CHAPTER FIVE

‘I COULDN’T BELONG TO ANYTHING ANY MORE’: THE PRECARIAT IN-BETWEEN

I

In common parlance, the term ‘in-between’ connotes a state wherein an entity is stuck between two planes. This sense of not belonging to either side completely might be self-imposed, the result of disruptive external forces, or in certain situations, the latter feeding the former. In the context of 9/11, this predicament extends to bodies and subjectivities of those stuck in-between which leads to the pursuit of belonging (humanity, place, people, culture, etc.). This chapter aims to look at the link between precarity and in-betweenness in the fiction of the post-9/11 period.

The objectives of this chapter are

i) To explore the relation between precarity and in-betweenness;
ii) To examine the corporeal and psychological in-betweenness of individuals; and
iii) To enquire how an in-between position and consequently siding with either side brings results in different outcomes for different people.

The chapter adopts the following hypotheses

i) For an “outsider,” in-betweenness is a precarious domain; and
ii) The self-acceptance of one’s hybridity fulfills the gap perceived on society’s end.

The chapter will address the following research questions

i) Is precarity a pre-existing disposition contributing to in-betweenness, or does in-betweenness mutate into precarity?
ii) How does in-betweenness affect the personal and the political?

Literature Review

It is a human proclivity to place oneself within identifiable brackets. However, such constructed affiliations do not always lie in congruity between the intents of the imposer and the imposed of that in-betweenness, thereby creating a disjuncture. 9/11 regimented ‘us and them,’ we look at what happens to ‘them’ and argue that ‘they’ become exponentially otherized with every move either on the part of the host community or the otherized mass of precariat just like them.

In the global timeline, 9/11 is one of the junctures that can be viewed in terms of its before and after. It can be assumed that in-betweenness forms an essence of the consequences of 9/11. In this context, Richard Drew's photograph "The Falling Man" functions as a frame to understand the state of suspension. The falling body then evokes an in-between state of living and death, creating a specter of loss and spectacle of horror.

A glance at post-9/11 novels advances in-betweenness as a commonly explored motif. In Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005), this can be located in the nine-year old Oskar's sense of loss and the brutal reality shaping that loss. Porochista Khakpour's *Sons and Other Flammable Objects* (2007), depicts Xerxes' in-betweenness concerning his Iranian lineage and American culture. In O'Neill's *Netherland* (2008), the Dutch immigrant-protagonist struggles to make sense of his existence in the post-9/11 US. In Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* (2009), Raza's in-betweenness emerges from his mixed cultural and national lineage, including his detention that lands him in an extrajudicial status. In Anna Perera's *The Guantanamo Boy* (2009), the wrongful detention of a British-Pakistani teenager, Khalid, at the Guantanamo Bay detention camp puts him outside the legal framework, and consequently from the 'human' experience.

In Khan's *Thinner Than Skin* (2012), given Farhana's Pakistani ancestry and American upbringing and Nadir's time in the US, they are viewed as neither completely foreign nor native in Pakistan. In Ramiza Shamoun Koya's *The Royal Abduls* (2020), Omar, the eleven-year-old son of Indian and American parents in the US struggles to make sense of his identity especially after 9/11. In Arvin Ahmadi's *How It All Blew Up* (2020), the teenager Amir navigates his position in the post-9/11 securitized world as a Muslim and in the family or community as a queer.

The primary texts discussed here are: Inaam Kachachi's *The American Granddaughter* (2008), Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* (2017), and Rayyan Al-Shawaf's *When All Else Fails* (2019). The analysis engages with different kinds of in-betweenness that arise out of the corporeal, psychological, ideological, and affectual dimensions in the larger framework furnished by the political, social, and the personal. The transnational spaces traversed in the three narratives in a way show how they cater to the characters' in-between positions.

II

Inaam Kachachi's *The American Granddaughter* (2008)

In Inaam Kachachi's novel, the precarity is shaped by an in-betweenness sourced from conflicting national, cultural, and familial attachments. Centered on Zeina Behnam, the narrative follows her return to the birth-country as an Arabic-speaking translator for the US forces in the post-9/11 Iraq invasion. It foregrounds the complex dynamics with one's nation, family, and the self. Precarity can be understood in terms of conflicted national inclination, relational implications, and contentious avenue of employment.

Entangled Commitments

The novel illustrates how affiliations towards two different nations are incompatible. Zeina's divergent inclinations towards Iraq and America are shaped by her birth and upbringing respectively. Here, to serve one translates to betraying the other. Because Zeina works as an interpreter for the US army, she inhabits the position of the other for the Iraqis.

The narrative explores an individual's relationship with a place. For instance, the grief over losing one's home is palpable in her parents, particularly in her mother on the day of obtaining American citizenship. However, in case of Zeina, it is perceived only in the initial months of exit from Iraq due to parting from her grandparents. It is challenging for Zeina to fathom the profundity of her parents' sorrow and wistfulness for the homeland as paradoxically it contributed to their flight in the form of political threats against her father: "Why had they come to America then? Why had they come with Iraq smuggled in their pockets like a drug they couldn't quit" (120). The fact that Zeina has never been to Iraq after her departure indicates the prolonged physical and socio-cultural distance.

The novel locates her role in the Iraq war to be an output of an immigrant's frame of mind. Although financial gain operated as a major factor behind joining the US forces, her drive stems from a sense of obligation: "It was my chance to repay the country that had embraced me since my adolescence and given me and my family a home (81). Again, her enlisting in the army is driven by the cause of the "poor" Iraqis: "They won't believe their eyes when they finally open onto freedom" (10). This underscores Zeina's subscription to the indoctrination of America's self-proclaimed mission of delivering liberty and justice. For instance, she visualized "democracy" promoted by the US to "candy-floss, colourful sugar wrapped around thin sticks that we could go around

distributing to the kids" (167). However, the reaction of the Iraqis contradicts her expected scenario:

> These were people eager for regime change, dreaming of freedom and welcoming to the arrival of the US Army. Why, then, were the black eyes looking out from behind the abayas overflowing with all that rejection? There was no friendliness in those eyes, or joy. Their irises seemed to be made of the same substance of sadness. (*American Granddaughter* 40)

Thus, the in-betweenness in Zeina's stance corresponds to the dissonance between the narrative cemented by the US and the ground realities that she encounters. Therefore, her arrival after a prolonged period is not similar to other immigrants' return: "All homecomings are cherished except this one" (71).

The pledge made by Zeina to America's call of duty is juxtaposed with the emotional ties with her grandmother, Rahma, who stands for Iraq. This disrupts any possibility to commit to a singular side entirely. While Zeina defended the "idea of a second homeland" by stating how "the whole world can be your homeland..." (133), she now acknowledges how it can also evolve into a sense of placelessness with the potential to thrust oneself into anomie. For instance, she chooses a second contract in Iraq after a brief visit to the US. It is seen that she struggles with belonging in both the places and therefore is also unable to adapt fully to either: "I was a dog with two homes but unable to feel at home in either" (150). While she opines how settling in a birthplace does not necessarily evoke belonging, Zeina eventually observes how being a migrant makes it difficult to 'belong':

> I couldn't be anything but American. My Iraqiness had abandoned me long ago. It fell through a hole in my pocket and rolled away like an old coin. I tried to be both but failed. I took off the khaki and put on the abaya and went to the market in Karada. I bought a loofah and plastic slippers and those chewing gum pieces sold in little bags. I talked to the shopkeeper and teased him in his own accent. He looked at me and smiled encouragingly, like I was some foreign orientalist. (*American Granddaughter* 167)

Zeina's "malady of grief" (7), since the arrival in Iraq culminates in her grandmother's death. The troubled affective is reflected in what Zeina considers to be her life fragmented into two: "'before Baghdad' and 'after Baghdad'" (148). She now bears a "cemetery inside her chest" (1) and likens herself to a "floor mop" and a "disillusioned saint" (2). She is rendered anchorless as she is unable to carry on with the job or a 'normal' life: "I couldn't belong to anything any more, not even to my own name" (181). The novel meditates on how belonging assumes a difficult space to traverse by immigrants.

Destabilization of Relational Structures

The novel grounds in-betweenness to the reconfigurations in intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships. As a part of the army, Zeina represents the US and is complicit in the violation of Iraq, where her roots lie and her grandmother resides. Thus, Zeina inhabits an in-between space by straddling the roles of an interpreter and a granddaughter simultaneously. The affective ties with Rahma transform during her work period. For instance, instead of completely relying on the truth or lying outrightly to Rahma, Zeina resorts to an in-between version by distorting the truth behind her job capacity. She identifies as an interpreter for an electricity company and later as an UN representative to observe the US army's operations over the Iraqi civilians. It is seen that while these supposed work profiles of Zeina already disappoints Rahma, the revelation of her real job profile amplifies it. By projecting Zeina as the familiar-turned-other, it enkindles shame, grief, and "heartache" (67) to Rahma. In addition to Zeina, one witnesses the precarity in Rahma who is unable to confront the tidings of war, and more so because her granddaughter is a collaborator in it. Zeina observes that unlike the close bond shared by her grandmother with her acquaintances like Haydar, Muhaymen, and Tawoos, she is a "stranger" to her: "they'd remained pure Iraqis, like pure gold. Their patriotism wasn't tainted by a dual nationality, and the blood raced in their veins when they heard the name Iraq…" (119). The in-betweenness is also perceived in Rahma as she can neither denounce her granddaughter nor can she accept her for her role. Moreover, Rahma's death without an illness leaves us and the characters to wonder if it was caused by the shame and grief due to Zeina's actions.

The collapse of the affective network for Zeina also extends to others apart from Rahma. Due to her profession, she adopts "self-censorship" (135) that acts as a barrier in being herself fully while connecting with her "milk brother" (62) and interest, Muhaymen.

Given his connections with the Mahdi army, Zeina's increasing fondness towards him prompts her to share everything about her life except her job. In addition to the familial relationship, the reciprocity is amiss in Muhaymen due to their divergent political ties and his pejorative view of her immigrant status, that too in the US that has ravaged his country: "The war came and sat between us" (170).

Again, Zeina's role also problematises her relationship with the land, the culture, and its history:

> I wanted to jump off the truck, shout something like 'Allah yusa'edhum!' and make small talk with them. Maybe ask about the wheat season or about the nearest store to buy a loofah for the bath, or simply invite myself in for a glass of cold water in one of their houses. I wanted to flaunt my kinship in front of them, show them that I was a daughter of the same part of the country, that I spoke their language with the same accent, I wanted to tell them that Colonel Youssef Fatouhy, assistant to the chief of army recruitment in Mosul in the 1940s, was my grandfather. (*American Granddaughter* 7)

However, Zeina's participation in the raids of the Iraqi homes is a microcosm to view the occupation of her ancestral country. More prominently, her role is opposed to her late grandfather who served in the country's army, while Zeina now sides with the 'outsider': "Oh God, I intersect with that history so much, yet we diverge, too!" (28). She fails to meet Rahma's expectations in this regard.

The novel cites Zeina's recurrent tendency to view reality through alternate mediums—virtual write-ups, dreams, considering episodes to a movie scene or its title, and so on. Moreover, the dilemma in terms of her affective complexity sprouts in the intra-personal domain in the form of an alter ego. The novel navigates this experiential liminality through her writer alter ego. In the light of this, this alter ego embodies an in-between dimension of identity that serves as a conduit to communicate what the original persona fails to do on her own. In her apparent conundrum concerning her participation in the Iraq war and its repercussions, it is this writer's persona that critiques her role and causes her to introspect. While it fully develops in Zeina in Iraq, its inception may be traced back to her opinions about the war prior to her involvement. It is evident as part of her was

distressed by the ongoing war in Iraq, but "that other" (15) part of her was concerned about its consequences which drove her decision to serve as a translator in the occupiers' army.

The alter-ego functions as a defense mechanism with everything happening with and around her. This persona inspired by her grandmother sees what she does not want to see. In her act of disassociating and "let the author describe" (100) the lived realities, we see how Zeina takes the help of a different part of herself to voice out what she may be by being in the US army or as an immigrant cannot. It acts as a more potent figure, voicing out what Zeina realizes but is unable to accept her part: "Every time I tried to escape from her, I saw her shadow behind me, attached to my own. They merged until I couldn't tell them apart" (91). In the writings, this force "traps her twice – inside the Green Zone and inside a hateful character" (27). This persona even spills over to her real one, evident in questioning her colleagues for mimicking and mocking Iraq's religious rituals.

The writer alter ego operates like a foil to Zeina that often conveys the essence of Rahma: "The writer sees me as a step-daughter of the occupation and my grandmother as a jewel of the resistance" (27). While Zeina fails to be the granddaughter Rahma expected, the former however undergoes the transformation primarily for the latter's assistance to have "completed me as a woman, as a human being" (180). Zeina now grows to find a discrepancy in her own former belief: "Pain could lead only to pain, and destruction to equal destruction" (39). If she was moved by the visuals of the twin towers, she now experiences the war on ground zero—the brutality of deaths on both sides, the chaos and vulnerability enveloping Iraq—and is also aware of the extremities in prisons like Abu Ghraib. Zeina witnesses the lopsided power dynamics, how destruction or pain can never be equally delivered, and realizes how she too played a cog in the machinery.

Through the alter ego and finally by herself, Zeina learns beyond what is being shown and told. This connotes an in-between space for what she was fed and imagined and the realities. The experience is a transformative journey for Zeina as despite the occupying forces overthrowing Saddam's reign in Iraq, she returns "defeated" (2), now comprehending her mother's grief for obtaining American citizenship years ago. Zeina's killing off the alter ego and replacing her in writing her story occurs parallelly with her departure from Iraq. This is reflective of Zeina's indirect cognizance of her emotions and dilemmatic life: "lost my author and a part of myself" (181). Zeina's inclination towards Iraq slowly reflects on the alter-ego as towards the end she finds it to have assumed the

look and characteristics of Iraqi women, those embodied by the women in her life – her mother, grandmother, and Tawoos. This shows her slowly reestablishing with Iraq and its people for she now sees herself as "no longer an ordinary American woman but a woman from a faraway and ancient place" (3).

Interpreting the Interpreter

The function of an interpreter deems it an in-between position as it renders communication possible between two sides. Zeina embodies it by operating as an intermediary between the US army and the Iraqis. Her stay at the palace of the former dictator is symbolic as she represents the current occupiers. In the context of her assistance as a cultural adviser, she simultaneously operates both as an insider and outsider. The same is true on a metaphorical level as her allegiance lies in turmoil owing to the collision of her professional and personal.

Language here is crucial to Zeina's in-betweenness. Her relationship with the language as a mother tongue starts in her initial years in Iraq and later continues in the US at the aegis of her father in order to stay connected to her roots. It is observed that while the rift caused between her and Rahma originates from the former's use of language for the army, it is the very language that helps her connect with individuals. For instance, she takes the help of a lullaby in the native language that she had heard as a child to soothe her grandmother's fury. Again, it is language in the form of poetry that becomes a common space between Muhaymen and Zeina despite their differences in opinion. However, her Arabic skill that has facilitated her return to Iraq inadvertently becomes a tool against its speakers in Iraq. Hence, we find how language caters to the in-between position, catering to her professional capacity for the US and against the Iraqis in general and Rahma in particular.

It is seen that Zeina assumes a collective identity with the occupiers which overshadows her Iraqi identity. Her inclusivity is determined by her appearance. While a taxi driver strikes a conversation with her in her civilian outfit regarding the impact of American invasion, her army uniform in other occasions erects a barrier by "cutting me off from my people" (*American Granddaughter* 7). For instance, she slips into her civilian outfit to meet Rahma to conceal her professional details. Again, it is later seen how Zeina in the army uniform contributes to the latter's misery: "'God damn you, Zeina, daughter

of Batoul . . . I wish I had died before having to see you like this'" (102). Hence, the disillusionment that leads her to end her professional journey also makes her throw away the khaki uniform which is emblematic of the distance forged.

The narrative shows how Zeina's movements in the landscape are easy yet complicated. For instance, she barges into the Iraqi houses during raids but is not allowed to venture freely due to military protocol. Her army outfit erases the bond she has with the Iraqis: "I told myself it wasn't me they feared but my uniform… It added dimensions to my character that disappeared when I took it off" (146). If she is the other in the eye of the occupied, she is twice distant from them, first by being a part of the US army, and secondly for being a native who has betrayed her Iraqi roots for that job role:

> I convinced myself that I was exempt. I was born in Iraq, and I had the same skin colour, the same language and the same fiery temperament as these people. They couldn't hate me. 'Can't you see that they hate you even more than they hate us?' (*American Granddaughter* 147)

It is Zeina's role that translators and interpreters like her embody making them visible as traitors in the eye of the locals. Again, her behaviour among her peers is seen to be interfered by her roots. For instance, she counters her colleague for mocking an Iraqi religious element. She is met with question: "…Whose side are you on, anyway?'" (108). Zeina's double life is apparent in her resisting the urge to communicate with the native in army uniform and to communicate with the army convoys in her civilian outfit. Thus, the in-between position renders her incapable of belonging to either: "I tried to be both but failed" (166).

The question of safety concerning her job also makes it difficult to traverse even the familiar areas of Iraq. For instance, Zeina takes "extra precaution" (75) by choosing not to get off a taxi right at her grandmother's doorstep. The fact that she now represents the US army makes her vulnerable in a land occupied by them. The novel highlights the deaths of soldiers, interpreters, and translators being "hunted down and slaughtered like animals" (114). We find how her job does not only make it difficult to emotionally connect with her grandmother, the protocols too turn it difficult for her to physically connect with her. For instance, it is only on the pretext of a raid that Zeina and her team are able to visit Rahma without drawing any suspicion from the neighbours. Again, for security reasons

Zeina is unable to be present during the mourners' arrival for the grandmother and only somehow manages to be at the funeral mass.

The narrative displays how an individual exudes hospitality and hostility in the same space. Zeina's birth and ancestral roots create an inescapable tie with Iraq. Therefore, though she herself belongs to a group of translators from America, Zeina slips into the position of a self-assumed host for the rest. For instance, she reaches out to her colleague's unease with the sand: "I reached over and thumped her back to help her breathe, like I was somehow responsible for what happened to her. This was my country, Rula was my guest, and her wellbeing was my duty" (31). On the contrary, the natives perceive her as a representative of the occupiers' hostility they are being subjected to. Hence, though the place is familiar, the experience brought by the role is unfamiliar.

III

Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* (2017)

Precarity in Shamsie's *Home Fire* features as a perpetuation by the social, political, personal exigencies pushing the already precarious existences into an in-between position. The novel revolves around three Pakistani origin siblings in London – Isma and the twins Aneeka and Parvaiz who are children of a late jihadi, Adil Pasha. The lives of UK's Pakistani-origin Home Secretary Karamat Lone and his son and Aneeka's love-interest Eamonn are politically and personally entangled with them. Parvaiz is stripped of his British citizenship for joining ISIS. The narrative set in a post-9/11 securitized world is a retelling of Sophocles' *Antigone* in which akin to its titular character, Aneeka fights for the repatriation of Parvaiz's corpse from Pakistan to London. Precarity here can be analysed in terms of civic and corporeal liminality, family and nation, and public and private.

The novel illustrates the individual caught up in civic and corporeal liminality. Here, the existing other is levied upon an extreme form of othering due to their 'transgression.' Parvaiz as part of a family with a deceased jihadi patriarch is already under the state's radar. By joining ISIS, he vividly becomes the 'enemy' of the British state that leads to the revocation of his citizenship. Here, citizenship functions more as a performance-based recognition rather than an inherited entitlement. The UK Home Minister, Karamat Lone cancels the citizenship of British citizens who are dual nationals

with dual citizenship that indulge in activities which do not align with the interest of the country. For him, citizenship is something gained based on "actions, not accidents of births" (Shamsie, *Home Fire* 214), and it is "a privilege, not a right or birthright" (98). Hence, despite London being his birthplace, Parvaiz is rendered stateless by forfeiting his citizenship for his actions.

The disenfranchisement of Parvaiz's legal personhood transmutes him into an extraneous entity without any scope for redemption. The legal eviction leaves him without a trial: "I made a mistake. I'm prepared to face trial if I've broken laws. Just let me go to London" (171). While Parvaiz realizes his mistake, leaves the extremist organization, and wishes to reclaim his life in London, his reentry is dependent on a passport. While his passport rests with ISIS, the only way to obtain another is to appeal to the very state that has revoked his citizenship. It is seen that his statelessness corresponds to civic subjectivity as his being is reduced to documents like a passport. This refers to a form of in-betweenness as he lacks an identity and belonging to a nation.

The emotional precarity of Parvaiz due to the equations with family and nation renders him vulnerable to fall into trap. For instance, Farooq who was on his recruitment purpose for ISIS befriends Parvaiz who becomes "a guinea pig" (178). He picks on his weakness concerning the non-existent emotional and physical connection with his absentee father. He is psychologically manipulated by Farooq by adding 'heroism' to the deeds of his father, a "shameful secret" (126) so far, and filling him with distorted versions of Islamic way of life, thus inclining him to join the media unit of ISIS. From being "Aneeka's brother" (124), he is made to think of himself as the son of his father adopting a new name Mohammad bin Bagram. He is drawn towards the 'brotherhood' that Farooq embodies in his speech and acts, and therefore feels accepted in contrast to the fear of always being the other in British society: "But the man didn't seem to think any less of him for it. Instead, he drew Parvaiz close, in a cologne-scented embrace, and said, 'I'm glad I've found you, brother.'" (126).

It is seen that the institutionalized expulsion maneuvers through corporeality. Parvaiz is thrust into a station of literal and symbolic statelessness. In dealing with him as an extraneous entity in view of governmentality, his body serves as a site of ousting. In rendering him as an outlaw, his body remains adrift in Istanbul with no access to return home and therefore the unclaimed body reaches Pakistan. The severity is seen in terms of

how even in his posthumous state, Parvaiz's body is denied a repatriation to his home country. The in-betweenness then is implicated in the suspension of his body that remains unclaimed. Moreover, in restricting Aneeka from reaching her brother's corpse in Karachi, it is deprived of grief and visibility in the public. Hence, the withdrawal of dignity deems Parvaiz a castaway not just in the legal sense but also from humanity.

Though Parvaiz realizes his mistake and desperately wishes to return "home," the passage becomes inestimable. He is stuck in a position of in-betweenness as the UK is inaccessible as his passport lies with ISIS while an easy withdrawal from the latter is perilous. The precarity is manifested when Parvaiz is hesitant to visit the British Consulate in Istanbul to seek help despite his physical proximity to it owing to the probable consequences. On the other hand, despite the fact that he manages to escape from his station, precarity lurks for him in the form of being discovered by his teammates. The resultant action of his elopement surfaces in his murder by unidentified entities on his way to the Consulate, who can be inferred as the members of ISIS. In the case of Parvaiz, even after his death, his body continues to serve as an in-between figure leading to corporeal in-betweenness: "We will not let those who turn against the soil of Britain in their lifetime sully that very soil in death" (188). Here, the corporeality of an individual is challenged to an extent that their existential identity comes into question. This in-betweenness extends to the living as well as the dead. The challenge lies in the fact that this is externally imposed that accrues to the law. Here, the form of in-betweenness that can be located in the characters' physical, politicized, and psycho-social disposition is an imposed as well as an internalized category due to its imposition.

While 9/11 created an Islamophobic environment in America, the novel exhibits how it passed on to the other nations of the West, invoking the stereotype of the brutal other. In fact, Eamonn questions why the British public has been allowed to continue linking Parvaiz's murder to his presence at that place at that particular time with terrorist motives. The case of Parvaiz joining ISIS depicts the manifestations of a repressed and stigmatised issue. The conditional othering and living a life in the shadows impels Parvaiz's decision to leave home. In fact, he does not seem to be fully aware of the kind of involvement he would have once he left home.

The state's control that permeates subjectivities and bodies also manifests in Aneeka's statelessness. While her British passport is confiscated by security services to

restrict her from being with Parvaiz in Istanbul, she is able to fly to Pakistan later on its passport. Since Parvaiz is considered an 'enemy' of the state, hence by dint of it, Aneeka too is paralleled with him after she goes to Karachi. Her Pakistani passport would obstruct her return to the UK as she had no British passport to apply for its visa and no grounds to apply for a new one: "Let her continue to be British; but let her be British outside Britain" (230).

The novel also shows the misuse of power at the hands of authority of a first world country. Karamat denies dual nationals with interests that do not align with that of the country an entry back to it. It echoes the general message of cleanliness to encompass individuals: "Take out the trash. Keep Britain clean" (171). His stern decision evokes the dichotomy of justice and law as prevails in the original source of the novel. Karamat's arrogance is revealed in his offensive statement: "If it turns out you're right, and I'm wrong. If there is an Almighty and He sends His angel Jibreel to lift up your brother – and your sister – in his arms and fly them back to London on his wings of fire, I will not let him enter… Not Jibreel himself" (238).

This arrogance is also reflected in the commanding tone employed by Karamat to intervene in the internal matters of Pakistan regarding Parvaiz's corpse. He not only revokes the citizenship of the British nationals as discussed above, but also exercises his power to manipulate or punish others. For instance, he instructs his assistant to cancel the UK visa (if he had any) of a Pakistani urbane host for his thoughts shared on television. He also tries to intimidate the Pakistani High Commissioner against the media show of Parvaiz's corpse in Karachi as it enables a spectacle of martyrdom and raises questions against his policies. In the process he also enquires about the visa application of the latter's son. His query about Oxford implies that he is in a position to stop with it. It is also highlighted in the views shared by Aneeka's cousin in Pakistan who relays their inferior position in the global front: "those of us with passports that look like toilet paper to the rest of the world who spend our lives being so careful we don't give anyone a reason to reject our visa applications?" Don't stand next to this guy, don't follow that gut on Twitter, don't download the Noam Chomsky book" (209). Despite Parvaiz's case that rests with the UK government, the cousin is worried for his sister who resides in America and the repercussions that might befall them while trying to help Aneeka. The questions of

citizenship, borders, and entry to a country often renders an individual helpless without agency.

The novel shows the in-between position that an individual inhabits due to the legacy of their family as well as the nation's approach. We can identify the siblings Isma, Aneeka, and Parvaiz dwelling in an in-between space owing to their ties with Pakistan, Islam, and "Jihad." Despite being born in London, the inescapable aspects, that is, by dint of their parents' geographical roots and religious background, they have inherited Pakistani and Muslim identities. In addition, the involvement of their late father, Adil Pasha with jihadi groups contributes to this sense of in-betweenness as they undergo a sense of scrutiny and othering. For instance, the reaction of the media after Parvaiz joins ISIS foregrounds the entire community's treatment of persons like him. The fact that his sister is seen as an accomplice, shows how people like Parvaiz are not treated as individuals but rather as part of a 'lump'—say, Islamic terrorist group—making him a "terrorist son of a terrorist father" (171).

Even if we consider for instance that the family suffers particularly for Adil Pasha, the proof of one's love and allegiance towards the country has to be repeatedly displayed. The sense of being under surveillance is internalized evident in Aneeka's message to its potential agents in the midst of texting her sister: "Stop spying on our messages you arseholes and find some bankers to arrest" (34). She even addresses the term as "Googling While Muslim" or GWM (65), referring to the surveillance one might encounter based on their internet browsing history and their religious background, thus endorsing a stereotypical association.

The experience of Isma at the airport is evocative of the repetitive accounts drawn in post-9/11 fiction wherein Muslims and Arabs are singled out on the grounds of "security" in America. That the episode occurs in the UK also highlights its transatlantic effect. The fact that she had "expected" (3) the interrogation, rehearsed it with Aneeka, or refrained from carrying "suspicious" items such as the *Quran*, family pictures, her academic books, being mindful of her responses, or the lurking fear of being denied entry to the US depict the received treatment as the norm in the current socio-political scenario:

"Do you consider yourself British?" the man said.

"I am British."

> But do you consider yourself British?"
> "I've lived here all my life." She meant there was no other country of which she could feel herself a part…" (Shamsie, *Home Fire* 5)

In a similar way, Parvaiz too had always considered his country as his own, equating it in his thoughts: "London. Home" (179). Their allegiance remains a matter for others to validate.

In fact, the news of Adil Pasha's disappearance could not be examined properly as due to the probable attention from the authorities and their neighbourhood, and people's misjudgement of their concerns. The family refrained from enquiring about the whereabouts of Adil for the fear of being "suspected of siding with the terrorists" (49) and consequently be deprived of benefits by the welfare state or be harassed by it and the neighbourhood. Even the details of his death, that is, by a seizure on his way of being transported from Bagram to Guantanamo is learned by them after two years from a source (a fellow prisoner later released) which is not the state. Even after his death, the family was "forbidden to talk about it" (50), save a few trusted people, and could neither gain access to his body nor grieve his loss publicly. This is replicated in the stance of Isma who informs the authorities regarding Parvaiz and also announces their decision to not attend the funeral. Even at large, the mosque too disengages with the sensitive issue in that volatile situation, condemned any rumour as "part of a campaign of hatred against law-abiding British Muslims" (197), and clarifies that it won't participate in Parvaiz's funeral.

Again, in the case of Isma, her voluntary reporting of Parvaiz's actions to the authorities stems out of the past experiences to have witnessed the ordeals of her family: "There was nothing I could do for him, so I did what I could for you, for us" (42). She chooses a side, that is, to be with the state to prove her allegiance and escape any accusations in the future: "We're in no position to let the state question our loyalties. Don't you understand that? If you cooperate, it makes a difference" (42). It is highlighted in Isma's opinions regarding the representation and treatment of British citizens rendering them "unBritish" (38). She observes how the media never characterizes the terrorists of 7/7 as British and in certain contexts used only in terms of aligning them with a different background to show the distance between their Britishness and terrorism, such as, "British of Pakistani descent," "British Muslim," or "British passport holders" (38). This underscores to project the differentness of these elements from the British who supposedly

do not share their geographical or religious backgrounds. Hence, they are stuck in a duality, of being British and belonging to the community or geography they or their predecessors represent. In fact, even in describing Karamat Lone, the Pakistani-origin MP turned Home Secretary of UK stresses on being "a man 'from a Muslim background,' which is what they always said about him, as though Muslim-ness was something he had boldly stridden away from" (33-34). However, despite being a student of sociology, Isma later urges Aneeka to abide by the rules instead of challenging it: "Accept the law, even when it's unjust" (196). Since they are not allowed to go to Pakistan for the funeral, Isma abides by it, while Aneeka exercises her right based on her Pakistani passport. It is seen that Aneeka is torn between family and nation. By picking a side, that is to be with her brother invites precarity to herself which makes her imbibe an in-between role. For instance, in order to help Parvaiz return to London, she befriends Eamonn as a medium to reach his father, the Home Secretary, to materialize it in due time. Though Aneeka falls for Eamonn in the process, her approaching of Eamonn implies her motives to gain access to a politically influential figure that could make a difference, in this case, make Parvaiz's journey easy. However, the precarity is apparent as she and Eamonn die in Pakistan due to a suicide vest tied on the latter by unidentified entities.

Apart from the siblings who consider London their home, even for Karamat Lone, a son of immigrants, who has embraced the country as his own, has to earn the reciprocation. His life testifies to the sacrifices or rather the choices he has had to make in order to climb the political ladder and attain the current position as the Home Secretary. The in-between position proves to be disadvantageous evident in the life of Karamat, which ultimately prompts him to pick a side – to constantly be and act in the sensibilities of his British counterparts. In order to uphold his allegiance to the state, Karamat estranges himself from anything that might bridge a connection between him and his Islamic roots. For instance, during his tenure as an MP, an episode of his visit to a mosque infamous for being an alleged "'hate preacher'" (35), gained media attention which he tried to fix by offering reasons, expressed his contempt for the conventions of the "gender-segregated space" (35), followed by circulation of images of him and his wife holding hands to a church. This not just ruined his personal relations with the community and hampered professional relations with his Muslim-majority constituency that voted him out in the elections only to win it later by a "largely white constituency" (35). This can also be understood from his refusal to help the community out rather than displaying "cruelty"

(15), particularly in dealing with the Pasha family in the past. The apathy shown by then MP Karamat towards the Pasha family's loss is his way of siding with the state. It could have threatened his stance, of himself being a Pakistani and a Muslim and "had to be more careful than any other MP" (69). He is cautious even in private, evident in asking Eamonn not to reveal that he recites an Islamic prayer sometimes. As public figures who bear the 'burden' of inescapable identities, they too reside in a perilous position. For instance, if there has been vigilance on Isma's family, Eamonn too is hypervigilant on the public front owing to his father's position. The episode where he crosses the street to avoid a mosque and then crosses it back not to appear doing so on his visit to Aunty Naseem testifies it.

The rhetoric seen in Karamat shows his failure as a representative of the country. In fact, in one of his speeches, he asks the people, particularly the "other" to not conduct themselves differently in the way they dress, think, behave, or have ideologies. This is more of a threatening rhetoric of othering and discrimination as he shows the alternate picture. According to him, by not adhering to his suggestions, the community would have to prepare themselves for a treatment of othering, "not because of racism, though that does still exist, but because you insist on your difference from everyone else in this multiethnic, multireligious, multitudinous United Kingdom of ours. And look at all you miss out on because of it" (88). It legitimizes discrimination by the other and in a way his own community is now 'otherized' by him. Thus, instead of educating his community, his words lead to permanent ostracization.

Aneeka draws on the hostility that seeps into immigrant society due to varied factors. In her statement, she relates it to "Terrorist attacks involving European victims. Home secretaries talking about people setting themselves apart in the way they dress. That kind of thing." (90). It underscores how terrorist elements evoke generalized contempt for people who allegedly share a similar socio-religious background of that of the former. At the same time, political rhetoric that can harness such scenarios can also contribute in shaping the thought processes of a society or body politic, evident in post-9/11 America. Here, Aneeka who wears a hijab is being spat on by a guy on the tube that takes place after Karamat Lone's address to the country concerning assimilative approach by immigrants.

Being at the receiving end of fear and injustice, Aneeka's views are different from that of Eamonn, who comes from a politically powerful family and of mixed heritage: "Why didn't you mention that among the things this country will let you achieve if you're

Muslim is torture, rendition, detention without trial, airport interrogations, spies in your mosques, teachers reporting your children to the authorities for wanting a world without British injustice" (90-91) Aneeka's reluctance to accompany Eamonn for a trip stems out of her fear of being surveilled: "MI5. They listen in on my phone calls, they monitor my messages, my Internet history. You think they'll think it's innocent if I board a plane to Bali with the home secretary's son?" (94). The precarious position they inhabit also makes them more vulnerable to be immersed in precarity. They become easy targets at the hands of manipulators and consciously or not they collaborate in endangering their and others' lives. Eamonn's actions initially stem out of his in-betweenness, attempting to function like a bridge between his father and Aneeka in the interests of Parvaiz.

IV

Rayyan Al-Shawaf's *When All Else Fails* (2019)

Precarity here arises from a state of in-betweenness marked by a sense of detachment in a post-9/11 world. The narrative centers on the rootlessness confronted by the Iraqi student-protagonist Hunayn in the US. While the thesis focuses on material precarity, this novel foregrounds a shift from material to existential precarity. The quest for belonging is contingent on factors beyond one's control and manifests more prominently as a state of mind over its materiality.

The novel shows how Hunayn's life scattered all over different geographies and inaccessibility to the motherland add to the lack of belonging. Though Hunayn was born in Iraq, political instabilities caused his family to move to Abu Dhabi, and consequently reside in Rome, Lebanon, and the US. The sense of belonging for him remains unfulfilled concerning (life in) a particular place. Though the first strike of 'unbelonging' stems from the political turmoil associated with their physical dislocation from Iraq prior to 9/11, it continues in different degrees in the form of othering at different junctures in the geographies that he inhabits, particularly in the post-9/11 US. The disruption and chaos which Hunayn calls Moloch—which has chased him from Lebanon to the post-9/11 US—can be read as the response to fear of unfamiliarity and another dislocation. The expansion of the Moloch—both figural and literal—underlines the devastating effects of 9/11 on people's lives. The fact that Hunayn could not grasp the event or its aftermath pushes into

the unknown: “I needed somebody to give me an idea of where things stood, and free me from the ordeal of trying to figure it all out by myself” (*All Else Fails* 42-43).

In the case of Hunayn, unbelonging stems in terms of national and religious or ethnic affiliations. Firstly, his Iraqi, Christian, and Chaldean identities pose a striking combination in the post-9/11 US. Though he faces no repercussions of the event in its immediate aftermath, the effects demonstrate after two years causing him to question his presence in that geography and culture. Through the eyes of Hunayn, one sees the “Septemberland” (249) that the US has metamorphosed into, enabling both material and immaterial damages to an ‘outsider.’ He is used or discarded because of the alleged views attached to him/his identity. For instance, a blonde shows interest in him only to fulfill her sexual fetish of being with a Muslim in the aftermath of 9/11.

In a different episode, he is physically assaulted by men who approve of his wooing the girl in their company but is enraged at the discovery of his Iraqi roots, and calls him a convert and is spat on upon the realization of his Christian identity: “When, despite my presumed familiarity with American culture, I was made aware that nearly two years after 9/11, America was still Septemberland” (162). This highlights the general bias of the host society towards the heterogeneity of the other. These episodes show how people like Hunayn are regarded as potential threats. His state is interpreted only on socio-political lines. Again, he is rejected by Kate without a valid reason, though it is perhaps due to his identity: “It’s not because I don’t want to go out with you, but because it’s a gossipy town and you never know what people might say, and what might happen as a result” (136). While Hunayn decides not to highlight his Christian identity, he chooses to identify with the larger Iraqi ethos and “earn people’s respect through my own actions” (67). However, it needs to be noted that he continues to be viewed in stereotyped terms, despite his efforts to assimilate.

The hegemonic ideals of the American society are highlighted when Hunayn’s ‘accent free’ speech comes out as a surprise to Kendra: “It took me a moment to remember that most Americans believed they spoke English without an accent; if you spoke the way they did, you also didn’t have an accent” (81). Though he left Iraq for good just two years after his birth, this fact changes nothing as it makes no difference for others. Though he and his family cannot return home except to the autonomous Kurdish region—which underscores a different political precarity in Iraq—his Iraqi identity (308), makes him a

representative of its otherness in the US. It is ironic that his accent-free American English and general demeanour become a major factor behind the hostility he invites from 'regular' American groups. As Hashem observes in the case of Hunayn who is not new to American culture having spent his years in the West, educated at the American schools in Beirut and Rome, and an international school in Abu Dhabi: "…with you it's different. You sound like them, so they think you're one of them. When they find out you're not, they get angry at you for having fooled them and betrayed their trust, but also at themselves for having believed that you're one of them" (153). This shows that 'othering' does not necessarily emerge from historical or ethno-regional connections. It is as if multicultural settings were always on charge, waiting to explode on the face of the 'other.'

The sense of belonging appears in doubt in the wake of 9/11 as he wanted to flee the impending adverse scenarios but "had nowhere to run to" (10) shows the life of an immigrant. The disruption occurs in his life particularly after 9/11 in the US, with him now having to "reorder my priorities" with the first being "to figure what the fuck to do" (47). He claims to have altered some habits to not arouse suspicion in the post-9/11 society. Even if Hunayn finds it difficult to associate with his Lebanese friend Hashem's views based on Kafkaesque prism on how it is over for them as "we are all guilty" (20), his behaviour in the conversation with his "American" friend Lewis after 9/11 displays the otherwise. For instance, he adopts a cautious demeanour in speech and even briefly deems Lewis as the "possibly revenge-seeking friend" (39). While Lewis has the privilege of viewing 9/11 as "probably the most spectacular thing" (69), Hunayn has to be watchful of his response. The dilemma manifests in the urgency to respond in the "correct" (40) way being an 'outsider' and of Iraqi origins. He draws a parallel between a publicly humiliating episode of getting bullied in school to anticipating this meeting with him. The sense of guilt and fear haunts him as he expects a police car to follow him. Ironically, he wants that to happen to "put an end to this nightmare" (10). He sees the complex fullness of Arab-Muslim-Americans' narratives of loss: "after 9/11, they were made to feel that America was no longer their home" (163).

If America pushes him into an unfamiliar situation, his decision to move to Lebanon, "a place I understood" (181), does not offer him a better option. This sense of 'un-belonging' does not go away even in this non-western geography, a place he had lived in before and especially because it is a neighbour of his motherland. The change in

Lebanon, however, from Hunayn's past is apparent as he does not see the Christmas celebrations any longer. In Lebanon, 'othering' clearly clouds the Christians. Though he expects Lebanon to reflect the sovereign status it has gained, he sees the regional unrest, frequent violence, and chaos likening it to the physiological experience of hell at 'home' post 9/11. His reception as a foreign national in Lebanon affects his public and professional life. It is clear that the warlike scenario in the region limits job opportunities, more so for foreigners. Hence, despite his willingness to change jobs, he has few alternatives: "Where to go?" (253). He somehow secures a teacher's job at the school he studied in, despite the fact that he is "neither a North American nor a Lebanese national" (257). In other words, 'othering' follows no geographical boundary. He loses a potential partner for his foreigner status in Lebanon as the former is concerned about her future children's position in the country. Again, his accent is mistaken to be Syrian which results in his harassment by a mob. Though he holds that the problems of Lebanon are "familiar" (194), he is unprepared for the new developments. He sees how in the global front, his own vicissitudes and those of people in general in the 'other' parts of the world turn lives into Septemberworld" (183), that is, precarious landscapes created by the US.

Hunayn's life offers frames of othering that he experiences in different affective landscapes, including his family's exile from Iraq, racism in school in Rome, getting beaten up by Christian boys in Lebanon, and physical and emotional turmoil in America. The novel touches upon the life of immigrants who are coerced to leave their home countries. They inhabit these other places without the feeling of home. The politics that operates on the outside shapes the dimensions of their personal lives, be it in relationships, profession, and public appearances. The circumstances in Hunayn's life in the US project a depressive and anomic state: "no less of a zombie" (159). He even decides to end his life inspired by the ritualistic suicide concerning honor and shame performed by Japanese samurais but fails. It is also seen how the state affects his professional life as he remains inactive towards other academic pursuits, making it difficult to "make even a minimal mental or physical effort to do anything" (95). Despite being a student of English, he joins the job of mostly data entry at a citrus packaging plant in the US to prolong his legal stay. The relationships in his life are affected directly or indirectly owing to political winds. For example, Lewis severs contact with him accusing him of his views on Iraq that shaped the former's views on the country and the war. Even in Lebanon, he is left with no friends, "no social life" (202), and a tilt is observed in his interest on the news of war in Iraq.

Though Hunayn never returns to Iraq or has "no memories" (299) — at the start of the novel he follows the American invasion only from a distance — being emotionally and geographically apart from Iraq deeply affects him. His inability to be in his homeland puts him in a precarious position. Because of the chaos and the plight, Hunayn decides to "roll up the Iraq rug. May be even my Iraqiness with it" (302), and to "spare me future pain" (304). It is seen how witnessing the chaos in Lebanon, having exchanges with other Iraqis, and experiencing the shock of war from close quarters shatters his "journalistic detachment" (301). As he feels a lack of belonging, or is rendered an outsider, he gradually reconnects to his "Iraqiness." Much like Zeina in *The American Granddaughter*, Hunayn comes to realize "how removed I was from Iraq" (133), and sees the ravages wrought by war on his homeland. Even though he is unable to move to Iraq, his situation evokes an in-between cartography of guilt and desire: "For although I had no plans to move there, a part of me wished to continue clinging to the possibility that I'd do so eventually" (296). Thus, even if he seems to have reclaimed his Iraqiness, his physical dislocation still haunts him. He is now indefinitely in-between.

IV

Conclusion

In-betweenness is a precarious topography. However, for an outsider even moving out of this say, by picking up a side can prove deleterious. The in-between position has both material and immaterial dimensions to it. In the above discussion, the in-between position is both an existing condition and reinforced by 9/11. To this end, corporeal in-betweenness gives rise to a cognitive limbo. The othering here occurs both ways: the subject put in an in-between position becomes an other to either or both sides. The displaced other inhabits newer and unexpected modes of self-othering in the wake of 9/11.