends Annabel, he visits the Ernst Barlach Haus, a museum in Hamburg dedicated to the sculptor’s work, which he first visits in search of ‘somewhere private’ after Georgie’s shocking revelation of the death of her six-day-old baby (205). He does not choose the place solely for privacy. This beautiful young lawyer with his daughter’s voice substitutes for and complements his absentee daughter in his imagination. He keeps asking himself if Annabel would approve of choices he makes (207). This reaction to her entry into his life strikes him first as a humiliating surrender; however, he soon reinterprets it as love:

At first he had seen himself as the put-down victim of a hostile take-over. Then he had sneered at himself: me, an adolescent of sixty, grappling with my waning testosterone. At no point had the dread word *love*, whatever that had meant to him, entered the dialogue he was having with himself. Love was Georgie. All the rest—the sticky hot-breath stuff, the eternal protestations—frankly that was for the other fellows. . . . when somebody half your age barges into your life and appoints herself your moral mentor, you sit up and listen, you have to. And if she happens to be the most attractive and interesting woman, and the most impossible love to have come your way *ever*, then all the more so. (207; ellipsis added)

As a worldly banker, Brue has consciously dismissed love as a delusive sentiment and thus automatically perceives anyone approaching him as hostile. As with any forms of hate, his reaction involves a ‘turning away from others’—*them*—and ‘turning towards the self’—*us*, a community, real or imaginary, that he recognises as his own (Ahmed 51). Georgie is the only person to find her place in this sanctuary. Brue subconsciously redraws the line so that Annabel is on this side of the border. Interestingly, she is not just a member of his community but his ‘moral mentor’. As with any idealised object of love onto whom the subject projects its ideal (Ahmed 128), she stands in for his ego ideal. As such, she may

punish him with 'the same harsh aggressiveness that the ego would have liked to satisfy upon other, extraneous individuals' (Freud 123). In reality, she demands that he should 'sit up and listen'—or submit to her. Consequently, his realisation of his love for Annabel leads to his liberatory self-knowledge:

Now at last he was able to understand himself. He had mistaken his need. He had invested himself in the wrong market. It wasn't copulation he had been looking for. It was *this*. And now he had found *this*, which was an important and rather astonishing clarification of his nature for him. Waning testosterone was not the issue. The issue was *this*, and *this* was Annabel. (Le Carré, *A Most Wanted Man* 208)

Here, certain displacements take place. The uncertainty of genital, sexual pleasure is replaced by the certainty of love. He is no longer troubled by his '[w]aning testosterone', but by the immediacy of love. This feeling of love slides from one lost object to another, from his daughter to a beautiful lawyer with her voice. Moreover, it claims compensation for the loss, regardless of the object's acquiescence. Through his encounter with Annabel, Brue understands the nature of love and thereby regains his self-esteem by recognising his ability to love, the very thing with which he could not previously repay his daughter's love. After preparing the documents for Annabel and Issa, he suddenly invites her to 'get to know Georgie a bit, and her baby' (le Carré, *A Most Wanted Man* 367). Despite its apparent irrelevance, this reunion is an ideal finale for the family romance he envisages.

Brue's involvement in Annabel's political activism follows the route of a family romance, which appears sentimental and yet humane. As in his case, hate can transform into love with a little negotiation of the boundaries between the self and the other. By letting Annabel in, he makes himself *open*, or remain able to affect her and be affected by what he recognises as her 'choirboy purity'—an openness that cannot be found in Newton, Foreman or Lantern: or not even in Bachmann. While these intelligence agents remain unable to think beyond their own protection from whoever they perceive as a threat, Brue breaks free from this post-9/11 myth of freedom under threat and his shamefulness by taking 'action' in a way reminiscent of Hannah Arendt's use of the word. With all their ostensibly political activities, the agents merely exert *prepolitical* force to arrest, detain and extradite to comply with the necessity of

their own protection.<sup>7</sup> They even create a useful scenario to contain intractable reality. In contrast, Brue does not take sides with Annabel because of necessity or utility. His actions even risk the survival of his family business. Solely 'stimulated by the presence of others whose company [he] may wish to join' (Arendt 177), he forges new interpersonal relationships and thus inserts himself into the world in a way that he has never imagined—almost a rebirth. Whereas even the arrest of two Muslims would not satisfy Newton the foul-mouthed victor, Brue seems comfortable with this new connectedness at the end of the novel.

#### 4 Conclusion

Annabel's frustration and Brue's caring attitude in the novel's finale suggest its two-fold structure and its focus. Through their engagement with Issa's liberation, the novel testifies to the significant role of shame and guilt in emancipatory politics or, more generally, the moral imperative to deflect the course of 'untidy history' albeit in a small way. Even though they react with different emotional valences, Annabel and Brue strive to redress the dire consequences of their parents' shameful (in)action in order to atone for their joint culpability. Annabel cannot save all refugees and marginalised, stateless people from a dire fate any more than she could prevent the Holocaust, nor can Brue undo his father's—and by extension, Britain's—complicity to organised crimes and exploitation in Chechnya. Owing to their limitations, their narratives of shame and guilt remind us, with the same emotional intensity that Annabel and Brue experience, that our scabs remain open. In the meantime, *A Most Wanted Man* posits two stories of unrequited love as an important subplot. Forgoing Issa's love, Annabel directs emotional immediacy and intensity towards her political activism. Her failure leaves her only with anger. In contrast, Brue submits himself to the kind of love that Annabel unwittingly evokes within him. In the end, he does not look as unhappy as the rest, as if to remind us of the uses of love as a 'positive fulfilment of happiness' and avoidance of unhappiness (Freud 82; cf. Ahmed 125). While Annabel's headscarf may fall, Brue's love does not fade away.

Sentimental and naïve as it may be, the novel implicitly calls for the need for love, or

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7) The CIA, in particular, relies on such prepolitical powers—'uncontested, despotic powers' to rule, originally used outside *polis* or, more generally, the public sphere (Arendt 27)—in that it forcibly subjugates all suspects without any respect for law or human rights (McCarthy 129).

such emotional attachment to others that we would usually call love, in this post-9/11 world filled with fear, hate and anger. Le Carré carefully begins this novel with an epigraph quoted from Friedrich von Hügel: 'The golden rule is, to help those we love to escape from us' (n. pag.; Hügel xxix). This German Catholic modernist insists that we try not to force someone else to open their mind to us, rather accept their alterity or the 'different stages' of their souls and pray for them—that may be the best we can do for them (Hügel xxix). Cut off from this historical context of Catholic modernisation and reproduced at the beginning of this post-9/11 novel, his words sound like an endorsement of Annabel's help for Issa and Brue's help for Annabel. While Annabel tries in vain to give this young Chechen boy a way out, Brue finally sees her mind leaving him, unaware of his kindness. He cannot understand her as much as she can understand Issa. Because of their limitations, they try to embrace their otherness. Even though Annabel finally recoils from Issa's otherness and her otherness eventually prevents her from relating to Brue, their emotional attachment to alterity embeds them anew into a web of connectedness, which helps us see the world differently and imagine a better one. If there is something that this text can offer (but neither post-9/11 political discourse nor identity politics can), it is *this*.

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