CHAPTER TWO

‘BRING SOME OF THESE FREEDOMS TO THE OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD’: THE PRECARITIZATION OF OTHER HOMELANDS

I

The relationship between a homeland and its inhabitants is complex. Under normal circumstances, homelands offer a sense of wholeness to an individual. However, different forces can disrupt this arrangement with the homeland no longer pertaining to the associations attached to it. The post-9/11 period registers these changes wherein the homeland including its people are otherized and this set of otherized also at times otherizes its own homeland. The aim of this chapter is to identify, inquire, and interact with post-9/11 landscapes imbued with different shades of precarity that problematizes the definition of homeland.

The objectives of this chapter are

i. To examine 9/11 as a context in which precarity stems from othering of homelands;
ii. To analyse the spatial politics with 9/11 as its starting point and the impacts on other spaces as its end point; and
iii. To examine different aspects of subterranean eco-precarity in post-9/11 homelands.

The hypotheses governing this chapter are

i. Precarity is distributed to the homelands as sites of 'suspect groups' after 9/11; and
ii. The attacks on one's homeland account for the destabilization of one's identity.

The chapter addresses the following research questions

i. Is homeland geography a producer, consumer, or distributor of precarity; or, is it a combination of all?
ii. How does spatial politics operate in an affective landscape?

Literature Review

The term 'homeland' is a key point of reference in the aftermath of 9/11. The episode marks the violation of the American homeland turning it into "no longer secure and, to that extent, no longer home" (Gray 5). The post-9/11 period witnessed a shift in the form of reconfigurations of the homelands of the other. The land being home to the "suspect

communities" (Hilal 78) becomes the larger aspect of othering. 9/11 altered the way of looking at people, now with an emphasis on one's 'origins' in the US in particular and the West in general. These origins connote not just the religious, ethnic, and cultural lineages shared with the 9/11 actors but also encompass their geographical roots or homelands.

Butler in *Frames of War* (2009), associates precarity to select populations who are subject to "failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death" owing to politically effectuated conditions. In *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004), Butler discusses the differential allocation of grievability in the post-9/11 context. This chapter adopts these views as a departure point to register the extension of precarity from people to places after 9/11. These places are homelands that allegedly host the presumed 'enemy' and even function as bases to retaliate the enemy forces. Since we have assumed precarity as an extreme form of othering, here it is the geographies that sustain extensive territorial crises of different kinds. After 9/11, these homelands have been transformed into sites of surveillance, propaganda, violence, oppression, trauma, displacement, dispossession, terrorism, and counterterrorism, and so on. For instance, the name Guantanamo Bay in Cuba evokes the infamous detention centre, representative of "extralegal spaces" (DeRosa and Peebles 208), located on that site and symbolic of the post-9/11 US military affairs.

In *Ecoprecarity* (2019), Nayar expands Butler's elucidation on precarity to advance the eponymous concept. He links it to the precarious lives of humans owing to ecological calamities and to the environment that is adversely impacted due to human interference. His discussion is extensive as it includes literary representations of vulnerability of entire ecosystems from "the foetus to earth itself" from "molecular level to the planetary" (15). His meditation on the invasion of the "bodies, homes, nations and the race itself" (12), wherein the hitherto inviolate and sovereign human becomes a host for the other and the planet housing unfamiliar lifeforms contributes to the study in this chapter. In the discussion of the novels, the concept of invasion of the body of the human and other lifeforms highlights a state of precarity.

In *The Post-9/11 City in Novels: Literary Remappings of New York and London* (2014), Karolina Golimowska analyses the city in select fiction in terms of the 9/11 ramifications. She argues that the post-9/11 novel is "preeminently a city novel" (182), and a "global space" (57), and how it has changed the perception towards urban set-ups.

She discusses how this city is anthropomorphized and that 9/11 steered the changes in meaning attached with particular places. She posits this space as a site for confronting the post-9/11 other. While Golimowska focuses primarily on the metropolises of New York and London, this study is a useful lens to examine the non-Western locations that are pushed to precarity in terms of their material and affective dimensions after 9/11.

Said's *Orientalism* (1978), illustrates the trajectory of West's construct of the other, that is, the Orient. He cites major literary works, personalities, journalists, and media that have shaped the Western consciousness about the Orient and in the process have given rise to a hierarchical relationship between the two. As a result, in contrast to the "civilized" West, the East has been cast and maintained as culturally inferior and possessing a barbaric demeanour. He also discusses the American contribution to it, working as "trained social scientist" over the Orient or other places, dated roughly after World War II as it took over the position of Europe and France (290). His discussions help in understanding how geographical distinctions or binaries have been existing and after 9/11 these distinctions have been activated and generalizations have been imposed.

Saba Pirzadeh in her study *Violence, Militarism and the Environment in Contemporary South Asian Literature* (2016), draws on Said's views to approach the othering of the environment. According to Said, the concepts of Orient and Occident are "supreme fictions" (*Orientalism* xii), that he says denote "a familiar space which is "ours" and an unfamiliar space…which is "theirs" thereby giving rise to geographical distinctions that *can be* entirely arbitrary" (qtd. in Pirzadeh 114). Pirzadeh's study explicates how violence and military activities impinge on the environment and determine human-environment relationships. She deliberates on "environmental Othering"—"the deliberate labelling of the terrain of opponent countries as enemy base, hostile terrain, volatile territory, and infested space (amidst others) to create a precedent for its invasion and occupation" (111). A key area in the chapter to analyze how places are perceived differently, essentialised, and assigned new statuses based on their positioning. The landscape also assumes an indirect participatory role in the othering with active agents acting on it, against it, or for it.

Maha Hilal's *Innocent Until Proven Muslim: Islamophobia, The War on Terror, and The Muslim Experience Since 9/11* (2021), offers an insight into the impacts and narratives around war on terror. Her views on institutionalized and internalized

Islamophobia help in understanding the target landscapes in the discussed texts that host Muslim populations.

The three primary texts discussed in this chapter are: Adib Khan's *Spiral Road* (2007), Sinan Antoon's *The Corpse Washer* (2013), and Mohammed Hanif's *Red Birds* (2018). The distinct topographies here relate to the different frames of post-9/11 territorial othering. Khan offers a place with the initial phase and subtleties of post-9/11 othering which is not yet discernible to everyone; Antoon limns a setting othered by functional warfare steered by 9/11; Hanif supplies a post-war terrain that is suggestive of a landscape impacted by the post-9/11 war on terror.

II

Adib Khan's *Spiral Road* (2007)

Adib Khan's novel projects Bangladesh as a homeland that interacts with precarity in terms of post-9/11 developments. Despite its seemingly distant position from the 9/11 locus, the nations represented by its actors, and the visible sites of war on terror, the homeland exhibits shadowy repercussions of the event. This homeland mired in post-9/11 politics is treated as a rising threat, "potentially a problem area" (*Spiral Road* 198). Precarity here operates in the form of surveillance, violence, and appropriation of spaces at the hands of both foreign and domestic forces. These influences interfere with the ethos of the homeland and thereby alter the tempo of everyday life. The alienation of the homeland is realized in Masud's homecoming to Bangladesh from Australia.

Alienation and Surveillance

The alienation of the landscape occurs when it is treated in ways that no longer retains its familiarity. Masud experiences the long shadows cast by 9/11 over his homeland in the form of surveillance. The discreetness of surveillance mechanism inserts a layer of invisible presence to the existing topography. In the wake of 9/11, the surveillance culture surfaced in the US at both the institutional and the community levels. For instance, in Naqvi's *Home Boy*, the Pakistan-origin Chuck undergoes a sense of being constantly monitored even after his release from detention for 'suspicious' activities in a US

neighbourhood. Khan's novel offers a case wherein post-9/11 surveillance mechanism transcends the US borders to affect other territories.

Bangladesh does not feature among the nationalities of the 9/11 actors and is apparently far from the 9/11 epicenter and the areas with active war on terror. However, it is entangled in the post-9/11 politics in the form of a suspicious environment due to the presence of foreign spies. In Nadeem Aslam's *The Blind Man's Garden*, the boot impressions of American soldiers on the post-9/11 Afghan soil pronounce their presence: "America is everywhere" (129). In contrast, surveillance connotes an invisible operation that conceals the influence of foreign entities in the homeland. In Khan's narrative, the spies Steven Mills from Australia and Peter Nichols from the US effortlessly tread the landscape in concert with the Bangladeshi government.

These spies are "essential appendages" (*Spiral Road* 196) to their respective governments who are on the lookout for terrorist cells and training camps in Bangladesh, based on information and suspicion. Their presence implies how the homeland of the other is violated not just in terms of discreet external interference but bearing the advantage of representing superior nations in terms of political and economic capital. This is highlighted in Mills' views towards curbing the alleged terrorist activities in the country: "If there's anything definite, the Americans will put pressure on the Bangladeshi government to act decisively. Otherwise, all sorts of aid programs will be at risk. And Bangladesh can ill-afford to miss out on American assistance" (239). Similar scenario prevails in Fatima Bhutto's *The Shadow of the Crescent Moon*, wherein the violence as a part of war on terror is unleashed by the US in the border areas of Pakistan with the latter's cooperation.

In Khan's novel, these kinds of threat and coercive approaches to exert influence by the US over a developing country highlight governmental tactics. This resonates with Masud's remark on 'postcolonial,' how countries continue to be impacted by political giants despite attaining independence: "That word's a construct of English Departments and Centres of Cultural Studies in certain parts of the world. There's nothing post about colonialism. Merely a shift in modus operandi" (*Spiral Road* 12). The counterterrorist motives underlying the spying on Masud or the country's activities at large, and their indirect cues towards the potential consequences echo subtle means of sustained power.

In the case of homeland, the individual organically forms a constituent part of it. Thus, it can be established that the alienation of the homeland renders the native an alien. Despite being in his homeland, Masud becomes a subject of surveillance at the hands of the foreign spies as a "precautionary measure" (198). This resonates with the "political imperatives of the US" (Hilal 8), which fails to take cognizance of their role in perpetuating such situations in other geographies. This is illustrated in the conversation between Masud and Mills with Australia as an ally of the US or a representative of the West:

> 'Imagine what it might be like if a bomb went off at Flinders Street Station at peak hour.'
>
> …
>
> 'Think about it. Both you and I have a responsibility to civilization.'
>
> 'Which one?' (*Spiral Road* 244)

Hilal observes how Bush's speech in an anti-terrorism summit of Central and East European leaders "obviously" employs the language of civilization to engage them, who represent "civilized" nations (*Innocent* 4). In so doing, she also highlights the presumption of the US that considers itself "the apex of civilization" (4).

Masud's participation in the Bangladesh liberation war against the Pakistani army, his family's suspicious transactions, and his ties with Australia posit him as a potential threat to these spies and their nations. His ordinary visit to his family comes under the sway of security concerns and therefore, he is indirectly reminded by Mills of the hospitality hitherto received by him: "Remember who you are now and where you live. The West has been good to you" (*Spiral Road* 245). The essence of homeland is then compromised due to the manipulative strategies adopted by foreign entities. For instance, Masud reacts to the warning to be mindful of his choices: "It's none of your affair what I do here!" (101). Again, the supremacy is noted with regards to Mills' threat of getting Zia fired from his company for his alleged assistance to the terrorists in Afghanistan. The claim that the spies have "many eyes" (198) attribute the air with fear and suspicion wherein one is forced to conduct themself in appropriate terms.

The novel exhibits how the homeland is differently othered by insiders. Here, surveillance is also orchestrated by a network of domestic radicals who participate in overt

and covert activities of violence alienating their own homeland in the process. In other words, while the foreign forces otherize the other's homeland, a set of this otherized population too participates in otherizing its own homeland. For instance, Shabir Jamal worked with the CIA in exchange for a "hefty pay package" (239), to report on the happenings in his country. Masud is also surreptitiously monitored by the local terrorist circuit and in particular by its representative and Masud's nephew Omar who expect his involvement in their cause. For instance, Omar is aware of Masud's meeting with the foreign spies. Furthermore, the sense of estrangement in the homeland also ensues from being treated as suspicious by other agencies. Masud undergoes differential treatment by the immigration officials in Dhaka airport who perceive him as a foreigner or rather representing the enemy (Australia/West), and is made to undergo an inspection of his body, luggage, documents, and phone. Later, he is accused of being a spy in a street rally for his Australian passport and escapes their anger by reciting a 'surah' on their demand to prove his Islamic identity: "There's something utterly despicable in being called a spy" (178). Moreover, such instances of his questioned allegiance trivialize not just the ordeals of being in his own homeland but also his past participation in the liberation war.

It is to be noted that this surveillance in the homeland is a continuation of what Masud has experienced in the host country. For instance, he received an invitation to a suspicious congregation of "like-minded" (10) Muslims in Australia and later it is revealed how Omar's organisation tracked Masud's everyday life there. Parallelly, Mills on the part of the Australian government after learning about this invitation, monitors Masud, follows him to Bangladesh, and interacts with him right from the flight itself by directing inappropriate questions on his allegiances. Despite not attending the congregation, Masud sensed surveillance in Australia that prompted him to even stop attending his phone calls. It is observed that his routine and "inconspicuous life" (16) as a librarian in Melbourne lends him only a semblance of how "the unpredictable and the chaotic seem far away" (17) which however alters after 9/11. This highlights how the experiences for Masud both in the host and home countries are not so disparate after 9/11. Despite sharing the same spaces—Bangladesh and Australia—with both the entities respectively, that is, Omar and his accomplices and the spies/Western representatives, Masud's position is precarious as he is under their scrutiny while each expects him to act in a certain way. The landscape then fractures the foundational aspects of a homeland and endows it as a site of sceptical and capricious intent.

The land is alienated in terms of its material and immaterial dimensions by different factors. This in turn alienates an individual from a space that no longer remains familiar. Masud finds that his homeland has changed beyond recognition: "What was once familiar has gone" (183). With regard to his immigrant status, the alienation of the landscape was an expectation. He shares a complex relationship with his homeland owing to the guilt and trauma from participating in the liberation war. It stimulated a relationship of avoidance, evident in his escape to Australia.

The changes in the homeland are both conspicuous and concealed which are realized by Masud and the readers along the narrative's progress. For instance, Masud likens the landscape seen from the aircraft to that of his formative years and considers that the world "hasn't really changed. Not from where I'm sitting" (8). This bird's eye view also extends to his physical and psychological dislocation from Bangladesh that fails to apprehend the globalization of an event: "These people would not care to know about New York or the twin towers. Afghanistan and Iraq are distant, mythical lands crawling with mechanical monsters and white sahibs. Here instead are flood-ravaged lives and peasants seeking nothing more than meagre meals, shelter and something to wear" (7-8). Here, the apparent insignificance of Bangladesh in the international scene is also insinuated in the episode of Zia's boss from the US having to look up Dhaka's location as the country apparently "doesn't figure in the international scheme of things" (40). This premise is overthrown by the suspicious activities in the homeland after 9/11, of which surveillance is a factor. The changes are overwhelming for Masud: "I'm finding it impossible to adjust to the new reality here" (183). In this context, we argue that his present sense of alienation is a result of not just the typical immigrant experience of prolonged absence from the homeland, but more so due to his disassociation regarding Bangladesh's socio-political re-configurations influenced by global occurrences.

Violence and Uncertainty

The past of Bangladesh is rooted in chaos and conflict following the post-colonial partition and later the cessation from the then undivided Pakistan. The mutability of the landscape is tested again after 9/11, giving rise to a panorama of rising intensity of violence and volatility. This is endorsed by Hannah Arendt's views on the contemporary scene of globalization wherein "every country has become the almost immediate neighbour of every other country, and every man feels the shock of events which take place at the other

end of the globe" (qtd. in Mishra 12). If the visual component is amiss with regards to the tacit changes in rural and remote areas of Bangladesh, the capital city Dhaka appears invested in global politics. The politically-charged atmosphere is sighted in the frequency of public demonstrations and rallies with varying political interests and indulging in burning flags and effigies of foreign ministers. Masud encounters a rally with posters and pictures including that of an overthrown dictator of the Middle-East. He is informed how mullahs sometimes impact the demonstrators and that new parties emerge frequently with "a revolution is always on the agenda" (*Spiral Road* 40), including the one backed by someone to create an Islamic State. It is perceived that the current times do not offer reparation of the political ruins of the homeland, but rather seem to have taken on a new form after 9/11.

Here, though the casualties do not explicitly mirror the losses of visible post-9/11 war operations, the sudden killings or bomb explosions in the capital shows the uncertainty of lives. Violence factors in as a common phenomenon and its coexistence with everyday life appears to be "a condition of living in a politically uncertain country" (102). For instance, the threats and later murder of the journalist Jamal with alleged ties with the CIA, the sudden disappearance of Mills, and the attack on Masud at the airport which results in Omar's death advance the growing front of precarity.

The rising cases of terrorist cells in the homeland conjure a theatre of violence. Judith Butler inquires how in their lookout for the perpetrators of 9/11 and terrorist hotspots globally, the US embarked on a mission to wipe out their sources. Butler questions how such acts, like "the invasion of a sovereign country with a substantial Muslim population, supporting the military regime in Pakistan that actively and violently suppresses free speech, obliterating lives and villages and homes and hospitals, will not foster more adamant and widely disseminated anti-American sentiment and political organizing?" (*Precarious* 8). Here, Omar and his kind embody this out-of-control vicious cycle of violence:

> It's like asking if history finishes. It changes its course often. But does it have a destination? I don't think so. It's given impetus by nations, people and their ambitions to dominate others, enabling it to meander on; as individuals we're like the wheels on which it moves. We'll wear out and drop off at some time, and be

> replaced immediately. Those who finish at a given time are of little consequence (*Spiral Road* 290)

Butler presses on the need for formation of a "global community" (*Precarious* 12) based on shared vulnerability and loss, and that the US missed an opportunity after 9/11 to acknowledge this fundamental tie of interdependency and envision a world where violence is minimized, as its different 'security' measures impacted many within and outside it. Omar's stance of how "the world is more important than my family" (*Spiral Road* 309) might seem to evoke this global community. However, his actions are contradictory to this position denoting a demeanour just like that of the US.

Omar's indication to the name of the road that leads to his terrorist camp—'Spiral Road'—echoes the loop: "victim becomes aggressor in the vengeful and ever widening cycle of a life for a life" (*Spiral Road* 182). This can also be gauged through the dubious agent-victim dynamics of precarity, played out by the west and such rebel outfits: "Have the Americans and, for that matter, the Australian politicians thought seriously about the reasons for terrorism to have spread so alarmingly?" (239). The post-9/11 marks the failure of America to acknowledge mutual uncertainty or to probe into the hysteria of targetting innocent civilians on the pretext of security. In this context, it also sometimes leads the civilians to act against it as in the case of Omar. He then "under a misguided sense of Nationalism" (Chakrabarty 112), and sympathy for those troubled by the West excludes certain geographies and populations in his imagination/vision of a just world, which then happens to be of the West.

The choice of violence by Omar or his companion Amin Haider ensues from confronting a treatment of othering in a different land. Omar's experiences with detention and torture in the post-9/11 America despite his innocence and Haider's experiences of social discrimination even prior to 9/11 in Britain shape their radicalistic ideals. This has resulted in their rejection of the West and combat its power—end white supremacy, secure economic balance globally and justice for Palestine, remove corrupt Middle East regimes, etc., but, above all, restore Muslim dignity (*Spiral Road* 300). However, in doing so, their actions tamper with the stability of their homeland inviting a dangerous future. It is not just their current actions and future plans in Bangladesh but the resultant probable consequences of more foreign interference in it akin to the other identified 'problem' areas after 9/11.

The fact that the utilisation of the forest is mere "modest beginning" (302) for terrorist training cells by Omar's organization only insinuates the grand scheme of things in future. Masud's restriction to the interiors of the training camp also serves as an alarm to the readers of the concealed affairs. Again, in the case of Omar or Haider, their motives are driven not due to devastation of their own homeland but of others that they empathise with. For instance, Omar following his wrongful incarceration in the US develops affinity with places wrecked in the post-9/11 war havocs like Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and so on. Furthermore, it is seen that the terrorist recruits in the camp belong to different nationalities, and their departure post training to "places far away" (306) indicates how other (home)lands would be imperilled apart from the Bangladeshi landscape: "What else can young men, born and bred in refugee camps, know besides anger and violence?" (301). In the novel, Jamal speculates Bangladesh to be in Al Qaeda's design after its presence in neighbouring countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia and thus become another front for America. In this context, this would again push the homeland as well as the US into precarity.

Here, the homeland is precarious also because individuals involved in terrorism lack any identifiable marker and hence, they effortlessly move among common people. For instance, Omar fits into this model—belonging to an affluent family, working as a textile factory owner, and an undercover agent of terrorist motives traversing all spaces conveniently. Similarly, Hamid, a staff member at the Dhaka airport later surfaces as a terrorist and is also likely the attacker of Masud. Again, Masud's brother Zia who works at a pharmaceutical company has associations with former members of Pakistani Inter-Services-Intelligence. He is speculated to be consciously or unknowingly involved in supplying medical aid to the Taliban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan. The fact that units of Omar's organisation are interspersed across the country puts it at risk and adds suspicion to every part of the landscape. Moreover, the lack of a name of the organisation along with the common mien of its members overthrows the conventional image of terrorists and makes their identification difficult: "Get rid of the image that everyone associated with Al Qaeda speaks Arabic or Pashtun or Duric, wears a certain type of clothes, carries a gun and is eager to be a martyr" (157). Their pervasive presence problematizes the homeland and raises questions on how security measures would curb it.

The novel adopts the post-9/11 generalized Western perception of the disillusioned Muslim youth's turn to terrorism or the connection between terrorism and Islam. The effortless geographical othering witnessed in relation to Islamic and Arab nations manifests here: "Bangladesh, of course!... The unknown factor. The majority of the population follows Islam. Isn't it conceivable that there could be terrorist centres here?" (238). The inclusion of Bangladesh against a Middle East territory or other war on terror affected countries like Pakistan and Afghanistan provides insights to new shades of precarity. However, it slips into reinforcing stereotypes both in terms of people and places. Md. Alamgir Hossain in "Islam, Terrorism and Bangladesh: Reading Adib Khan's *Spiral Road*" (2014), says that Khan gives into the Western lens rife with generalizations and stereotypes while engaging with issues such as terrorism and Islamic fundamentalists in Bangladesh.

This also leads us to argue how such literary renditions might establish a stock image of such homelands in the common imagination and therefore supply further grounds for their precarity in a narrative beyond fiction. However, Mirza Sariful Hassan in "Dynamics of Perceptions: A Study of Adib Khan's *Spiral Road* in Post-9/11 Context" (2021), observes how Khan maintains an authenticity by restricting from sweeping generalizations by locating different people with different ideals towards terrorism and shows how terrorist recruitment has been influenced by "injustice and exploitation" (263). It is seen that Khan attempts to create an arc for his characters instead of casually placing them in the post-9/11 frame. Masud here inhabits a middle ground as he dodges involvement with terrorist activities as well as raises concerns regarding US foreign policies otherwise censured within it.

Masud's prior views of his homeland wrestling with an internal crisis is now changed after being privy to its contemporary socio-political currents. In his case, the revelation of the political in the landscape runs parallelly to the domestic, and this domestic is webbed with the political. For instance, he learns about his father's past extra-marital affair and on a different axis of Omar's terrorist agenda and Zia's suspicious affairs. Thus, the distance makes Masud "lonely" (220) thereby inciting a sense of "fragmentation" (*Spiral Road* 170), and an urge to return to Australia. The paranoia that he seemed to have hitherto compartmentalized revisits Masud in new degrees on his return to the homeland. For instance, after returning from Omar's camp, he frequently checks the windows in fear

of its members following him. The trepidation is apparent as he opens an envelope cautiously by making a tiny slit, covering his nose and shaking it over a towel anticipating some hazardous substance. This evokes the Amerithrax episode occurring in the US shortly after 9/11 wherein anthrax-laced letters were mailed to individuals causing sickness and a few deaths. This shows how the paranoia of an event that occurred in a particular landscape spreads to another. While prior to homecoming Masud claims Bangladesh to be "one of the safest of the Islamic countries" (20), and imagines himself as a "prophesier" (17) with respect to his routine life in Australia, are no longer viable in the homeland where things are unpredictable.

Appropriation of Spaces

The precarity of homeland operates in terms of transforming certain spaces into something else. In terms of landscape, the signs of postcolonial crisis and challenges of a developing country manifest here. The ecology of the land laden with constant upheavals compounds the condition of precarity and establishes as its permanent feature: "Has this always been a country of maybes and shadows?" (*Spiral Road* 242). While urbanization and modernization has seeped into the city in terms of infrastructural layout, it also portrays contrasting features of life with large mansions, beggars, clubs, the blasting horns of vehicles, frequent public demonstrations, class hierarchies, and so on. The city of Dhaka is visibly precarious, evinced by the recent episodes of bombings, attacks on people, and the heightened presence of security personnel. Again, the rural landscape is apparently marred by acute poverty, class difference, gender bias, ignorance, lack of amenities, fundamental religious teachings by mullahs, etc. For instance, Alya's plan of building a school in the village is opposed by the mullah who prefers the madrassa or religious teachings. Again, the remotest parts of the country uphold negligence from the state and harbour suspicious activities.

The novel foregrounds how spaces in one's homeland are utilized and transformed by tampering with their essentialist forms. For instance, the interiors of Bangladesh facilitate the requirements for a terrorist training base. Moreover, it is also indicated that the forests of Sundarbans also harbour suspicious dealings. It is insinuated by Omar concerning the fate of those involved in West's speculative mission: "…there's very little dry land there, but your countryman will find signs of human activities…He'll want to go further inland, where there's little daylight among the trees. And then…He may slip and

fall. The mangrove swamps are treacherous. They hide their secrets well" (257). A similar scene is found in Mahajan's *The Association of Small Bombs* that cites the use of forests for a terrorist training camp in Hubli, India.

These spaces echo Pirzadeh's discussion regarding the utilitarian potential of nature based on their role in the context of war and militarism (*Violence*). In Khan's novel, the "virgin forests" (*Spiral Road* 235) lay at risk of getting scoured by the presence of arms and terrorists. The easy penetration and habitat of armed entities in this space blurs borders between the human and the natural environment. Masud claims how he is more worried about the threat to the global environment than the threat to Islam. However, this view fails to take cognizance of how 9/11 has also given way to exploit nature and its resources.

The journey of Masud and Omar takes them deeper into the Hill Tracts with gradual decrease in population and increase of raw natural settings. The landscape on the way to the camp is admired for its untouched and verdant state akin to a "theatre set" (262) which can be read as the facade against what is to follow in its trail. The untapped wilderness located in the border areas of Bangladesh has been leveraged as training bases for terrorists. The remoteness of the camp with no town nearby, "primitive" (119) living conditions, and the compliance of the local ethnically disadvantaged groups due to their strained relationship with the government make it a convenient and advantageous space for this purpose. Akin to operating a terrorist camp in the pretext of running a factory with indigenous workers, in a geographical sense the camp makes use of the more interior site of the forest by situating the factory before it. The co-existence with the natives helps the organisation to "maintain our anonymity" in exchange for "sympathy and promises" (298), otherwise absent from the centre for the former. Thus, the othering of the space and its population in the national context, in this case the indigenous people, causes them to retaliate by siding with the terrorists, which again is instrumental in initiating precarity for the rest of the country.

Again, the cooperation of the police with the terrorist base in exchange for a "price" (262) displays one's partaking in the othering of their own homeland. Moreover, the foreign spies with government support also suffer at work due to the bureaucrats and police who have previously in part deliberately supplied misleading information. Moreover, the claim of the distribution of the terrorist network lends the homeland or other homelands

precarious: “We aren’t located in large numbers in any one place, but we’re everywhere. We’re a presence yet invisible” (307).

The name of the path ‘Spiral Road’ leading to the campsite can be considered indicative of the distorted perspective offered to the rest of the homeland. The place, apart from its tribal inhabitants, is exclusive, and hence Masud’s presence as an ‘outsider’ is heavily guarded. Moreover, his declination to join the terrorist network as a facilitator in Australia positions him as a potential threat upon his return to Dhaka for having learned about the “forbidden place” (306). This results in the death of Omar who saves him from an attack at the Dhaka airport on his way to Dubai. This homeland for Masud is no longer the one he had lived or imagined. With time and circulated reports, even Masud grows to believe that Bangladesh might be involved in politics that plays out beyond its territories. This othering is different from that of Hanif’s portrayal of the homeland in *Red Birds* as here the environment here is (mis)utilised by internal forces, whereas the spaces are demarcated by outsiders in the latter.

The incorporation of Australia fortifies an overarching Western frame that moves away from the hackneyed post-9/11 representations fraught with the US and Europe. Again, the inclusion of Bangladesh against a Middle East territory or other war on terror affected terrains provide insights into newer geographies of precarity. It is seen how different spaces of the homeland act on Masud’s sensibilities. For example, the garlanded image of a turbaned man in the street rally makes him “almost afraid” (39), and how its impact is higher in Bangladesh than in Australia.

Again, the images of war horrors shown to him in the camp elicits a different reaction to what he felt in Australia: “In Melbourne I felt disgusted, even glimpsing such pictures on the TV. But the photographs have a special significance here. It’s as though they have personal meaning, and we each have an obligation to dwell on them, and react” (292). He justifies his absence from his family and the country with his definition of home that is “not a physical location any more. More like several places in the mind” (37). He believes how the “indigenous man and the migrant will never reconcile their differences and live as an entity” (38). Masud is unable to perform “another dislocation,” that is, permanently return to Bangladesh for the fear of “uncertainties” and “further changes” (92). However, the changes pervading the literal and symbolic homeland culminates in the death of Omar which now prompts Masud’s submission: “I’m unable to run anymore”

(362). It can be interpreted how precarity of the landscape ultimately engulfs the individual. Here, precarity in the homeland manifests not just in the contemporary context but also offers inklings of its intensity in future.

III

Sinan Antoon's *The Corpse Washer* (2013)

Sinan Antoon shows how Iraq becomes a homeland that 9/11 has added to its existing body of turbulence. Here, the othering of one's/other's homeland is wrought by a history of conflict, including dictatorship, embargo, the post-9/11 US-led intrusion, and consequent sectarian conflict. Here, precarity is perceptible primarily through the eyes of Jawad Kazim, an artist who is compelled to join the family profession of corpse washing. The homeland here transmutes into a realm saturated with death, devastation, and stagnation.

No Escape from Deathscape(s)

In the novel, post-9/11 Iraq is attributed with a deathscape-like scene. Death is a reality and a universal phenomenon but socio-political and other allied factors bear the potential to tamper with it. The post-9/11 occupation of Iraq led by the US on the pretext of Saddam Hussein's possession of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) conjures new specters of precarity in a homeland that is familiar with prolonged state of instability: "we got ready for wars as if we were welcoming a visitor we knew very well, hoping to make his stay a pleasant one" (Antoon, *Corpse Washer* 61). The dwindling socio-political and economic state of Iraq worsens in this juncture, entering "the stage of total destruction to erase Iraq once and for all" (85).

The consequences of this othering of the homeland are pronounced in the immense casualties of lives. While the advent of the foreign forces incited hope for a prospective future, the homeland is drawn deeper into devastation: "The student is gone and the teacher is here" (72). Here, the washhouse or "mghaysil" can be regarded as the microcosm of Iraq that witnesses the relentless incoming of corpses. Its six-monthly restocking of supplies for the ritualistic washing of the dead is now reduced to once a month: "But death back then was timid and more measured than today" (3). Apart from the participants who are

directly involved in the organized violence, innocent civilians are victims of this bloodshed: "their lives became a currency that was easy to circulate and liquidate" (108). The roads hold sights of tanks, wrecked and burning vehicles, people burying abandoned corpses in makeshift graves, and so on.

The novel exemplifies the homeland reeling under the violence of both foreign and the rebelling domestic bodies. Considering the 'us and them' dynamic that rekindled after 9/11 and the occupation being an enactment of it, Iraq seems to internally contrive it in the form of sectarianism. The civil war culminates in a situation with "corpses piled up like goals scored by death on behalf of rabid teams in a never-ending game" (108). Butler maintains that the body is a social phenomenon and that in order to sustain it must rely on its outside (*Frames* 33). Here, it is apparent how wars demonstrate that our bodies are at risk from external sources.

Apart from being direct victims of violence, there exists possibilities of death owing to robberies, kidnappings, and also to indirect channels like drugs which is now rampant in the decaying environment. The interplay between different agencies factors into the degree of grotesqueness of the corpses at the washhouse which varies relatively to prior times:

> refrigerated truck arrived with the weekly harvest of death: those who were plucked from their families and lives, tossed into the garbage in Baghdad's outskirts, thrown into the river, or rotting in the morgue…a bullet in the forehead, strangulation marks around the neck, knife stabs in the back, mutilation by electric drill, headless body, fragmentation caused by suicide bomb. (Antoon, *Corpse Washer* 131)

While uncertainty in the battleground typically looms over the participants, here it makes no distinction between armed individuals and civilians. Jawad meditates on human intolerance that knows no bounds: "I know that humans can reach a stage of anger and despair in which their lives have no value, and no other life or soul has value either…what is new are the numbers of bodies becoming bombs" (162). Everyday spaces of the homeland are rendered precarious and even one's safe return from the outside remains doubtful. For instance, Hammoudy goes missing under mysterious circumstances on his way to collect supplies for the washhouse. Again, Jawad narrowly escapes from a suicide

bombing while queuing up at the passport office. Likewise, Abu Ghayda is killed owing to a suicide bomber while waiting for registering himself for employment.

This unpredictability linked to the landscape is palpable in the episode of an unalerted explosion by the American Apache on a parked taxi in the highway that claims one life. Moreover, the lack of space to store unclaimed bodies or the refusal of concerned authorities to retrieve this corpse on account of scarcity of required workers display the magnitude of the state of affairs: "If we, the living, are worthless, then what are the dead worth?" (146). Again, the separation between Jawad and Reem occurs due to the latter's battling with cancer. Through her doctor it is revealed that the recent surge in cancer rates in the land is possibly due to the depleted uranium used in the ordnance in 1991. It highlights how long-term effects of warfare also add to the deathscape. The deathscape then is commensurable with both the living entities and the land that is subject to material and symbolic decay. However, deaths occupy significance concerning another dimension in the corrupted environment. The novel cites cases of illegal sale of organs of corpses: "Even the dead are not safe anymore. They are booby trapping corpses now" (116). The war profiteering in this chaos also manifests in the harassment of al-Fartusi, involved in the selfless act of burying unclaimed bodies, with wrongful charges on organ selling in exchange for a bribe.

The specter of terror also renders the individual disenfranchised with respect to the homeland. Their movements are restricted and monitored causing them to be vigilant. For instance, Jawad's mother has to visit her son's grave in Najaf for "one last time" (61) in view of the impending war situation. Again, Jawad and his company are stopped by an American platoon on their way to bury his father in Najaf. They are asked to kneel down at gunpoint and undergo inspection of their bodies, the car, and the coffin. The language barrier also exerts more pressure on the situation and Hammoudy despite not understanding any English could sense: "Looks like these liberators want to humiliate us" (68). They also put up a white flag on their car while returning evocative of how it is them who need to assert their identities and prove themselves harmless in their homeland.

The novel presents how people and places share a symptomatic existence. If the landscape is altered, its impact is reflected on its inhabitants. Apart from deaths, the everyday events of his homeland traumatise Jawad offering no semblance of life: "I felt for the hundredth time what a stranger I'd become in my hometown and how my alienation

had intensified in these last years" (174). He develops insomnia and experiences frequent nightmares, some even recurring, filled with corpses, his dead father, Humvees, armed men, masked men, death personified, speaking and moving statues, and so on: "Death is not content with what it takes from me in my waking hours, it insists on haunting me even in my sleep" (3). The seamless integration between the dream world and real life, the internal and the external, blurs the line between being and dying: "Are we alive or dead, father?" (155). The only available medium of respite, though temporarily, in terms of sleep also therefore lay amiss for Jawad.

The novel also marks the death or the collapse of societal set up. For instance, Jawad's friend is threatened and compelled to leave his home for Syria owing to his son's name Omar that projects them as Sunni: "Can you believe this? These four letters of a name. I just want to tell them, face to face, that I'm supposed to be one of their own. If they want me to change his name, I will, but just leave us alone" (164). It exposes how even arbitrary markers endangers one's life: "men have been slaughtering others and killing themselves for ideas and symbols since time immemorial" (162). The change in societal layout is felt in the rising sectarian divide, such as, the individuals inducted in the new governing council are named along with their religious or sectarian identity in a homeland where they "were not accustomed to" it (92).

Due to the societal disintegration with apparent hostility between sects, Jawad struggles to conform to the altered atmosphere of his homeland: "I had come to a point where I hated everyone equally, Shiites and Sunnis alike. All these words were suffocating me: Shiite, Sunni, Christian, Jew, Mandaean, Yazidi, infidel" (133). His disposition also posits him in an isolated state as he does not feel like associating himself with any group: "I'm all by myself. Neither with you nor with them" (148). In effect, this creates a case of double othering for Jawad, first as an Iraqi for the foreign forces, and second, as a part of the larger landscape and Iraqi cultural mosaic that is othered.

Jawad's frame of mind resembles that of his admired artist Giacometti which unravels another aspect of the relation between art and death. Jawad links the Swiss sculptor and painter's "existentialist attitude toward the emptiness and meaninglessness of life" (41) with him for having spent a life through two world wars. Jawad finds that humans in Giacometti's art "appeared sad and lonely, with no clear features, emerging from the unknown and striding toward it" (42). The statues he sculpted are thin, fragmented and

"always naked" (42) which resonate with the corpses at the washhouse. Akin to him, Jawad's despair arising from everyday realities in his homeland is representative of the suffocation felt by people, in this context, the artist. In the case of Jawad, he is largely distant from artistic creation during this period. Moreover, the narrative offers no optimistic impression for its eventuality with his ultimate submission to the profession of corpse washing.

Iraq, like Afghanistan, represents those spaces that have endured conflict for an extended period of time making it a familiar drill to them: "everyone in Baghdad felt like a stranger in his own country. Most people were drained, and the fatigue was clearly drawn on their faces" (175). The loss of the defining features of their homeland finds expression in the Iraqis who return after a long interval. For instance, Jawad's uncle Sabri who visits Iraq after decades is surprised to be received by an American soldier at the entrance. He notes the lopsided representation of Iraq in national affairs particularly in the presence of three foreign soldiers against only one Iraqi soldier who had no say to one's entry at the border checkpoint with Jordan. Sabri encounters a demand for a bribe by an Iraqi official and notices the security hardly performing any checks on individuals. While America tightened its rules on immigration after 9/11, the opposite is seen to be practiced in this Iraqi border check-post making it potentially "easy it is to enter from other points. Anyone coming now from Syria, Saudi Arabia, or Iran can enter" (85). He further observes how only the name of the entry point is in the stamp on his passport as though "Iraq had been wiped off the map" (86). This gesture is symbolic of the cumulative blows that would effectuate the erasure of material and metaphorical aspects of the homeland.

Infrastructural Othering

While the othering of lives forms a key theme during wars, the text foregrounds the utter disregard for the infrastructural set-up that makes up the homeland. It is exemplified by the vandalism and the control over personal and public spaces and institutions by the American forces in the other's homeland. Similarly, the resultant resistance and sectarian frenzy too contribute in creating a volatile and destructive environment. There have been reports of mobs plundering and pillaging public property, ministries, the national library, and the national museum. The sordid vignettes of Baghdad present itself as a character with gory, threatening, chaotic, and morose features that exhibit the constant blows on it until everything material and immaterial is decimated.

Sabri, for example, observes how Karrada, once the "most beautiful neighbourhood" is now tarnished with a spectacle of "garbage, dust, barbed wires, and tanks" (Antoon, *Corpse Washer* 96). Jawad discerns how scenes of aftermath of a suicide bombing have attained a usual status: "puddles of blood, human remains, scattered shoes and slippers, smoke, and people standing in shock, wiping their tears or covering their faces" (161). The mosques and shrines are attacked while the streets of Baghdad are filled with bumps and craters owing to bombings. In Antoon's *The Baghdad Eucharist* (2017), Jassim highlights the presence of blast walls in the interiors of shelters in Iraq opposed to the dangers to life on the outside (65). The altered landscape of Iraq shocks Sabri: "This is not the Baghdad I'd imagined. Not just in terms of the people. Even the poor palm trees are tired and no one takes care of them" (Antoon, *Corpse Washer* 96). Akin to an upcoming apocalypse where people hoard supplies for sustenance, Jawad's family stores candles and food before the full-blown scene of war. Furthermore, the lack of electricity hinders them in watching the devastation of their land.

The novel displays how violence targets infrastructures—personal and public. These events are direct, deliberate attacks, such as the bombing at the academy and the torching and robbing items of its library. Here, while the bombing is caused by the Americans, the library is destroyed and its air conditioners are stolen by unidentified entities. Jawad likens the bombed building to "a corpse that had been skinned and then had its entrails burnt and its ribs exposed" (Antoon, *Corpse Washer* 74). This is reflective of Golimowska's observation on how "not only the city, its skylines and its buildings often become "anthropomorphized and felt for" in post-9/11 fiction" (*City* 20). It highlights how structures that compose a landscape are beyond their materiality for its people and subject to "emotional reactions and attachments" (20). Mark Wigley comments on the relation between a building and a human body (qtd. in Golimowska 21). According to him, while buildings generally and relatively outlive humans and as such function as witnesses to them and the associations made with it by following generations. In that scenario, any distress caused to a building would imply distressing the entire piece of cultural heritage and the attributed memories (21).

In relation to art, Antoon's novel shows symbolic representations of warfare: "history is a struggle of statues and monuments" (Antoon, *Corpse Washer* 103). The significance of symbolism is rooted in the episode of 9/11 that targeted America's

symbolic structures of "power and commerce, and for capitalism more generally" ("Representing" 1). In the novel, the vandalism of structures, such as the statues indicates the relative impact posed on its people: "Even the statues are too terrified to sleep at night lest they wake up as ruins" (Antoon, *Corpse Washer* 103). The statues are either stolen to be sold or are pulled down "to rewrite history" (103), thus drawing congruities between them and their rivals who erected new statues in their regime.

This othering of spaces induces material and symbolic annihilation of one's past, present, and future embedded in them: "I was surprised that the Americans made no effort to protect public institutions since even occupiers were required to do so by international conventions" (Antoon, *Corpse Washer* 71). The vandalised structures also take the form of collateral damages, such as, Abu Ghayda's shop destroyed in a shelling uproots the family as it happens to be their only source of income. Again, the participation and accountability of the internal forces concerning destruction of their own structures is raised here: "if Iraqis themselves were not protective of their own country and were looting and destroying it, what should one expect strangers to do?" (85). The land turns into a mayhem wherein destruction is a common denominator irrespective of the parties.

The destruction of the homeland which occurs materially dismantles the affective ties attached with it. The blows levied on the homeland estrange the natives: "when will the orchard return to its owners?" (98). There exists fear and trepidation among its local population due to the conspicuous presence of the invading forces. For example, the public spaces taken over by the American forces materialize a sense of othering. It is evident in Jawad's visit to his academy that is met by American soldiers and tanks that direct them to take another route. With regard to the foreign presence in every corner, the Martyr's Monument in Baghdad, designed by Ismail Fattah al-Turk, is turned into barracks for American troops. The sentimental value levied on the monument is thwarted by this act: "a premeditated insult, calculated for its symbolic significance" (95). The visible and intangible reconfigurations incite hopelessness in Jawad. Thus, the compromise with the constituents of one's homeland is seen to push one into an identity crisis.

Stagnation

The homeland here is transmuted into an area of atrophy with no scope for progress. The post-9/11 state of affairs exude stunted growth which is in stark contrast to the references

of its past. Jawad's teacher meditates on Iraq's rich legacy, how it is credited with invention of writing, building the first cities and temples, and being "the first and biggest art workshop in the world" (Antoon, *Corpse Washer* 1). In the contemporary period, prospects are bleak for the Iraqis with the ordinary population caught up in a limbo of uncertainty and sustained hostilities including that of both before and after 9/11. For instance, the embargo following the war over Iraq's occupation of Kuwait dismantled the economy which has intensified in the post-9/11 period. Jawad notes how America's assurances to transform Iraq as Hong Kong is reduced to "chaos and massive unemployment" (102). There exists scarcity of electricity and prolonged dysfunction of telephone operations. The American propaganda of releasing the Iraqis from the clutches of dictatorship is exposed as a sham: "Americans would fix the electricity. How come they've only made things worse?" (83).

The novel cites the menace of drug addiction that has become common especially among the younger sections. The areas are infested with crime such as robberies, kidnappings and killings while curfews are imposed. In addition, the novel hints at how even dead bodies are commercialised for organs with possible links with hospitals as they help in carrying out the necessary procedures for it. The presence of multiple players in this chaos causes confusion with regard to its perpetrators. It is also seen how suffering for one can work out as a prospect for the other. The act of deriving profit from representations is seen in Uzma Aslam Khan's *Thinner Than Skin* (2012), where an American interviewer suggests Nadir, a photographer, to make use of the "dirt" and "misery" (11) of his homeland Pakistan in his work. Jawad observes how the Iraqis who return to the homeland lack any effort on their part to help as they are driven by vested interests, such as bringing in tanks and militias, earning money or availing sensational stories.

The livelihoods of people in the conflict zone suffer in different ways. For instance, the compensation is not yet received for a taxi exploded by the Americans. In Antoon's *The Book of Collateral Damage* (2019), a newspaper article reveals the hierarchy of lives, with the beneficiaries receiving an insurance payout of 400,000 dollars for an American soldier killed on duty while the compensation for an Iraqi civilian amounted to 2,500 dollars (202). In *The Corpse Washer*, the shops are either closed early or not opened at all. Again, Abu Ghayda loses his business owing to an explosion. The potential of Jawad as an artist is wasted due to lack of resources and is compelled to join the washhouse. Let

alone commercialising his art, he is unable to create any during this period. The only semblance of art he indulges is the cleansing of the dead which he carries out in "a semi mechanical way" (58). Here, the art is short-lived, as it vanishes along with their burial. Art refers to creation, as opposed to morbidity that permeates the washhouse, where "death's traces—its scents and memories—were present in every inch of that place" (11). He notes how some of his classmates who "didn't have a fourth of my talent" (99) have turned successful moving abroad years ago. The conversation between Jawad's parents at the advent of US invasion in 2003 exposes the infeasibility of the population for safety and alternate shelter making them passive subscribers to their fate:

> My mother asked Father, "What are we going to do? Are we staying in Baghdad?"
>
> He said: "Where else would we go? If God wants to end our lives, he will do so here. This is not the first war, but I sure hope it will be the last one. Enough." (Antoon, *Corpse Washer* 61)

This inescapability of precarity is maximised in the case of Jawad. His attempts to land a job are unsuccessful in the disorderly climate with the process being "a confounding quest through a labyrinth of checkpoints and walled neighborhoods" (104). In a similar vein, Ghayda gives up her college education owing to the dangers related to her commute and stay. It is also pertinent to observe that Sabri notes the absence of women in the streets. Despite Jawad's persistent efforts to evade the career of a corpse washer and later accept the role connote the lack of alternatives: "I wasn't dealing directly with it with my own hands, death's fingers were crawling everywhere around me. I couldn't shake the notion that death was providing my sustenance" (104). Moreover, his endeavour to move abroad leaving behind his mother fails. His entry to Jordan in order to resurrect his life and career is denied for only families are allowed to cross the border. This insinuates how in order to escape debt the homeland subsumes him in the form of working again in the washhouse that makes him feel like "suffocating and dying" (174). It foregrounds that apart from the landscape that is bereft of potentialities, even the possibility of escaping it is amiss for many.

Here, the homeland is othered as a warzone wherein the ordinary population lacks agency to stop it. It highlights how the post-9/11 US gained impetus to invade and reshape a foreign territory that gave rise to a condition of precarity.

IV

Mohammed Hanif's *Red Birds* (2018)

The precaritised homeland in Hanif's novel is an unnamed post-war desert space. The precarity materializes through the blatant othering of foreign territories by the US, premised on wiping out potential threats akin to post-9/11 operations. The novel follows Major Ellie, an American bombardier, stranded in the desert for eight days after his plane crashes followed by his coming into contact with the refugees of the camp that he initially sets out to annihilate. The othered homeland is suggestive of war detritus that highlights spatial othering, dispossession, and environmental othering. The narrative never explicitly cites the post-9/11 war on terror; the American military presence with "eighteen years of implementing distant wars" (*Red Birds* 6), the war-ravaged Muslim population and the desert topography allude to the same. Sadaf in "Benevolent violence: Bombs, Aid, and Human Rights in Mohammed Hanif's *Red Birds* (2022), based on such available hints suggests that the place is a cross between a Middle East desert and the arid region of Baluchistan (2).

Spatial Othering: Displacement and Dispossession

The homeland here presents itself as a war detritus. It is not only taken over by invaders, but has created micro spaces that clearly distinguish natives from them. The narrative takes place in three distinct spaces: the Desert is a treacherous expanse; the Camp that typifies the insidious consequences of war; and the Hangar is a structure of American omnipotence. In contrast to the architecturally produced spaces, the Desert is a natural and permanent infrastructure, that is at once a marker of identity, "cultural backdrop" (Sadaf 5) for locals and a taxing expanse for outsiders. It acts as a supplement by passively partaking in the war as its treacherous topography causes people and planes to go missing, while also being utilized for war, such as to plant mines. The Hangar is a now abandoned refuelling facility for airplanes and storehouse for artillery used by American forces during war. The Camp houses the war refugees who have been rendered homeless in their own homeland. Given these infrastructural remnants of war signifying the colonizer and the colonized respectively, the othering of the homeland is testified by the continuity of adhering to this power dynamic even in the post-war stage.

Here, the Camp embodies the ravages wrought by war: "God left this place a long time ago" (*Red Birds* 26). It is a "wasteland" (Veyret 126) that "reeks of neglect" and populated by "thieves with tears" (*Red Birds* 20) who now are disenfranchised and at the mercy of foreign aid. The significance of America or USAID in their lives is perceptible in the overall restructuring of the homeland as well as in their daily lives evident in the use of supplied or discarded flask, knife, cap, army uniforms, sleeping bag, etc. For instance, Momo wears a cap with an inscription of "I Heart NY" that indicates the locale of 9/11 which ironically bears the 'justification' of their prevailing crisis. He observes that one needed to possess a ration card and some knowledge of English as the basic skill set to prove their "at least half human" (63) status to the foreigners that ran the Camp.

The glimpses of the homeland before and after war are offered by the dog-narrator Mutt: "I am from the times when there were houses instead of this Camp, when there was no war…" (26). The specters of violence depict the metamorphosis of the land: "Those whistles, those sirens, those blasts, all that whoosh, whoosh… It was terrifying. But later, after everything that could exploded had exploded, there would be calm. And much rubble to jump over, burnt flesh to be sniffed" (28). Tim Cresswell maintains how naming is one of the ways spaces can be given meaning to become place (*Place* 9). Therefore, if we consider the Desert as uninhabited and the Hangar as currently a non-functional apparatus, the Camp that actually hosts people bears the name "USAID Refugee Camp" strips them of their own identity and only suggests the 'humanitarian' ploy of the US. The non-labelling and anonymity of people and place in the novel stand for "shifting, precarious identities and places" (Veyret 121).

The Camp occupies an inferior status in the socio-spatial layout with respect to the Hangar. The novel exhibits no intermingling between the groups unless authorized by the invaders. The fact that it typically did not prefer "foreigners" (*Red Birds* 99) to work inside it foregrounds how natives now occupy the category of 'outsiders.' This is seen in Waldman's *The Submission*, wherein the Afghans are defined as "outsiders" (46) to the foreigners stationed there and the former is restricted to certain spaces, such as the French restaurant resembling "paradise" or the road which would be taken up by the new embassy would be "forever closed" (46-47) to them. In Hanif's novel, soldiers from the Hangar who arrived in the Camp's vicinity in intervals to fetch water from a pond at the edge of the Desert consisted of a convoy of armed vehicles and a water tanker along with

soldiers looking straight "as if nothing on their left or right interested them" (66). The refugees are restricted to the Hangar's premises, a structure in their own land, protected by "miles and miles of razor wire" with signs "IT'S NOT A THOROUGHFARE, INTRUDERS WILL BE SHOT, THIS PROPERTY IS PROTECTED BY GUARD DOGS" (195). The hierarchy is vivid as even in its current non-operational state, the Hangar continues to cast a sense of dread among the refugees. They do not dare to enter it even to check on their young boys who never returned from it. The three-minute alarm that goes off at the Hangar randomly throughout the day reminds the population of its presence: "It is a shrill sound that stuns the morning birds, pierces through every mud wall, stirs everyone in their dreams" (192). In fact, the Hangar or its alarm also functions as a reminder of their dead, their missing people and of their misfortune.

The othering of the homeland finds a voice in Momo's question on the American occupation: "My land. My people. And here they are refusing to go away. What's their excuse to be here? Why can't they just give us our man and take theirs? What do they need that sky high roof for?... They built this place as if it's going to last forever. They think they are going to last forever" (236). Even when Momo and the others stride into the Hangar in search of his brother Ali, their presence is questioned in contrast to Ellie, a foreigner: "My land, my people and now they are telling me I am not an authorized personnel on my own land (164). In the context of 9/11, the edifices such as the Hangar can be seen as corollaries in the mission to substitute its own losses. In a way, the lack of twin towers contributed to erecting new structures in foreign lands.

Wars embody an extreme form of othering which is visible and can carry the division of "us" and "them" for an unspecified period. The narrative offers a critique on the motives and consequences of pre-emptive wars based on potential threats: "if we are not bad Arabs we must be up to something" (70). Hilal meditates on the war on terror that was rooted in "selling a story about good and evil—with Muslims cast as the ill-defined enemy irrationally driven to destroy everything America held dear" (*Innocent* 2). This enabled the then government to indulge in violent means to fight "evil of terror" (2) beyond its borders.

Moreover, even though war is over and its victims housed in the Camp, Colonel Slatter's plan to wipe it is premised on personal grudge. Given that the attack would have come after a long hiatus of warfare, its successful materialization would have left the

clueless refugees into a more miserable state. Despite being an outsider himself, Colonel Slatter alleges the locals to have caused the closure of the Hangar in the latter's homeland—his "boots on the ground" (*Red Birds* 8). Araújo suggests that concepts such as terror and security, usually presented as conflicting, should be seen as contiguous. This contiguity is rooted in the fact that terror requires measures of security. However, on the pretext of security, "much terror can often be created, generated, and promoted in the name of security practices and theories, themselves" (*Transatlantic Fictions* 5). She discusses how the US and its allies have turned "security" into a source of "captivity" (5).

In *Covering Islam* (1981), Said highlights how humans live in "second-hand worlds," that is, "their experience itself is selected by stereotyped meanings and shaped by ready-made interpretations" (68). Again, drawing on Said's concept of 'othering,' for Pirzadeh environmental othering refers to casting the land and spaces of the opponent nations as hostile, threatening and volatile to gain license for invasion and occupation (*Violence* 23). In the novel, Ellie considers Momo to be an Arab in their first meeting, typical of the homogenized lens following 9/11. He represents an American in the post-9/11 period that indulged in a self-educated mess in terms of other's religion, faith, community, language, etc.: "'They call themselves Muslims and still don't speak any Arabic'" (*Red Birds* 139). This is problematic as a land is targeted based on generalizations and without the knowledge of its diverse demography.

Said advances how a group of people living in a piece of land would set up boundaries between their territory and beyond it which they name "the land of the barbarians" (*Orientalism* 54). He refers to it as a universal practice wherein one mentally designates the familiar space as 'ours' and the unfamiliar space beyond it to 'theirs.' Said considers how such practice of creating geographical distinctions can be entirely arbitrary. Moreover, he highlights how this knowledge can exist only in our minds and need not necessarily be known to 'them' and that their territory and their mentality are differentiated from 'ours' (54). In the novel, it is perceived that the intruders have already conjured up an image of the natives before the war. Even after they are stationed in relatively close proximity, that is, in the Hangar, this image of the 'other' continues.

The classroom training modules for the soldiers to deal with specific situations in an alien land, such as 'Significance of Elders in Tribal Cultures' (182), Eat and Drink With the Enemy (125), 'Cultural Sensitivity Towards Animals' (88), 'Suppression of

Inexplicable Urges' (161), 'Sensitivity Towards Religious Rituals' (*Red Birds* 140), etc. sarcastically indicate their hollowness in the real landscape. For instance, the classroom module Cultural Sensitivity that Ellie formerly excels in is exposed to be rooted in stereotypes. Colonel Slatter's views show a lack of sensitivity as refugees are dehumanised, reduced to something discardable, against whom they must be protected: "Get the goat-fuckers but watch out for our own" (8). He offers the extremely prejudiced lens to view the desert 'enemy' to be a goatherd that would sexually assault or slaughter them if lost. This refers to Butler's views on the Bush rhetoric after 9/11 concerning the binary of us and them: "the same binarism that returns us to an anachronistic of "East" and "West" and which, in its sloshy metonymy, returns us to the invidious distinction between civilization (our own) and barbarism (now coded as "Islam" itself)" (*Precarious* 2).

Colonel Slatter's ridicule of the Central Command's ethos of "Oneness" exposes how it remains limited only to their own kind: "here he would cup his balls...How can I believe in Oneness when I have a pair" (*Red Birds* 250). Thus, the plane that Ellie flies carry two 500-pound laser-guided bombs, marked YES and OH YESS, shows the sheer commitment to destroy the Camp, a "hideout for some of the worst human scum" (14). Additionally, the decision concerning the other as enemy and their annihilation is often carried out without absolute evidence: "On your map the house is marked as a compound inhabited by enemy combatants. Now you're up there and you can't tell whether you are about to target enemies plotting an atrocity or innocent civilians waiting for dinner. You have two and a half seconds to make up your mind" (93). Such a reckless and whimsical attitude that sounds like a videogame only indicates the worthlessness of certain lives and exposes the viciousness of wars.

Veyret notes how the description of the Camp resonates Zygmunt Bauman's description of refugee camps as "both enclaves where "wasted lives" are assigned and a place outside the limits of human life" ("Ethical" 124). In order to justify its atrocities, the Camp is fed to the army and the public as a place "where evil festers" (92), and an "existential threat to our great nation" (*Red Birds* 93). The views of Ellie towards the refugees from afar offer a romanticized panorama which seem to justify their roles and actions as utilitarian: "People who had not left their little hamlets for centuries, goat herds who believed in nothing but grassy fields and folk music, women who had never walked beyond the village well, now they could all go and live in UN tents, eat exotic food donated

by USAID and burp after drinking fizzy drinks" (31). However, the classroom training of the army appears redundant to them when exposed to the real landscape. For instance, Ellie's idealized views prior to the mission subverts after witnessing the state of the Camp:

> The top of the gate has something written on it… USAID FUGEE CAMP. The RE seems to have dislodged itself out of embarrassment.
>
> … I have never seen a refugee camp for real, only in pictures and TV news. I expect neat rows of tents, gleaming ambulances, people standing in orderly queues waiting to get their rations from gap year students with dreadlocks and nose rings…
>
> The camp is a sea of corrugated blue plastic roofs, stretching like a low, filthy sky, broken by piles of grey plastic poles and overflowing blue plastic rubbish bins…NO LITTERING signs over piles of litter. This seems like a failing effort to keep some distance between children and the impending plague. This place needed no help from the skies. (*Red Birds* 92)

Golimowska points out that 9/11 differs from 7/7 in London in the context of performativity (*City* 27). On that note then, the spectacle that 9/11 offered is amiss in cases of its aftermath, where the devastations are relatively not publicised or not visible to the public and even to those who are directly involved (such as, the military) in exercising the othering.

Despite encountering the refugees in their wretched state, Ellie continues to unsee how this creation (destruction) has been at their behest: "There's an entire fucking US of A government department to feed them, a five-star Hangar to protect them, all funded by my countrymen, by my taxes, to feed these guys, now where is my food?" (*Red Birds* 78). Ironically, while spending time at the Camp even for a short period he undergoes the feeling of "being treated like a refugee. I feel insulted. I feel homesick" (123). He even draws an incongruous relation between these refugees and the homeless in his homeland: "They also keep telling me that they are proud people. What does that even mean? …I have seen homeless folks back home who were better fed than this lot. And they only asked for loose change, they didn't wave their pride in your face" (178). Ellie, who assumes a

superior status with regards to his country and living standards, finds it difficult to confront the resilience of the Camp. He fails to recognise displacement and dispossession of these refugees have been engineered by his country.

Here, the invaders posit themselves as self-appointed harbingers of independence to people: "We're fighting this war and the previous war and the ones budgeted for next year in order to bring some of these freedoms to the other parts of the world" (161). In this novel, the white man's burden can be located in this neo-colonial phase led by America. The ghost of the Colonel represents the self-proclaimed and constructed roles of the invaders to "to pull this shithole out of the Stone Age" (255). This reflects America's packaging of the war against terrorism by insinuating it as a "moral imperative" for its "supposed superiority" (Hilal 6) with relation to the rest.

Ellie echoes the rationale behind the war as he wonders how it can be "a crime against humanity" (*Red Birds* 142) for just doing his job. While, in contrast to the Camp—a wreck, the Hangar's operational period projects a lavish scenario: "There were people from fifteen countries in there…Daily review meetings. We had twelve thousand gallons in reserve fuel. There were eight types of bread on the buffet. We used to open a new box of brass polish every Friday" (137). In contrast to Ellie's aircraft that costs 65 million, the population in the Camp struggle for basic amenities. Again, the aid given to the war victims is suddenly withdrawn that exacerbates their miseries, evident in the sarcasm: "There have been no air drops for seven months. Bombs stopped falling, auditors stopped coming… There must be other fugee camps. Probably worse off than we are. Actually, if you look at it we are doing OK. They must be very busy people. Probably busy in other parts of the world" (111). Ellie, despite causing the adversities of the refugees by him and his countrymen places their plight on the same axis with that of his struggles in the desert fails to comprehend their resilience. Momo brings to the fore how America deals with its trauma as an exclusive feature, evident in Ellie's behaviour: "An American in pain, God help us. An American in pain is a fucking pain in the ass of this universe" (88). Despite Ellie being saved by Momo, the former's concerns about the lack of "attention" for the "near-death experiences" and the "sacrifices"—all self-inflicted—undergoing the treatment like "an unwanted hitchhiker" (89), expose the hubris, evocative of the post-9/11 America.

The power balance in the novel is lopsided akin to the real world as Americans have the privilege of starting a global campaign after 9/11 on the pretext of eradicating

terrorist bases in foreign territories. On the other hand, ordinary populations in those places are left without any defence, agency or resources and often end up as collateral damages. Momo exposes this uneven balance in this power dynamics: "They had planes in the sky, tanks in the Hangar, guard dogs on chains, what did we have? How can you even compare?" (152). For instance, Momo's house that was built with aid is again destroyed by the soldiers presumed to draw away suspicions over Bro Ali's working at the Hangar. Furthermore, it is implied that the natives are without any support from their government, further bolstered by the remoteness of the place. For instance, Momo dares Ellie that his underage driving can be charged only "if the police can find this place on their map" (182). The homeland is geographically as well as socio-politically in the fringes. It highlights how even the invaders would refrain from attacking it: "There is nothing to destroy here, nothing to be saved…No decent country takes these people into consideration when drawing up next year's war plans. If they are searching for me, they are likely to search for me in the desert. Or invade a country far far away. Here, even the next plane carrying tinned food doesn't arrive" (177-78).

The novel from the perspective of multiple narrators portrays that the cost of 'othering' is borne by both parties. The homeland here consists of ghosts and hence doubts arise over one's appearance. For instance, Ellie's character is a ghost, given the impracticality of surviving the plane crash and sustaining eight days in the desert, Mutt not sensing any smell on him, and the boys finding a charred corpse with his nametag. This is evident also in the larger environment and particularly the haunted space of the Hangar now populated with the ghosts of the dead and missing soldiers and natives. Just like the Hangar or the Camp, they can be attributed as war detritus, the remnants of the dead and missing and their memories. Moreover, the presence of red birds which are not visible to everybody in the landscape is evocative of the grief or memories of the dead or lost individuals: "When someone dies in a raid or shooting or when someone's throat is slit, their last drop of blood transforms into a tiny red bird…a reminder that they may have gone but they haven't really left yet" (84).

The play between life and non-life apparent in the co-existence of ghosts and humans is also indicative of the landscape that has paralleled their status. Moreover, the presence of ghosts or their memories in the form of red birds highlight precarity that does not offer liberation to any. The ghosts of the army seem to indicate that the Central

Command has probably abandoned its representatives and reduced them to "slashed budgets" (255). The Hangar's aura is then, as Ellie observes, a ploy in order to perpetuate an illusion among people that they are still around: "Central Command keep up the pretence that we are still around, still on duty, still serving God and country. So, these hubs are kept alive, with rotations, rations, pending leaves, a perfect façade" (255). They all remain suspended in the landscape which lends an after-death-like scene.

Othering of the Environment

The novel offers an insight into how wars cast their impacts on non-human entities which are often labelled as collateral damages. For instance, Shaila Abdullah's *Saffron Dreams* (2009), mentions the sediment of ash and dust from the destroyed twin towers on the Hudson riverbed. Akin to innocent civilians confronting the devastations of war, the environment including the non-human animals too come under the sway of militaristic operations. Such acts again cannot be always considered as side-effects. In the Vietnam war, the US forces used defoliants such as Agent Orange that caused massive deforestation that affected humans as well as other species (Aspen Institute). The attacks on larger landscapes do not distinguish one target from another, apparent in the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In *Ecoprecarity* the eponymous word indicates Anthropocene as a factor in rendering the environment precarious (Nayar 18). *The Baghdad Eucharist* cites the massive cutting and burning of trees in Iraq by Americans for facilitating visibility of snipers. In *The Watch,* the American lieutenant observes the Taliban's hunting of the gray wolf with Kalashnikovs has made their sight a rarity. In *The Corpse Washer,* akin to the surge in cancer in Iraq, the fish is not fit to be consumed owing to pollution in the river with depleted uranium and untreated sewage. This can be alluded to Nayar's concept of ecoprecarity which involves the invasion or violation of bodies by foreign elements/entities, in this case, toxic substances.

In the novel, the dog Mutt is one of the narrators and his reflections on warfare imply how lives of other species are equally significant. His memory lends an insight into the arrival of precarity in the landscape and the resultant lowly status of animals in the "war for the sake of war" (*Red Birds* 32):

> I have lost many of my own comrades, some in the bombings, some while trying to rescue their human companions after those bombings, others have perished in

> horrible diseases that spread after the bombings. Do we ever ask for any medals? Do we have roads named after us? Do you really believe we all deserve to die a dog's death? (*Red Birds* 101)

The hypocrisy on the part of the army is evident as the planes would drop slabs of salt, just like the aid for refugees, a supposedly "humanitarian plot" (30) to help the animals from diseases arising out of rotting human flesh.

The incident is again later juxtaposed with Mother Dear preparing food without salt, now a luxury for them. In her article, Sadaf discusses the case of salt droppings in the military parlance, how a salted weapon is made of non-radioactive materials that can cast its effects over larger spaces. She adds how despite no evidence of such cases, there exists the temptation to use it. She cites the case of Lord Gilbert, a UK Labour defence minister, who suggested dropping a neutron bomb on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border to root out terrorism ("Benevolent Violence" 11). The state of the Anthropocene is highlighted by the Doctor who observes that the human race "has turned raging oceans into deserts and deserts into wastelands" (*Red Birds* 156).

The novel also hardly captures any portrayal of greenery, and instead features contaminated water and skies marked by spectres of terror: "When you live here you learn to survey the skies without thinking, because here things fall from skies" (*Red Birds* 81). Even the desert comes under the sway of warfare. For instance, Ellie spots a big crater while wandering in the desert and claims it to be either a dried-up natural reservoir or the outcome of a thousand-pound bomb. Again, he considers a mud hut to be either a camel stop of the nomads or a former military barrack. Nizam in Roy-Bhattacharya's *The Watch* notes how everything including the vegetation and trees in the stretch of land leading up to the American camp has been levelled. It has resulted in a lack of shade and the greenery is replaced by the boot prints of soldiers and tracks of vehicles. In Hanif's novel, the desert becomes another volatile space with Americans planting mines or is reduced to a site for foraging scrap materials left behind during the warfare.

Claudia Card in "Environmental Atrocities and Non-Sentient Life" (2004), opines how "some of the worst damage culpably inflicted by human agents has been to the natural environment" (25). Pirzadeh contextualizes Butler's notion of precarity how certain forms of grief are validated and amplified whereas other losses are not recognised and therefore

rendered ungrievable to the environment, as "natural spaces are denied their right to Being, rendered into inanimate zones and declared essentially ungrievable" (*Violence* 11). Hence, if human lives are hierarchized, it only indicates the lack of protection and accountability towards these non-human entities.

Play of Opportunities

The novel exhibits how in "rearranging the geography of some poor country" (*Red Birds* 260-61) opportunities are seized, withdrawn, created or sold. In fact, the post-war bombing planned on the Camp is an opportunity that exposes the unethical and unaccountable use of power. Colonel Slatter who first embarked on the bombing mission had suggested Ellie to use the chance to uplift his career profile: "There is a war on and what is a war if not an opportunity, an opportunity to make up those extra points" (6). In a similar way, Ellie's interaction with the Camp and he being an agent of its dilapidation evokes no compassion. He sees it as a potential business venture: "And although I couldn't give a rat's ass about people before ending up in this shithole… I had started to sense the possibility of a post-retirement career in the parallel universe called International Relief." (198). It is also noticeable how he takes up projects in order to escape conflicts with his wife: "Sometimes a distant war is the only way to resolve domestic disputes" (165).

Again, the humanitarian efforts are revealed to be a sham. Ellie exposes the war timeline by observing how wars adhere to the pattern of "carpet-bombing followed by dry rations and craft classes for the refugees" (32). Momo notes how the "international-aid types…do-gooders" are the "biggest thieves of all" (13), who would pocket the money sanctioned for the Camp. For instance, there is a crater, steel poles and a shack for a water reservoir, electricity, and school respectively that never materialized. Again, while the war uproots lives, on the other hand, the refugees end up as case studies. They have lost their homes in the war and are now rehabilitated by USAID, an organisation of the country that invaded their land in the first place. However, they are left with no aid for seven months: "Even our conquerors have abandoned us" (55). This can be paralleled with the recent withdrawal of American forces and their aid in Afghanistan before the Taliban takeover, leading to a "sense of abandonment felt by the Afghan people" (Sadaf 3).

Lady Flowerbody, a Coordinating Officer for the Families Rehabilitation Programme, is representative of the absurdity of USAID. These researchers

are sent to assess psychological impacts on the population: "You mean to say that there is one department that picks them up and then another department that is sent out to make us forget them?" (*Red Birds* 47-48). Mutt comments on the cycle of war that is reduced to avenues of creating business: "Global security is nothing but social engineering through job creation" (231). Lady Flowerbody intends to study the teenage Muslim mind and "use this community as a laboratory for testing my hypothesis about how our collective memories are actually our cultural capital…" (44). Ironically, the circumstances of the homeland become a source of income for Lady Flowerbody: "I get PTSD, she gets a per diem in US dollars" (68).

The hypocrisy is evident in the support provided by the invaders after the war: "they bombed us and then sent us well-educated people to look into our mental health needs. There were workshops called 'Living With Trauma' for parents, there was a survey about 'Traditional Cures in a Time of Distress and Disorder'" (44). Momo's question on Lady Flowerbody's endeavours highlight the set-up: "War is business, no? Or is there more business after war? The business you are in?" (152). While the Camp shows no hope, Ellie's views concerning his participation and Lady Flowerbody's role uphold the solipsist attitude:

> If I didn't bomb some place, how would she save that place? If I didn't rain fire from the skies, who would need her to douse that fire on the ground? Why would you need somebody to throw blankets on burning babies if there were no burning babies? If I didn't take out homes, who would provide shelter? If I didn't take out homes who would need shelter? If I didn't obliterate cities, how would you get to set up refugee camps? Where would all the world's empathy go? … If I stop wearing this uniform and quit my job, the world's sympathy machine will grind to a halt … You need fireworks to ignite human imagination. (*Red Birds* 201)

In this context, the concept of just war can be approached. Rooted in the philosophies of figures such as Aquinas and Augustine, just war refers to a military activity that has "a just cause and fought within specified normative constraints" (Brooks 2). The two normative conditions that are usually employed to gauge a war as just are "jus ad bellum" (1), that is, the justification of engaging in war, and "jus in bello" (2), that is, the justice arising within war. In the novel, the motives behind the bombing then renders the whole proposition of just war hollow. Here, Colonel Slatter suggests how bombing the camp

might be framed as a "happy mistake" (*Red Birds* 14), thereby raising ethical concerns over targeting people based on stereotypes.

The lack of opportunities for the refugees is evident in their deplorable state. It is seen that the residents of Camp are without any actual employment. For instance, the doctor in the Camp was a farmer who has developed his skills by "trial and error" (15). Father Dear used to work as a part of the Supplies and Logistics department of the Hangar, basically a "pretend job" (108). He states the difficulties of presenting an alternate picture for children who have seen nothing but war. Their former traditional way of living is affected drastically, evident in Father Dear's rumination:

> We have been fugees for such a long time that it's difficult to tell today's kids that we were not always fugees. We were like normal people. We were nomads. We had goats and buffaloes and we followed the rains and stored our own grain in our own stores. We were becoming better, we built houses with flushing toilets, we bought tea sets and sofa sets and we bought electric fans because electricity was about to arrive, and it did come for a few seconds, and we all remember those few moments and are waiting for it to return. Now it's all gone – the house, the job… (*Red Birds* 110)

The existing environment is a degenerative one as people are left without prospects. They are drunks and concubines, "men pimping their wives for half a bottle of moonshine, wives smashing those same bottles on their buyers' heads and then everyone threatening everyone else with hellfire" (27). Momo shows how the place is infested with thieves who steal even the boundary wall. The children are exposed to the miserable condition early on in their lives: "You can't be a child in this place for long…you are expected to grow up fast" (15). They are accustomed to the spectacle of violence and therefore find it difficult to consider the alternatives.

Hence, when Bro Ali expresses the desire to explore the world, Momo finds it difficult to relate as his world is limited: "What does he wanna see the world for? It's the same everywhere. Mothers, fathers, junk shops, schools, Hangars" (40). It is seen how Momo or the other young boys are seen to be driving around without supervision. Momo spends his time without proper objective while his familiarity with terms like PTSD or the studies such as 'Growing Pains in Conflict Zones,' 'Tribal Cultures Get IT,' 'Reiki

For War Survivors' (67) since he was eleven, highlights the impacts of growing up in a conflict zone. Momo's school is now a shelter for buffaloes while he now indulges in ideas like Falcons for Ethical Hunting and Sands Global, a parody to Western business projects. It is only through Cathy, Ellie's wife, that we receive a form of critique against the hypocrisy of such war operations:

> think of the children, they say, think of all the starving children, dying children in the world, and thinking of the children they go and drop tons of bombs on some godforsaken place and then come home and need some 'me time'. They start a war and after a few millions have died then suddenly they remember the young ones. Think of children, they say. All the wars in the world are an afterthought about dead children. (*Red Birds* 260)

This depiction suggests that the rationale, the means, and the aftermath of wars lie in absurdity. The novel contours how in the absence of prospects, the only possible form of available opportunity is also proved to be precarious. Though the Hangar is representative of the power that uprooted their lives, they do not have any other prospects except to join their invaders: "When you are pushed to the wall you have to go to war because there's nowhere else to go" (19). In a way, the otherized participate in their own destruction. The narrative shows how local youth are recruited by the Hangar but many of those boys have gone missing including Bro Ali.

The precarity here is such that there exists no scope for the family even to initiate an inquiry for the missing, be it in the formerly operational or now defunct state of the Hangar. For instance, earlier a teenager inquiring about his lost brother to the soldiers from the Hangar is killed. Bro Ali joined the Hangar thinking he could make a difference for his people while Mother Dear allowed him to do so, considering it a safer option than moving around in the open spaces that the army targets: "A proper job in the middle of the war, a job that didn't involve fighting. I swear I thought he'd be safer in the Hangar. They had the guns and the alarms and could decide where to throw bombs. He would be better off, I thought, after a bomb came through our own roof" (218). Though we do not learn about the missing boys, Bro Ali's ghost insinuates a similar predicament for others.

Bro Ali's ghost offers a glimpse of the resultant predicament of resisting against the precarity of his people by attempting to manipulate the technicalities of aircrafts: "It

was human error. I only fiddled with some frequencies. And they came tumbling down" (191). His presumed death exposes us to the price he paid for it. Sadaf in her article rests on the Pakistani military's role in working with America's anti-terrorism operation. She observes Pakistan's history with forced disappearances of civilians and based on former Prime Minister Parvez Musharraf's account links them in the current scenario to post-9/11 America's pressure and economic incentives ("Benevolent" 2). Musharraf mentions the prize money Pakistan received in exchange for supplying suspected terrorists to the CIA (qtd. in Sadaf 2).

The novel delivers a resistance to this precarity in the form of Momo's family charging into the forbidden space—Hangar—to bring back Bro Ali. However, it shows how they too are prepared to resort to violence in order to claim their lost son. The preparation of Mother Dear by carrying a machete hints at the lack of alternative than to fight the occupants of the Hangar: "In the process of trying to eliminate the other you become the other" (*Red Birds* 253). The novel exhibits the extremities meted out to a homeland and shows no resolution of precarity. The questions on one's living or dead status or the co-existence of ghosts with the living foregrounds the othering of this homeland.

V

Conclusion

The chapter illustrates precarity of lives which extends to geographies that are rendered vulnerable owing to socio-political dimensions. It shows how othering of places occurs with regards to the population it hosts. In relation to 9/11, it is seen that this othering is fostered by external agents over the homelands of others, as well as by internal forces to retaliate against this othering. The chapter highlights such othering makes no distinction between the targeted individuals/groups and innocent civilians as they mostly share the same spaces. In some cases, this co-existence also operates as a pretext to sabotage such all-encompassing geographies.

Since, the associations shared by an individual with their homeland vary from person to person, its changes or losses are viewed differently and therefore if grieved, manifests in different ways. While Antoon's narrative exhibits the horrors of othering a

land awash with incremental suffering by both internal and external forces, Hanif's novel shows how the land is already inordinately ravaged even as post-war one-sided attacks are attempted. Khan's novel, however, depicts the incoming of the 9/11 winds to an already unstable land, and provides inklings of the arrival of a more uncertain phase. The historical/colonial/post-war frames associated with these geographies produce new precarities in the wake of 9/11 that operate as a condition and a consequence or both. The conflicts in these geographies retrograde the wellbeing of its population and other species. They offer no scope or hope for healing or resolution of the precarity and any attempt to escape it is proved futile in most cases. Moreover, while the discussed landscapes are representative of the 9/11 (dis)order, there exists 'others,' impacted in diverse ways. The landscapes navigate the impacts of a localized event, that is, September 11, 2001 with potential to continue across spaces and time. The study is not just limited to representation of post-9/11 spaces, but is also a template to explore the post-9/11 period altogether in a new light.