

INTRODUCTION

The term ‘post’ in conjunction with 9/11 connotes a shift accompanying the episode that bears a point of reference but lacks a definite end. In this context, post-9/11 fiction can be perceived as a corpus of literature that extends to (i) the specters of the day and its immediate aftermath: *Windows on the World* (2003), *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005), *The Writing on the Wall* (2005), *Falling Man* (2007); (ii) the implications of nationalization of the event: *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), *Home Boy* (2009), *Welcome to Americastan* (2011), *Homeland Elegies* (2020); and, (iii) the globalization of the event and its lingering shadows: *Saturday* (2005), *The Sirens of Baghdad* (2006), *Burnt Shadows* (2009), *The Blind Man’s Garden* (2013). The above frames are not exhaustive or mutually exclusive and may coexist. Moreover, the narrative construction of post-9/11 fiction includes explicit, indirect, allegorical, and sometimes little referential kinship with the source event. The thesis critically engages with literary performativity of these configurations incited by a globally pronounced episode of the past.

The aim of this thesis is to examine the representation of precarity in select post-9/11 fiction. In the course of this, it seeks to identify, analyze, and critique different ‘geographies’—real and imagined—of precarity in the post-9/11 context. Here, precarity is premised on a materiality that has verifiable indices in terms of displacement, both affective and material.

The objectives of the thesis are

- i) To examine the origin and evolution of precarity as a ‘material’ formation in the wake of 9/11;
- ii) To examine the transformation of precarity in the wake of 9/11 in terms of ‘decentered’ and ‘affective’ geographies; and
- iii) To map the formation and struggles of the precariat in the wake of 9/11 within and beyond the US.

The hypotheses guiding the study are

- i) Precarity is not just a consequence of global capitalism but also of wars and other factors of displacement;
- ii) Precarity is as much a condition as consequence post 9/11; and

- iii) Whereas the merger of ‘material’ and ‘affective’ geographies/conditions lead to existential ruminations, post 9/11 such mergers result in extreme forms of abjecthood and otherization of bodies, minds, and landscapes.

The geographies of precarity in post-9/11 fiction encapsulates the extension of 9/11 into homes, territories, and emotive faculties. Precarity here refers to a chaotic, compromised, and contingent clime manoeuvred by numerous determinants, engendering its various constructs. The thesis both draws on and moves beyond the inceptual realm of the term ‘precarity’ in relation to labour market, contours Judith Butler’s distinction of it from the existential case of precariousness, and postulates it as the phenomenon of an extreme form of othering. Geographies here allude to sites which are both empirical and abstract, material and affective, and it is argued that they encompass physical, socio-political, cognitive, corporeal, environmental, human, and more-than-human landscapes.

There exist certain vistas in recent human history that command an enduring lease over the collective psyche. In this regard, the visuals of the collapse of the two globally significant edifices into rubble on 11 September 2001 embody such a spectacle. Richard Gray in *After the Fall* (2011), observes how the fall of the towers, including the people within them, has been a “powerful and variable visual equivalent for other kinds of fall” (7). Here, New York City, nestling the crumbling towers, becomes the “poster victim” (Bell 7) over casualties incurred by the other hijacked planes on the same day. On a macroscopic level, this is analogous to America attaining the center stage concerning the effects of 9/11.

Again, there appeared a puncture in the sustained exercise of leaning towards the big names to make use of their intellectual and critical insights to enrich the common perception. The period was marked by a “failure of language” (Gray 1), and “all meaning-making systems” (Versluys 2), and filled with the “cacophony of chanted verities” (Faludi 2). The disintegration of the towers invoked the “moonscape dust, very much like we saw when the astronauts were on the moon” (Smith 111). This, in view of the scene, can be perceived as the inadequacy of words that otherwise constitute this world have now failed to capture its ‘otherworldliness.’ In “Representing 9/11: Literature and Resistance” (2008), Ann Keniston and Jeanne Follansbee Quinn call 9/11 literature as a ‘prosthesis’—a term borrowed from Philip Roth’s novel by Charles Lewis in his essay—to indicate its role as an “awkward substitute” and “attempt to compensate” for the “unrepresentable absence

effected by 9/11 itself” (2). Arin Keeble in *The 9/11 Novel: Trauma, Politics and Identity* (2014), credits the form of the novel for having the “most” narrative capacity to “attempt, at least, to internalize and contextualize traumatic or catastrophic events” (9). She dwells on the “phenomenal anticipation” of the novel to represent 9/11 and its significance of how they were composed “under the pressure of an expectation that literature would provide answers and give meaning to a newly uncertain world” (10).

Concerning the aftermath of 9/11, Susan Faludi observes how the lack of “official moral leadership” demonstrated by the US failed “to think constructively about their place in the world, to redefine civic commitment and public responsibility” (*Terror Dream* 3). Similarly, Butler comments on the country’s lost opportunity “to redefine itself as part of a global community when, instead, it heightened nationalist discourse, extended surveillance mechanisms, suspended constitutional rights, and developed forms of explicit and implicit censorship” (*Precarious* xi). In a paradoxical sense, the absence of the towers embodies a kind of presence in terms of its corollaries that have stretched both spatially and temporally with regard to an event that occurred within specific geographical coordinates and lasted for a fixed duration. This evokes how such events transpire neither in isolation nor at random, as they may suggest; they bear a past and the potential for propagation in different matrices in the future. In order to navigate and negotiate these post-9/11 mutations, the thesis as a departure point assumes that post-9/11 fiction addresses pervasive impacts and implications of the event, documenting those populace, places, and pitfalls that were not immediately evident in the central imagination of American victimhood.

In the introduction to *Narrating 9/11: Fantasies of State, Security, and Terrorism* (2015), the editors Duvall and Marzec examine the narrative strains following 9/11. In their opinion, the criticism of Western post-9/11 narrative, the American novel in particular, for embracing the domestic while attending to 9/11 is challenged by expanding the scope and engaging with “fuller variety” (8) of post-9/11 narratives. They consider how post-9/11 novels capture the shifts brought about by post-9/11 fantasy concerning the American homeland. This comprises licensing its role in safeguarding itself by demonstrating its dominance over other territories. Joseph M. Conte in “Post-9/11 Narratives” (2022), notes that post-9/11 narratives may deal with the day’s “spectacular events” or capture its “collective transformation afterward in the social order, politics,

psychopathology, or modes of representation in the arts” (1). Susana Araújo in *Transatlantic Fictions of 9/11 and the War on Terror* (2016), views that in contrast to novels in the early period of 9/11 that pursued emotions such as fear, anger, and shock, the later ones engage with the broader repercussions such as the war on terror and the “disproportionate violence” (11) effectuated by it. Framing 9/11 and the war on terror within history enables these novels to engage with concepts such as globalisation, democracy, and liberalism in the 21st century (11). Keeble calls the 9/11 novel or fiction an “evolving canon” (*9/11 Novel* 14). In a similar way, Keniston and Quinn observe that the history of literary representations of 9/11 can be marked by a shift from “narratives of rupture to narratives of continuity” (“Representing” 3).

Beyond documenting the day of the event or its immediate aftermath, the post-9/11 corpus directs critical enquiry to indirect, ‘unnarrated,’ and overshadowed aspects, making it more nuanced and inclusive while breaking through any national and narrative confines. In this process, it also poses as a critique of 9/11 fiction. According to Keeble, Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), is the first 9/11 novel with a non-American chief protagonist and is seen as the first of its kind to have engaged with 9/11 and post-9/11 from a “genuinely international perspective” (*9/11 Novel* 77). Moreover, it is also observed that the terms ‘9/11 literature’ and ‘post-9/11 literature’ are also used interchangeably by many.

This study expands and integrates precarity in order for it to accommodate extreme forms of ‘othering’ that happened and continue to happen within and outside the US territories following 9/11. It pursues forms of such representation of precarity in contemporary fiction and seeks to establish how precarity takes on the variants of a fundamental feature of human society. Here, othering represents a ‘constant,’ while the otherized constitute the variables that are contingent on geographical, socio-economic, political, and historical dynamics with 9/11 serving as the point of reference. Moreover, the event here enkindles new crises or amplifies existing fault lines.

Structure of the Work

The thesis is organized into five chapters, based on five clusters of precarity. The novels chosen for this purpose offer distinctive aspects of precarity and span a wide geographical range—Afghanistan, India, Bangladesh, Iraq, Pakistan, the UK, the US, and an unnamed

space that indicates a landscape affected by post-9/11 war. The study deals with textual expositions that interact with the stated premise and have 9/11 as a frame of context with effects that continue to reverberate beyond the discussed domains. Here is a brief outline of the chapters:

Chapter 1, titled “Framing Precarity: Critical Perspectives,” provides the theoretical map for the study. It discusses the different trajectories of precarity in order to devise a conceptual framework in alignment with the thesis and contextualizes it in terms of post-9/11 textual representations. It is important to investigate how different forms of precarity intersect, starting from its initial conceptual take in terms of neoliberalism to Judith Butler’s exposition of the phenomenon as a politically stimulated condition. In order to assess precarity as an extreme form of othering, the thesis connects it to other critical concepts and perspectives. Together, these connections facilitate the exploration of the post-9/11 specters as a condition or a consequence in select fiction.

Chapter 2, titled ““Bring some of these freedoms to the other parts of the world’: The Precaritization of Other Homelands,” deals with the extension of othering from people to places post 9/11. The texts chosen for study are Adib Khan’s *The Spiral Road* (2007), Sinan Antoon’s *The Corpse Washer* (2013), and Mohammed Hanif’s *Red Birds* (2018). The chapter examines how one’s homeland is ‘othered’ and how internal and external forces contribute to turning space into an apparatus. It shows the ways in which the politics around security that lie at the core of the source event, that is, 9/11, are leveraged in its aftermath, leaving homelands violent, vulnerable, and volatile. This chapter argues that the ‘homeland’ after 9/11 can be reimagined exclusively as a producer, a consumer, or a distributor of precarity, or a shifting combination of these roles.

Chapter 3, titled ““How could you be dead if you did not exist?’: The Precariat Otherized Abroad,” examines the post-9/11 period as a site that intensifies the prevailing migrant (outsider)-native (insider) dynamic. The novels considered for study are Laila Halaby’s *Once in a Promised Land* (2007), Amy Waldman’s *The Submission* (2011), and Laila Lalami’s *The Other Americans* (2019). The chapter studies how in the context of national interests and security imperatives, the presence and identity of immigrants slip into questionable territories. It engages with the aspects of visibility and representation, evoking Butler’s discussion of liveability and grievability. It examines how subjectivities

of the immigrants in post-9/11 America are shaped, making it difficult to know where one frame ends and another starts.

Chapter 4, titled “‘He never went out again’: The Precariat Otherized at Home,” examines how one’s relationship to their home is plagued by ‘different’ determinants posed by 9/11. The chapter looks at how 9/11 recontextualizes the idea of home situated outside the US soil. The novels selected for discussion are: Joydeep Roy-Bhattacharya’s *The Watch* (2012), Fatima Bhutto’s *The Shadow of the Crescent Moon* (2013), Karan Mahajan’s *The Association of Small Bombs* (2016), and Nadeem Aslam’s *The Golden Legend* (2017). The chapter negotiates how invasion of one’s home induces precarity and how precarity entails a defamiliarization of familiar systems, which here corresponds to destabilization at home. The chapter argues that precarity ensues from the threat to both the embodied and affective dimensions of home, with ‘embattled homes’ creating an ‘other’ across multiple frames of homelessness.

Chapter 5, titled “‘I couldn’t belong to anything anymore’: The Precariat in between,” addresses how the post-9/11 period determines the corporeal and cognitive in-betweenness of individuals. The texts chosen for analysis are Inaam Kachachi’s *The American Granddaughter* (2008), Kamila Shamsie’s *Home Fire* (2017), and Rayyan Al-Shawaf’s *When All Else Fails* (2019). 9/11 regimented ‘us and them’; the chapter explores what happens to ‘them’ and how ‘they’ become exponentially otherized either by interventions made by the opposing group(s) or the otherized mass of the precariat. It examines whether precarity is a pre-existing disposition that fosters in-betweenness, or if the in-between position cultivates forms of precarity.

Othring in its extreme form constitutes the comprehensive facet of precarity and in this context, even narratives appear to have been otherized in purview of the hegemonic narrative of the US centering on 9/11. The study pursues the magnitude of the event by mining its overarching ramifications as a counternarrative to this centrality of experience around the 9/11 epicenter. As such, this research is an attempt to interrogate the logic and solidity of the term ‘post’ in post-9/11. The curated set of novels serves the purpose of representing different forms of precarity, especially in the wake of 9/11. By clustering them through four core critical dimensions, the thesis maps the deterritorialization of precarity, and its formation and transformation. In this sense, the precariat is no longer restricted to any one particular ‘homeland.’ This study explores the complexities of the

current world order through the lens of precarity. Precarity is endemic to ‘exilic’ lives and all lived experience. Following Edward Said’s views on how each age and society recreate their “Others” (*Orientalism* 332), this thesis uses 9/11 as an example to analyze how (a) different sets of lives and landscapes turn into geographies of precarity, and (b) how often several of these sets recur in its wake.