

**POST-9/11 FICTION AND THE GEOGRAPHIES OF PRECARIY: A STUDY OF
SELECT TEXTS**

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CONCLUSION

The thesis revisits the layout—fictional, critical, social, and representational—of post-9/11 precarity by re-embedding its vicissitudes in a wider transnational spectrum. In so doing, the thesis seeks to reframe some of the oft-repeated questions on the nature, identity, and ideology not only of the victims but also of the perpetrators of terror. However, the thesis refrains from restricting terror and its deleterious impact to the events of 9/11 alone, particularly given the overwhelming exclusive and exceptional nature of the representations of 9/11 in American literary-cultural narratives. In other words, the thesis pleads for a non-hierarchized order of lives, even while accepting the centrality of 9/11.

The idea is to decenter interpretive maps of 9/11—critical and cultural narratives—that seem to be fixated on American sufferings in exclusivist terms. Once we expand the violence and suffering surrounding the ‘events’ of 9/11 to a transnational matrix of precarity, we see the emergence of an assorted range of precaritized lives, both human and more than human. Again, once we read precarity as an extreme form of othering—social, cartographic, rhetorical, and environmental—the ‘other’ creates and is created by a montage of precarity. To this end, the thesis shows how *that* kind of precarity transcends cartographic and corporeal boundaries. The thesis argues that both before and after 9/11—and within and away from American borders—bodies, bases, things, and beings are repeatedly hierarchized, producing different orders of precarity.

The contexts for such productions are provided by ‘events’ linked to networks of terror as defined by a globalized repository of terms and interpretive categories. It is clear that the victims and perpetrators of terror do not belong to a particular location. One is always presented with ‘facts’ that turn out to be interpretations and ‘images’ that happen to be ideologically processed. For instance, while the evidentiary status of an ‘assassin’ is confirmed and the suffering of the victims is repeated and recycled through global media, there is a general tendency to erase the face of the victims if those faces are from locations with alternative histories of terror and violence. In other words, it makes sense to examine precarity and the precariat by simultaneously foregrounding American and non-American victims of terror. That being the case, the thesis sees precarity in terms that are not only non-hierarchical, but also challenges interpretations based on temporality and spatiality. The thesis locates precarious lives and landscapes in places that are not always obvious and may also be hidden from view.

The foregoing analysis of post 9/11 narratives shows that precarity in different forms can inform a single event identified as *one particular* event in the media and seen as such without further scrutiny. For example, the events surrounding 9/11 and their subsequent interpretations compound already existing social and economic tensions in different landscapes and locations across the globe. The study shows how one kind of precarity can snowball into another kind in a different location. Precarity, whatever its form, content, or location, does not exist in isolation. It exists concurrently with other forms and factors. In *The Shadow of the Crescent Moon*, for example, the existing systemic othering in Mir Ali assumes a new lease with the post-9/11 operations. Here, Aman becomes a different form of ‘other’ by siding with the state against his people in exchange for an escape abroad. It is necessary to recognize that the actors behind 9/11 play out the events surrounding 9/11 differently within the US and outside.

The thesis establishes that post-9/11 precarity operates both as a condition and a consequence. In consequence, in the realm of precarity or its absence, the ‘other’ comes to embody only that the interpretive ‘self’ projects. It is found that post-9/11 precarity is produced and perpetuated by a combination of ‘foreign’ and ‘domestic’ forces, including state and non-state actors. One also notes that the actors position themselves in the light of old and new conflicts that cannot be separated through temporal and spatial contexts. This creates a complex network of power and its social sublimation. In some of the narratives, there are cases of particularized others expressing their agency through various forms of resistance. Such expressions lead to false starts, promising escapes from particularized contexts of precarity. Ironically, however, such expressions and escapes cast a long shadow on the ‘actors’ on the scene as well as people or places that are left out of the map. So, both players and non-players turn into precariats, challenging any preconceived thesis on the nature of precarity.

The position of ‘aliens’ or ‘outsiders’ (temporary or conditional residents, including exiles and immigrants) in the host countries gets increasingly fragile and vulnerable. During periods of national crisis, their precarity gets doubly underscored when they are (a) demonized as the ‘other’ and (b) seen as aliens who make the lives of residents (natives and insiders who are traditionally seen as ‘nationals’) exponentially vulnerable simply by staying in the said location. Their otherness presents them as threats to national

security. What is hidden in this sense of threat is the perceived challenge to legitimate livelihood practices for the residents in their own land.

Periods of national crises accentuate the search and unqualified imposition of homogeneities in home communities that may have respected—or at least tolerated—cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversities. This is applicable both to the US as well as several other landscapes (cultures, geographies, and environments) affected by American policies on terror adopted by successive governments. It is clear that in the wake of 9/11, discriminatory racial and ethnic profiling—say, Arab-Asian Muslim—removed all distinctions between documented and paperless individuals. In *The Submission*, Asma's loss is disregarded as she is an 'alien' while Mo experiences prejudice and injustice despite being an American-born. The American Dream is subsumed within terror-torn precarities. In *Once in a Promised Land*, the Jordanian immigrant Jassim loses his job, marriage, and sense of belonging despite embracing an 'American' lifestyle.

While the thesis sees the 'other' in contradistinction to the affected person's home country (say, the United States of America), the idea of 'home' gets increasingly problematized both for residents and immigrants. While one may associate 'home' with the idea of the host country—that is, the country of one's residence and work—it is conceived exclusively on the grounds of geographical (national and ethnic) origins post 9/11. Thus, the thesis contests the idea of a politics-neutral home for individuals disturbed by 9/11. Home therefore is no longer a concrete construct. In *The Other Americans*, Driss holds on to the home that he builds in America and refuses to return to Morocco in spite of crisis he confronts. He fails to see that war changes the very basis of social contracts. Ironically, his death is the ultimate price he has to pay for believing in the grand narratives of American nation-building through the work of immigrants and refugees.

The study finds that post 9/11, precarity manifests itself in unexpected forms and landscapes for residents and refugees, away from what the immigrants or the Americans call home. 9/11 reframes the material and affective dynamics people share with their home. In *The Watch*, Nizam finds that her idea of home is irrelevant, both in the context of loss of family and the absence of state protection induced by 9/11. The analysis points to the increasing vulnerability of minorities during wars on terror leading to national crises, regardless of the location. As portrayed in *The Golden Legend* and *The Association of Small Bombs*, Christians in Pakistan and Muslims in India get doubly marginalized in the

wake of 9/11. Their fragile social existence gets exposed to new dangers in view of increasingly divisive social hierarchies created by the 9/11-induced convergence of reality and rhetoric. Minorities are forced to revisit the horrors of partition in the long shadow of 9/11, but without the option of ‘going home.’ The irony is that while Asian and Arab Americans (say, Indians and Pakistanis) have the option, real or imagined, of returning home, there is no easy solution for minorities in their home countries.

It is clear that post 9/11, landscapes (natural, human, more than human), get directly embroiled in the production and perpetuation of precarity. While Ground Zero of 9/11 continues to be a part of the popular imagination, there exist other(ed) landscapes which are considered as mere backdrops with regards to its ‘enemy’ population. Akin to civilian casualties that are deemed ‘collateral damage,’ the attention towards the landscape reconfigured by post-9/11 developments remains secondary. Apart from foreign interference, it is seen how the natives too thrust one’s own country into precarity in the process of retaliating the former, countering the government’s position or as a means to enforce their ideals on the masses. Again, apart from the terrains of explicit violence of war on terror, the landscapes are altered and exploited through other material and intangible ways. In the case of surveillance, the atmosphere is imbued with a tacit sense of hierarchy. This scene of suspicion and threat on the pretext of shoring up national security stimulates dread and mistrust among individuals. The land of the other serves as a larger frame to construct its enemies and also functions as an apparatus to exercise that othering. In *The Corpse Washer* the presence of American army in the streets and important edifices of Iraq symbolizes its occupation. In *Red Birds*, the spatial reconfiguration of the land by the US forces underpins the power structure.

Again, in addition to humans, the non-human species and the environment are subject to transformation. The thesis offers an insight into a human phenomenon that compromises other existences beyond its realm. The manufactured identity of a landscape robs a landscape of its organic essence. In *The Spiral Road* the wilderness is reduced to a site for terrorist training. On one hand, if the land of the other is viewed as a threat it necessitates a reconfiguration; on the other hand, if the land is already considered expendable as the lives it hosts, it highlights its disposability and therefore elicits no protection. The land here functions as a producer, consumer, and distributor of precarity in their different permutations.

The thesis approaches precarity in its material and liminal aspects. In so doing, it however also alludes to cognitive precarity that stems from its material dimension. The study signals how apart from the visible frames of precarity, people lie at risk of being internally vulnerable. In *The American Granddaughter*, Zeina is torn between her allegiance for her host country America and home country Iraq for participating in the post-9/11 Iraq war. Again, the breakdown of the external system marks a breakdown of one's affective disposition. In *When All Else Fails*, Hunayn confronts a sense of rootlessness due to his existing exile and heightened by the changes brought by 9/11. The in-between position that has been explored here unveils how it can be a starting point for precarity or be itself an output of precarity. In *Home Fire*, Parvaiz's existing in-between station due to his religious background and familial legacy against the rising anti-Muslim sentiment in the West factors as a leverage for his induction into a terrorist organization. The discussion also demonstrates how apart from cognitive and affective liminalities individuals are pushed to physical in-between states. This is different from self-validation narratives generally associated with war.