CHAPTER THREE

‘HOW COULD YOU BE DEAD IF YOU DID NOT EXIST?’: THE PRECARIAT OTHERIZED ABROAD

I

In the wake of 9/11, the discourse around outsiders and immigrants dominated a major part of the political landscape. The 'outsider' and 'insider' dynamic was stirred particularly in the US. This chapter aims to analyze and understand the precaritization of the immigrant/outsider both in the aftermath of 9/11 and in terms of what is a long-standing shadow of the event.

The chapter is centered on the following objectives

i) To examine precarity stemming from the positions allocated to/assumed by immigrants;
ii) To explore the discriminatory treatment of immigrant victims and their families against the 'insiders' in view of a common source of loss and grief; and
iii) To study the formation and struggles of the precariat in the wake of 9/11.

The chapter develops around following hypothesis

i) That precarity is a defining feature of immigrants and 9/11 only amplified it, and that the country of birth determines the treatment one receives.

The chapter will pursue the following research question

i) What kind of precarity is generated for and by the immigrant 'other'?
ii) How do illegal immigrants face double precaritization?

Review of Literature

Historically, the US has been a major destination for immigrants from across the globe. According to the statistics offered by the American Community Survey (ACS), approximately 47.8 million immigrants resided in the US as of 2023, comprising 14.3% of its total population (Batalova). Again, the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) shows immigrants and their US-born children accounted for more than 93 million in 2024. The MPI estimated that there were around 13.7 million unauthorized immigrants in the US in mid-2023. The numerous enclaves (such as Chinatown in San Francisco, Little Ethiopia in Washington, Little Bangladesh in California, etc.), built around ethnicities or nationalities scattered all over the country stand testament to the substantial immigrant

presence on American soil. Hence, in the contemporary scene, the global attention behind the US presidential election is also due to the immigration politics and policies to be reconfigured by the elected candidate.

The concept of the American Dream is significant in understanding the inflow of immigrants to America. Adams' *The Epic of America* (1931), discusses the lucrative image of America that magnetizes people across nations. America and its values embody opportunities to rise above by sheer dint of hard work and effort as it has always been seen as the "land of promise" (204). The pursuit of the American dream also infers that the future in both individual and social realms can be improved (10). While time and again, the dream has been explored in literature, post-9/11 narratives offer a site to contest this idea and expose its futility especially for the immigrant others.

Laila Lalami in her non-fictional account *Conditional Citizens: On Belonging in America* (2020), sees human beings as a "migratory species" (60), and refers to the story of humanity as fundamentally a story of migration. One of the objectives enshrined in the preamble of the US Constitution is to "secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity." The Statue of Liberty is a US icon that symbolizes freedom and justice. Even on the very day of the 9/11 attacks, President Bush's address to the nation cited that it was targeted because "we're the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world" (Bush, 2001). However, in its aftermath, the sense of liberty and justice lay in abstraction for many immigrant communities, particularly the American Arab and Muslims who for some Americans came to be perceived as "dangerous outsiders" (Bayoumi, *Problem* 3).

Places are distinguished because of demarcations and borders. In this sense, the contents within those borders, that is, the population, are invariably categorized based on their place of origin, which may or may not be their birthplace. For instance, a third-generation Indian immigrant abroad would be likely viewed, in part or whole, to be of Indian origins. The physical features of individuals belonging to specific geographical or ethnic positionings become an obvious indicator of their categorization. In fact, the disclosure of the 9/11 attackers' origins—nation, religion, ethnicity—transpired in a binary of "us and them," the former assumed by the wounded West, typically the white Americans, while the latter pertained to "suspect communities," terrorist entities or nations that apparently harboured them. It came to be seen how individuals sharing similar physical, geographical, religious, socio-cultural, ethnical, and linguistic facets with the

9/11 perpetrators also came under the umbrella of "them." It has been found that while immigrant communities experienced discrimination prior to 9/11, hate-crimes were rampant after 9/11 with Muslim, Arab, and South Asian communities as its primary targets (Nguyen xxii). Hence, it is seen how Sikhs, and the Indian or Bangladeshi Muslims, among others, in the US also found themselves in precarious positions as deliberate or mistaken targets. The genre of diasporic literature already taps into the distance between one's geographical roots or home country and the host country. 9/11 offers an avenue to examine the precarity associated with such displacement of the 'outsider' in the host country wherein they mostly occupy secondary and liminal positions. Here, othering range from verbal abuse to physical reparations, surveillance to unaccountable dismissal from jobs, interrogations at public places to indefinite detention following 9/11. In Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), the protagonist Changez retreats to Pakistan owing to his subjection to suspicion at his workplace and in public, and his disapproval of America's foreign policies after 9/11. Marina Budhos' *Ask Me No Questions* (2007), projects how the otherwise invisible lives of a Bangladeshi immigrant family on expired visas in the US are suddenly under spotlight due to the changes in immigration policies in the wake of 9/11.

Similarly, in Joseph O'Neill's *Netherland* (2008), the wife of the Dutch immigrant-protagonist leaves the post-9/11 New York due to anxieties in the "city gone mad" (25) to be at home in a "probably safer" (28) London, especially for the sake of their son and followed by the latter. Dave Eggers' non-fictional book *Zeitoun* (2009), shows the eponymous Syrian-born protagonist who helps his town people during Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans is later wrongly charged with terrorist activities and detained for several days without his family's knowledge. Naqvi's *Home Boy* (2009), casts three Pakistani-origin men who called themselves "Metrostanis" treated as potential terrorists and subject to detention for different time periods in the post-9/11 hypervigilant America. In Shaila Abdullah's *Saffron Dreams* (2009), a Pakistani 9/11 immigrant widow in the US struggles with her husband's absence and the Islamophobic episodes. In Khan's *Spiral Road*, Omar's wrongful incarceration and inhumane treatment in the US and its violence over foreign territories turn him towards terrorist indulgences in his home-country Bangladesh. Ayad Akhtar's *Homeland Elegies* (2020), advances the complexities concerning questions on identity, belonging, and home for a Muslim, especially in the post-9/11 changing socio-political atmosphere of America. In Jabeen Akhtar's *Welcome to Americastan* (2011), the Pakistani-American protagonist Samira's attempt to run her car over her ex-fiancé due to

personal grievances is construed differently. She ends up in the FBI's terror watch-list and consequently fired from her job. According to Hilal, the Terror Watchlist which emerged from an immigration related counterterrorism means initiated after 9/11 called the Terrorist Screening Center (TSC) is problematic, among other reasons, as it lacks transparency concerning who and why someone is listed there (*Innocent* 84).

Lalami notes how her stay as an immigrant-turned-citizen has been "in most ways happy and fulfilling" (*Conditional* 9), but never on complete terms. The modalities of immigration, ethnicity, race, and gender make her a "conditional citizen" (9). She defines conditional citizens as those who at the behest of the state are punished and policed more harshly, denied of the same electoral representation as others, more likely to be expatriated or denaturalized, surveilled more closely, people whose rights are found expendable in seeking white supremacy, and so on. The primary texts discussed in this chapter depict the immigrant lives that are not at par with their white counterparts.

While Hilal's *Innocent Until Proven Muslim: Islamophobia, The War on Terror, and The Muslim Experience Since 9/11*, helped in assessing the war on terror abroad in the previous chapter, here it is relevant to examine it on the domestic front. She dwells on the unfavourable climate for "suspect communities" in the US due to institutionalised Islamophobia that surfaced in post-9/11 politics and policies. The formation of initiatives such as Department of Homeland Security or implementation of acts such as USA PATRIOT or "Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism" to tackle terrorism—a domestic war on terror—provided a stringent environment for the other.

The concept of panopticon is instrumental in understanding the post-9/11 American socio-political set-up. Based on Bentham's design of an enclosed space inhabited by subjects with central watching entity/entities, the panoptic schema ensures order as the invisible surveillant force compels the inhabitants to be in their best conduct at all times. According to Bentham's view, power is guided by the principles of visibility and unverifiability which is ensured in the hierarchical relation between the inspector and the inmates. Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* (1975), views that the major effect of the panoptic schema is "to induce in the inmate a state of consciousness and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (226). He observes how the mechanisms of power continue to be "disposed around the abnormal individual, to brand

him and to alter him" (199), based on the forms of treatment given to the leper and plague victims. According to him, the architectural panopticon resembles this composition. After 9/11, the US witnessed a panopticon-like socio-political set-up wherein "suspect groups" were monitored not only by authorities but also the general public. However, it also shows how branding of the scrutinised subject denotes a process of othering while the question of their alteration never arises as one's origins, which make them suspects, are not alterable.

While dealing with the issue of immigrants and their relationship with the host country after 9/11, the concept of hospitality is relevant. In Kant's *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch* (1795), he presents an ideal scenario of state affairs that ensures reign of perpetual peace among different states. In this context, Kant taps the notion of world citizenship, wherein "the rights of men, as citizens of the world, shall be limited to the conditions of universal hospitality" (137). According to him, hospitality refers to the claim made by a stranger entering a foreign territory to not be treated with hostility by its owners. He claims how the right to visitation should be vested in everyone and that if they conduct themselves peacefully, they shouldn't be treated inimically. Kant evokes the idea of cosmopolitanism. The term signifies the concept of global citizenship, that is, all people are citizens of this world and hence they bear mutual responsibility for one another (Guglielmone 1). However, the terms for perpetual peace among states is conditional for Kant, that is, it is reserved for visitation purposes only. While discussing hospitality, a glance at the current world order displays how lives are differentially valued. For instance, an American passport-holder's suspicious death in a foreign territory, especially in a third world country, is mostly treated with utmost urgency. However, the same cannot be expected if roles are reversed.

The understanding of globalization and the formation of the precariat is central to the discussion on immigrants abroad. Standing's *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (2011), contributes to the analysis of this category. Apart from the domestic precariat, immigrants form a large section of the global precariat being its "light infantry" (113). In a related context, Appadurai's article titled "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy" (1990), helps with the workings of a globalized world. The five "disjunctures"—ideoscapes, technoscapes, ethnoscapes, finanscapes and mediascapes (Appadurai 6-7), corresponding to the respective domains highlight the innards of the

globalized system. The post-9/11 period saw their entanglement, one shaping the other and assisting in the creation of narratives.

The three primary texts chosen for study in this chapter are: Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land* (2007), Amy Waldman's *The Submission* (2011), and Laila Lalami's *The Other Americans* (2019). Set in post-9/11 America, these narratives engage with the different kinds of precarity one endures in a land different from that of their origins, one that was chosen deliberately in this context.

II

Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land* (2007)

Laila Halaby's novel follows a Jordanian couple caught up in the post-9/11 nationalistic fervour. The seemingly successful trajectory by American and immigrant standards with Salwa, who works at the bank and is a part-time real estate agent and her husband, Jassim, a hydrologist at a water firm in Tucson, Arizona in the US, is overthrown. Their regular lives are propelled under the radar of post-9/11 hypervisibility. The precarity here can be analysed in terms of the post-9/11 nationalism and the resultant effect in the professional domain.

Dangerous Nation(alism)

In the wake of 9/11, the US indulged in a heightened sense of nationalism that impacted lives differently. In terms of immigrants, especially those belonging to "suspect communities," the scope of this nationalism often interfered with their personal and professional spheres. The post-9/11 novels set in the US, especially in New York, present the position of the immigrant suddenly brought into the politically-loaded milieu. For instance, in *Home Boy*, the familiar spaces of New York turn volatile for three Pakistani-origin men after 9/11. In Halaby's novel, the idealism of Jassim concerning their safety for their geographically distant location of Arizona from the Ground Zero of 9/11 is thwarted. While Salwa anticipates the repercussions on immigrants from Arab and Islamic nations, Jassim's optimism as "nothing to worry about" (*Promised Dream* 21), echoes his naivety rooted in his hitherto 'secured' standing. In a way, the challenges in their lives also owe to the unexpectedness and unpreparedness towards the consequences of 9/11 to engulf them. This connotes the nationalization of the event as they are now seen only in respect to their

otherness, as Arabs. Moreover, despite Salwa being an American citizen by birth, her position is eclipsed by her appearance. The introduction of the novel meditates on the sudden exposure of their roots owing to a distant yet national event:

> We have come to know them only after the World Trade Center buildings have been flattened by planes flown by Arabs, by Muslims. Salwa and Jassim are both Arabs. Both Muslims. But of course they have nothing to do with what happened to the World Trade Center.
>
> Nothing and everything. (*Promised Dream* vii-viii)

Their Jordanian backgrounds draw attention in the public in a detrimental way: "everything Arab was newsworthy" (71). It is seen how Jassim's initial reservations about Randa's fear of people hurting her family due to their Lebanese origins is quelled by the news of a hate crime on a Sikh. This episode highlights how the other encompasses different subgroups, however due to a homogenous lens, apart from the directly targeted, the other subgroups in that lot also indiscriminately face the same belligerence directed towards the former.

The economic standing of Salwa and Jassim in the US echoes the American Dream. The opening of the narrative with Jassim waking up to an alarm for his swimming session denotes a routine life. Their adoption of a typical American lifestyle however does not gain reciprocity in the post-9/11 landscape. For instance, Jassim's movements at a mall are regarded as suspicious, deemed a threat, and reported to the security by an employee. This employee finds that his mere gaze at a motorcycle on a pedestal "creeped me out" (31): "He was standing here and staring too long…It was weird" (30). This is steered by the fear-laden atmosphere following the 9/11 crisis. Jassim for his Arab features becomes an obvious target based on the stereotypical association drawn for people with similar physicality akin to the national and ethnic markers of the 9/11 attackers. Such instances can induce fear and humiliation in individuals as their public presences not only come under scrutiny but are likely to be misapprehended and acted upon. In *Conditional Citizens*, the writer notes how in public places, particularly those that are considered elite, the white presence remains ordinary and invisible in contrast to non-whites who not only exude visibility but are also monitored (Lalami 90). This is especially daunting given the

risk of policies such as infinite detention of suspicious individuals that has reportedly affected innocents enormously.

Surveillance constitutes a security measure in the US both at individual and institutional levels with immigrants being primarily susceptible to it. Jassim and Salwa become subjects to surveillance without their knowledge. Jassim is monitored by his colleague Bella and is later reported to the FBI. Similarly, Jack Franks, a retired US marine, pries into their lives and informs the FBI regarding Jassim's 'suspicious' activities. Jack views the contemporary scene as "scary times" and is driven by the need to participate in the protection of his country: "The president said that specifically, that it is our job to be on the alert for suspicious behaviour, to help the police, to be the eyes and ears of the community. Besides, if it turns out to be nothing, then no harm done to anyone. Dammit, if you're going to live in this country, you're going to have to abide by the rules here" (*Promised Dream* 173). The idea of 'suspicious' behaviour is itself arbitrary and subjective and in the wake of 9/11 such encouragement from the government serves as a cover for one's prejudiced views or to fulfill one's personal vendetta against the other in the garb of national responsibility. For instance, Jassim is fired from his job based on speculations without any solid evidence: "Truth lay somewhere under a sordid pile of allegations, unreachable, unfathomable" (298).

We find that Jack's self-proclaimed duty to respond to the nation's call stems from underlying prejudice concerning his personal life. The elopement of his daughter with a man from Jordan years ago sustains his resentment towards the latter's nation and its people. Though he attempts to bring her back from Jordan, expecting "her to be smoking dope in some sort of primitive harem" (164), she refuses in view of her happy life. Moreover, Jack's potentials have been dimmed due to a genetic mutation, the discontent of which extends to other spheres of his life with 9/11 rekindling these disappointments: "everything he had run from, every weakness he had disguised, came bubbling to the surface. All that was really wrong in his life came back to haunt him, to erase the man he had become" (165). Hence, his decision to act as a dutiful citizen by indulging in Jassim's case is more of an opportunity to prove himself: "for the first time in years he felt armed with a righteous and vital responsibility and therefore important, selfless" (173). This also exhibits a lack of acknowledgement of the idea of cosmopolitanism; the immigrant considered as the outsider and a threat then does not comply with the terms of mutual

responsibility. In a different occasion, Jassim encounters a random person mouthing him "Go home" (156), which indicates how the idea of home is embedded purely in terms of one's geographical origins and any attempt on the part of the immigrant to create any in the host country is dismissed.

In the case of Jassim and Salwa, their visibility is powered by their origins and their presence in the public realm. Their lack of knowledge about who or why they are being watched exacerbates their ordeals. For instance, despite having known Salwa professionally for the past four years, Jack after 9/11 secretly monitors her and Jassim for their Arab identities. While he interacts with Salwa as a customer at her bank, he keeps an eye on Jassim at the swimming pool and even asks one of its employees to do so. The novel shows how after 9/11, behaviour and actions of individuals came to be viewed and judged based on one's origins. Here, the death of Evan, a teenager in an accident after being hit by Jassim's car is racialized. Though Jassim himself calls for help for Evan and is also consequently acquitted from the incident based on witnesses, it casts a major influence not just on his psyche but on others who continue to suspect his intentions. The fact that Evan held anti-Arab sentiments, relayed later by his mother and evident from his skateboard sticker "Terrorist Hunting License" (231) at the time of his death, raises questions on the event as an accident given Jassim's ethnicity. The FBI too later connects this act to Jassim's "suspicious" behaviour reported by Jack and Bella: "But he had done all the right things. He had called the police. They had investigated. There were witnesses. What were they trying to do with these questions? (231). Salwa's views serves as a commentary on the discriminatory American system which even tends to overlook evidence:

> . . . do you see, Jassim? If we had been home and you had hit that boy, his family would have gotten involved from the beginning. Here, no one cared until they found out who you were, and now they've made it grounds for a federal investigation. It's crazy —they're not looking at who you are as a person, at all the great work you've done. They're looking at the fact that you're an Arab. Do you think any American would be scrutinized in this way?" (*Promised Dream* 301)

This episode also demonstrates how Evan at such a young age harboured hostility against Arabs given the ethnicities of the 9/11 actors. He wanted them to be "kicked out of this country, rounded up, herded up, and thrown out" (200), and even expressed the wish to

kill one. The confidence shown by Evan to identify a terrorist based on mere looks exhibits the generalization of associating every Arab or Arab-looking individual with terrorist motives: "I'll know" (76). Moreover, his death is preceded by his unusual activities on the skateboard, his glance back at Jassim and his movements that seemed as if he "chose to jump in front of his car" (143). The fact that he might have deemed Jassim a potential terrorist just by his appearance supplies an instance of mistaken targets after 9/11 due to their physical attributes.

In the post-9/11 world, symbolism informs and invigorates American patriotism. For instance, the use of American flags became a dominant icon of pride, resilience, and determination after the event. In the novel, the flags emerging everywhere after the attacks disturb Salwa. She sees the two flags given by her colleague for their cars as means to assuage the world that "we drive by that we do not intend to blow anything up" (68). This foregrounds the sudden reification of their foreignness and the resultant way to prove their innocence. Again, the media around them fosters solidarity by putting the 'Americans' against the other: "Is anyone fed up yet? Is anyone sick of nothing being done about all those Arab terrorists? In the name of Jesus Christ! They live with us. Among us! Mahzlims who are just waiting to attack us. They just want. . ." (57). The exclusionist spirit of the US both before and after 9/11 is exhibited through the eyes of Salwa:

> At first she had thought it was a result of language, or of her being from a different culture, but now, all these years later, she was beginning to think it was simply the culture of America to show everything but to remain an island, a closed-up individual. In the past month that distance had been stronger, an aftereffect of what had happened in New York and Washington, like the cars sprouting American flags from their windows, antennas to God, electric fences willing her to leave. (*Promised Dream* 54)

The novel dwells on the estrangement between the couple over time, heightened due to Salwa's miscarriage of her baby without the knowledge of Jassim who does not want a child. Salwa reckons that the distance between them has emanated not just from the lie of 'mistakenly' getting pregnant against Jassim's wishes but also due to the "patriotic breathing" (184) in her surroundings. If Salwa yearns for Jordan even before 9/11, the sense of homelessness abroad is fuelled now by external impetus. Though the narrative

runs on both domestic and political, internal, and external axes, it is observed how these are interdependent.

The Inseparability of the Professional and the Political

The novel depicts how the changes in the socio-political realm invariably impacts the professional scene. Since immigration to the US is largely driven by professional opportunities, this offers an area to explore post-9/11 consequences. Here, Salwa and Jassim are subscribers to America as a land of promises. Salwa, working as a real estate agent and part-time at a bank, is able to financially help her family. Jassim, a US graduate fails to secure a satisfactory job in Jordan, returns again to America for further studies, and later joins a consulting firm as a hydrologist. Though he seeks to implement his skills in his home country, the return is indefinitely deferred as for him America "pumps through the blood," while Jordan "stays in the mouth" (*Promised Dream* 65). This is more prominent in Jassim who despite being unfairly fired still holds on to the vision that Salwa "could have done more" (314). While he is "eaten by the West" (278), and feels comfortable with an "easy, predictable life" (71) that the country provides, Salwa's decision to marry him over Hassan is because he "offered her the best opportunity" (100), that is, America. After 9/11, their respective workplaces have become sites of reminding them of their non-belonging to American society.

The othering in the professional space occurs as Jassim is considered a threat due to his job profile. Because he works as a hydrologist, his access to the city's water supply after 9/11 raises concerns that he might poison it. In addition to his unfavourable presence in America, his professional contribution and ethics towards the public too is misread. Questions arise on his ability and motivations despite water being his "first love" (243), and having been engaged with the firm since the past twelve years: "I have spent my entire life trying to find ways to make water safe and accessible for everyone. Just because I am an Arab, because I was raised Muslim, you want to believe that I am capable of doing evil" (232).

The office environment becomes a microcosm of the world outside where "the other" is surveilled—personally, which takes an institutionalized form. Jassim becomes an object of distrust and gaze. For instance, he becomes a subject of scribbled notes passed among some of his colleagues. His behaviour and movements are monitored, noted by

Bella who reports him to the FBI out of her wish to avenge September 11: "She wrote down everything you said, what you wore, how you seemed" (271). She even deems Jassim suspicious for his reaction to 9/11 for he "didn't seem very upset by what had happened" (271). This echoes the views of the University of Michigan anthropologists Sally Howell and Andrew Shryock regarding the biased attitude towards Arab and Muslim Americans who have been expected to conduct themselves in a certain way after 9/11 which for the US citizens are merely assumed (qtd. in Bayoumi, *Problem* 5). The error is evident as the abnormal behaviour that Bella detects in Jassim is actually his way of dealing with the personal turmoil. The change in attitude towards him is perceived in the "less than warm reception" (*Promised Dream* 26) by a group of the city's engineers who otherwise received him in a friendly manner.

Moreover, akin to the outright hatred exhibited towards the other, Jassim suffers more so because he is ostracised in his hitherto familiar space: "Being hated outwardly would have been so much easier than this dancing around people's words and complaints and trying to figure out what they really meant. It made him shaky and unsettled. Unbalanced. An unfairly weighted scale" (234). Though he initially does not consider it serious, he is emotionally affected and the federal investigation ultimately costs him his job making his future uncertain: "he had as little connection to those men as they did, and there was no way he could accept that anyone would be able to believe him capable of sharing in their extremist philosophy" (22). The FBI interrogations of his colleagues are directed towards Jassim's religious and political beliefs, the internet sites that he surfed, his reactions to 9/11, war on terror and the role of Jordan, and so on. He is also personally interrogated by them in those lines, in addition to the motives of his work or his meeting with any of the 9/11 hijackers. Moustafa Bayoumi comments on the position of Muslims in America with the War on Terror culture viewing them constantly and solely through that very lens and never for what they are (*Muslim American* 13). The kinds of institutional surveillance in the novel allude to the mechanisms that were developed in the aftermath of 9/11 to curb potential "threats." This highlights the position of the immigrant suddenly posed as threat in the interest of national security:

> In more than a decade of good citizenship, he had never for a minute imagined that his successes would be crossed out by a government censor's permanent marker, that his mission would be absorbed by his nationality, or that Homeland Security

> would have anything to do with him. Things like this aren't supposed to happen in America. Americans are pure, simple people, their culture governed by a few basic tenets, not complicated conspiracy theories. (*Promised Dream* 299)

The narrative shows how external tension seeps into professional relationships. For instance, Marcus, his long-term friend and boss, initially defends him before giving into pressure that overshadows his perception. He discredits Jassim for losing out on business and his "unreliability" for he "could not change who he was" (296). The enquiries made by the FBI with the firm's clients about Jassim makes it lose contracts. His absence from the office, a perk of flexible work hours, now comes under scrutiny deemed as "odd behaviour" and "inconsistencies" (297). Despite being the "most sought-after person" (224), showing no negligence towards work and after sharing his personal updates with Marcus, he is still dismissed from his job. This also marks public pressure which Marcus adheres to on the pretext of "good faith": "we're going to lose the business if I don't make an act of good faith to the people we do business with" (297). Marcus' former defense for Jassim based on his non-religious and non-political views also connote how indulging in politics or one's religion is invariably associated with something sinister. Jassim undergoes further humiliation from being restricted to personally collect his belongings from his office space despite having served there for more than a decade.

The position of the illegal immigrant worker embodying the precariat is a customary picture. However, in the context of Jassim, his dismissal comes as a surprise to him and his position too evokes the precariat. According to him, the West was "neater, tidier" wherein control over one's life could be exercised "so much more easily" (278). He held on to the American life "that promises a happy ending for everyone if you just believed it hard enough" (119). 9/11 punctures this illusion as he fails to comprehend the injustice despite siding with the "Americans" in the "with or against" rhetoric: "But was he not with?" (234). He ends up becoming a victim of racial profiling: "I understand American society, he wanted to scream. I speak your language. I pay taxes to your government. I play your game. I have a right to be here. How could this be happening?" (234).

Adams discusses how the American Dream is premised on achieving a social order wherein every individual shall be "able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous

circumstances of birth or position" (*Epic* 370). After 9/11, in the context of immigrants the American Dream metamorphosed into a nightmare compelling them to reconsider their place. For instance, Jassim is suddenly pushed into uncertainty: "I cannot stay here, though. If my firm has fired me, who is going to hire me? No one in this city" (*Promised* 314). Salwa by association too comes under purview as Jassim is interrogated concerning her particulars, including her reaction to September 11. Her sending a 'questionable' amount of money to her family on 12th September and phone calls from Hassan, her acquaintance in Jordan now come under scrutiny.

Salwa becomes an object of contempt as well as desirability in her office space. For instance, a woman customer at the bank rejects her service after learning about her 'origins.' The customer, having a look at the bank's Chinese-origin manager, no longer wants "anything to do with you people" (114). The disdain towards immigrants is advanced by her complaint about "foreigners taking away jobs and 9/11" (160). The novel taps into the othering of immigrants dating even before 9/11. We find that the relocation of Salwa's family to America years before 9/11 was cut short owing to their treatment as outsiders. Her father worked "like a dog" in a restaurant with people around him that resented others for being "foreigners who were willing to work harder than they did" (70).

Even in the current scenario, Evan wonders about the existence of only Mexican gardeners against the absence of white gardeners. It is interesting to note that these immigrant gardeners "who perhaps has risked his life so that he could prune trees and fix sprinkler heads" (323), appear twice in the background here and it is them who rescue Salwa from Jake's attack. Their existence and work underscore the lives of the precariat: "the miles of desert they must have crossed for the opportunity to trim and mow and prune, the perils they must have endured to have their clear shot at the American Dream" (316). Moreover, the presence of a Guatemalan gardener, clubbed under the category of Mexicans, also signals how specificities are blurred and homogeneity is imposed on the other by the West. While Salwa's father deems Jassim's socio-economic standing that deals with "the good of America" (70) a shield from the othering his family had previously encountered, the novel shows how 9/11 overthrows such assumptions. The event amplified differences irrespective of class or education of select groups.

Again, in contrast to Jassim, Salwa's origins and gender make her an object of temptation associated with the other. Her colleague Jake Peralta, a part-time drug dealer

and an addict and a part-time student is drawn towards her "maturity" and because "her foreignness made her sophisticated. Exotic. And married" (171). According to Lenore Bell the term "All-American" is often used to refer to the ""pure" white Americans" based on the Nordic ideal of blonde hair and blue eyes and how everyone outside this turns exotic (*The "Other"* 3). For Jake, the compositions of Salwa's features "turned him on" (*Promised Dream* 171), and he wonders if all Arab women had this appealing quality and if that drives them to be veiled. Even before 9/11 he enrolled in an Arabic class, mostly because he thought the script was pretty and he could learn the "language of opium" (171), and look exotic while speaking it. He displays his "love" for Salwa and even she is drawn towards him in lieu of Jassim's emotional unavailability. However, Jake's ingrained views are later exposed when Salwa reveals her plan to return to Jordan: "you're running back to the pigsty you came from?" (320). Brett Berliner defines 'exoticism' as "a form of relativism where an Other is exalted or denigrated as a means of defining the self" (qtd. in Bell 4). Jake also responds to Salwa's decision by physically attacking her, causing her to be hospitalised. Moreover, twice in the novel, we witness Jake moving around barefoot in his house. Owing to his parents' stay in the Far East and their speaking of Japanese or his interest in Arabic, this sight may be conjectured as a habit inculcated from these cultures. Hence, his hitting of Salwa with the edges of the Japanese painting frame can be interpreted as his insult to the interest he showed in her and her culture, aired by the post-9/11 focus on Arabs, obvious in his disrespectful comment.

The novel also offers a glimpse into the strain on personal relationships in pursuit of the Dream. It dwells on the dilemma of the immigrant regarding their station. While Salwa and Jassim consider their problems as 'American,' which unlike in their homeland cannot be dismissed, thus making them helpless. It unveils them to the discriminations they would always be subjected to as Arabs. This is reflective of the novel's title—"promised land"—which ironically subverts their American lives and expectations. Salwa is disillusioned with America, considers the Dream as a "huge lie" (*Promised Dream* 316), and her former belief in American freedom to lend a sense of "fulfilling" (99) is nullified. She appears to be unfulfilled by America driven by a need for 'home.' It is observed that despite America being Salwa's place of birth does not necessitate the sense of home. Moreover, being a child of Palestinian refugees and residing in Jordan heightens her rootlessness in the increasingly intolerant and unwelcoming post-9/11 atmosphere. Hence,

even before the post-9/11 discrimination surfaces in their lives, Salwa wants to go home to Jordan and considers raising her unborn child there.

The novel shows how precarity not only encompasses bodily vulnerability but also engenders a scenario wherein other aspects of life are at risk, including jobs or relationships. The estrangement Salwa senses towards Jassim also owes to his indulgence in his work: "…a husband to offer his wife the freedom to do as she pleased, his attention would have to be drawn elsewhere. Therein lay the problem—that in Jassim's enthusiasm for his work and in his offer of the life she wanted, he had somehow neglected her" (99). The distance between them also results in their affairs with other people. The idea of 'home' is absent as they both seek refuge elsewhere, and towards the end the betrayal from the country and towards each other make them long for home. Salwa likens America to an island "a closed-up individual" (54), which is reflective of their private lives as they both individually deal with their own issues. The socio-political otherization clubbed with the domestic and personal conundrums ultimately creates an urge to return to their homeland. If Jassim's disillusioned state insinuates a sense of homelessness, Salwa in fact buys a one-way ticket to Jordan for an unspecified period of stay insinuating that she might not return. The novel's end without a clear picture of the materialization of their plans also can be treated as an embodiment of the overall uncertainty and unpredictability pervading their lives.

III

Amy Waldman's *The Submission* (2011)

Waldman's novel examines precarity in the disparate yet connected lives of immigrants in the post-9/11 US. The narrative centers on the politics concerning the 9/11 memorial project. The winning of the anonymous submission by a Muslim architect, Mohammad Khan (Mo) for the memorial design competition creates a nation-wide chaos. Here, his existing othering as a second-generation immigrant is maximized while entangling other immigrant lives. Precarity here can be examined with respect to the concept of hierarchized lives, collapse of an artist and his art, and representation and political play.

The novel has been read in terms of cultural trauma (Baelo-Allué 165-83); hegemonic masculinity (Vafa et al. 121-40); psychological trauma on women (Zabihzadeh et al. 49-59); politics concerning intermediality (Dan 35-43); memorials as reflective sites

(Miller 212-40); othering of Muslim women (Pamungkas 38-44); space (Koç 333-46); American cultural imperialism and marginalization of Muslim identity (Fakhrulddin et al 361-76); safety and post-9/11 nationalist discourse (Balestrino 33-51). Here, the novel is approached through the lens of precarity to assess the precarious position of immigrants in the host country despite their attempts to embrace it.

Uneven Lives and Classified Deaths

Post-9/11 America exposed the way lives are valued differently. While the war on terror campaign launched overseas by the US exhibited this hierarchy in visible ways, this was reinforced even in its own territory amidst people who shared the same 'tragedy.' The novel projects this stratification that impinge not just upon the living, but also the dead. Here, the illegal immigrant casualties of 9/11 are not treated at par with their legal counterparts. Their omission in the official count of deaths connotes an utter disavowal of the lives lived. Inam Haque, who died on duty at the World Trade Center, is a representative of such lives that are invalidated: "How could you be dead if you did not exist?" (*Submission* 70). This move not just negates his identity but erases his existence altogether. The selective empathy towards victims is seen to be a product of the heightened nationalism post 9/11.

Inam and his wife Asma Anwar are undocumented Bangladeshi immigrants. Inam embodies the risk associated with contingent labour that ushers them into a perennial shadow of unpredictability. In spite of a university degree, the corruption, and the high concentration of job seekers in the home country prompts Inam's move to the US. This is again seen in Nasruddin, another Bangladeshi, who continued his stay in America from the age of nineteen for its "predictability" (227) and the effectiveness of its systems absent in his home country. However, the struggle for survival is vivid in the life of an overqualified Inam who worked as a janitor, lived in a rented viewless room with Asma, and sent a portion of the income to their families.

The narrative unveils the position of the precariat in neoliberal economy with a substantial immigrant population engaged in a precarious work culture. The neighbourhood of Inam, called Little Dhaka in Kensington, Brooklyn hosts a large number of Bangladeshis, mostly illegal ones. Owing to Asma's 'visibility' after Inam's death, Nasruddin, the 'mayor' of the locality who oversees the workers for the elite population

near them – the "dozen Brooklyn brownstones" (70), insinuates the uncertainty attached to their lives: "Next door, upstairs, there are illegals everywhere…The whole building could go. Half the neighborhood" (251). The precariat situation in America is bolstered by the flyers of Polish construction workers advertising work at cheap rates. The displayed images of these white men in white outfits, as Nasruddin observes, may be an attempt to "draw attention to their skin color" (228). The fact that these flyers have been circulated "lately" (228) can be interpreted as their endorsement to appear less foreign and as a 'safer' choice relatively to their counterparts now clubbed under "suspicious communities." Standing in *The Precariat* (2011), illuminates the insecure relation of the category of undocumented migrants with the state. He discusses how undocumented workers provide cheap labour that benefits the host country's economy. Furthermore, he sees how disposability functions in their easy dismissal and deportation if found uncooperative. Their supposed invisibility even in their presence serves in a situation like recession as they "do not appear on the payroll of firms and households, and fades into the nooks and crannies of society" (102). Standing observes how this group facilitates as a "shadow reserve army" (91) as productivity surges in a boom owing to more recruitment that has no record, while in a recession employment drops less than the drop in output and demand. Asma conveys this precarity in connection to the illegal labour force after 9/11: "…for the army of workers who cleaned and cooked and bowed and scraped and when the day came died as if it were just another way to please" (*Submission* 77). This evokes an exploitative design wherein individuals in a way submit themselves for survival with the hope for improved living conditions.

The novel exhibits how in the wake of a national crisis such otherwise seemingly strategic obscured presences run the risk of being completely effaced or being made prominent. For instance, during their initial days in America, Asma on a boat-trip with Inam in presence of people from different nationalities experienced a sense of being "a part of everything, New Yorkers" (*Submission* 145). However, 9/11 debunks this impression for Asma as she confronts the disparity of lives. While loss is a common denominator, expression of grief remains predominantly a prerogative of the family members of the legal victims. In relation to Asma and other families of the illegal victims, the sense of loss is incongruous as they not only deal with grief for their dead, but face additional challenges. They undergo the angst for their losses being unacknowledged and therefore being denied the right to grieve publicly. The likes of Inam are deemed

ungrievable as grief besides an aspect of affect, factors as a politicizing tool in the saturated socio-political national context. This underpins Butler's concept of grievabilty centering the discussion on precarity, precariousness, and vulnerability, how some losses are "nationally recognized and amplified" and are grievable in contrast to others that are "unthinkable and ungrievable" and lack legal and political legitimacy, such as the detainees of extrajudicial detention (*Precarious* xiv). According to Butler, the former category can form the base of nation-building (xiv), evident in the launch of wars. In the light of this, the recognition of Inam's death would disrupt the similar kind of nation-building process.

While the proposed memorial to be built on Ground Zero was to bear the names of the dead, protests are held against the inclusion of the names of immigration violators as it would make them "equivalent to citizens" (*Submission* 77). It is seen that while their services were exploitative in nature prior to 9/11, grievability considered as a feature tied to human lives, is withheld in its aftermath. The unrecognized death of Inam then also extends to a symbolic effacement of a life lived. Thus, the dehumanization of the precariat corresponds to both figurative and material facets. The socio-political and economic standing also determines this unequal dynamic. For instance, Claire, a 9/11 'American' widow and a jury member of the 9/11 memorial committee, stands as a face and a voice for the bereaved families and the public. The aftermath of her husband's death includes the painful process of selling his items or detaching his name from items like credit cards, club memberships, contracts, magazine subscriptions, bank accounts, trusts, boards of institutions. Asma on the other hand, is financially disenfranchised and lacks agency due to her unlawful residential status. She faces exclusion from the collective grieving process, such as not being invited to the get-together of the bereaved families.

Lalami in *Conditional Citizens*, draws attention to the lexical discrepancies pervading the issue of immigrants. She notes how in the press a term like "expat" is used for immigrants from industrialized countries while their counterparts from former colonies or poor countries as a whole are often referred to as "immigrants." She advances that the former's stay in the foreign land on expired visas is usually not termed as "illegal" or "undocumented." This is evident in how the substantial number of Americans in Mexico are commonly termed as "gringos" which does not elicit "legality or precariousness." On the other hand, immigrants operating similarly in the US earn the titles of "illegal aliens" or "removable aliens" (70). In Waldman's novel, Sean Gallagher, brother of an 'American'

9/11 casualty, is against Mo's design for his Muslim identity, and that it would carry the names of every victim. He considers the grief and the claims on the memorial of his mother and Asma to be asymmetrical. The protests against the inclusion of illegals on the memorial denote how one's legality gains precedence over one's humanity also underscoring a lack of compassion. This is embodied in the views of a radio host, Lou Sarge:

> Respect for the law is what makes America, America…If we put illegals on the memorial, we will be spitting in the face of the law-abiding Americans, including legal immigrants, who died. The illegal immigrants who died came here seeking opportunity, but if they had stayed home they would still be alive. Isn't that the greatest opportunity of all? (*Submission* 77)

Though the names of Inam and his kind are later ensured in the memorial, however, the fact that protests and chaos effected this step exhibits "that history had only narrowly made room for him" (77). Moreover, this shift manoeuvred by Asma by publicly voicing out her demand in turn impacts her. Her uninvited presence and emotional speech in the memorial meeting in support of Mo's design, the cause of illegal victims, and against the discrimination of Muslims disrupts this hierarchized ethos of grieving. By attempting to access a right 'not reserved' for her, optimizes her vulnerability.

While the disregard for the illegal victims with respect to the memorial signals a nullification of their symbolic worth, the material value attached to their deaths in the form of compensation is also initially amiss for their families. For instance, Claire possesses the means to retaliate at the criticism against the 9/11 widows seeking government compensation. She justifies how their demand was not about money alone or how she does not need any compensation but seeks "justice, accountability" (10). The empowerment is evident in her reach, merit, and privilege to assume such a public position and how she can even consider forgoing the compensation. Conversely, Asma struggles to acquire the financial assistance offered for the victims as her loss is discounted. Since she has been dependent on her husband and lacks agency as an illegal, her future now entirely rests on that money. Again, the subcontractor that recruits Inam now refuses to recognize his death on the pretext of using a fake name and Social Security number which was effectuated with the former's knowledge. Moreover, Inam's illegal status also hinders the Bangladesh

consulate to accept his death leaving Asma with no assistance for repatriating the body or gaining government compensation.

Moreover, the quandary for the eight-month pregnant Asma arises as her demands for Inam's body or compensation could expose her and deport her. She manages to survive with the support of a little aid from a mosque and her landlords who offer free accommodation temporarily. It is only later that she receives a little financial help from the consulate, Inam's subcontractor and a substantial amount as government compensation after public protests. Before the announcement of government compensation to families of "illegal aliens" (75), her struggle is rooted not just in coping with her loss in her pregnant state and later with her new-born, but also in seeking recognition of it materially, financially, and symbolically. The precarity incites fear of uncertainty such that Isma naturally grows insecure towards this gesture of the government and speculates it to be a mechanism to identify illegal aliens and deport them.

The novel explores how any individual strife against precarity can result in adverse results. Here, Asma dares to challenge the precarity in the form of extending her support to Mo's design. For her, it would preserve Inam's memory in the form of his name in lieu of the unretrieved body: "Her husband had no grave. Only in this memorial would his name live on. Only there could his son see it, maybe touch it. A parliament of the dead deserved respect, too" (99). Even without the knowledge of English and always been tethered to the domestic, Asma offers a speech, translated by Nasruddin, at the public hearing for the memorial in favour of securing the names of illegal victims on it: "He had to be named, for in that name was a life" (77). This act maximizes her existing precarity as it now exposes her to the public and her hitherto 'non-existence' suddenly comes under the radar of media, politics, and country. Apart from receiving some support for her cause, she receives threats through letters. The little value ascribed to her body and being is now maximized. The disregard for her is evident in the apathy and insensitivity of a police officer in response to the inquiries made by Nasruddin for her safety: "Nobody forced her to get up there and speak," … His eyes were unsympathetic. ""What do you want us to do? Park someone outside her door?... Don't think it will sit well if an officer's off the street full-time because the lady sounded off. File a report if you want" (244). Asma's questioning of the norms makes her visible and bodily vulnerable, issuing her deportation.

However, despite consequently submitting to law by preparing to leave the country, she is fatally attacked in a mob on her way to the airport.

Vulnerability of Art and the Artist

The othering of Mo as a Muslim individual is highlighted even before the limelight on his artistic side. He is singled out at the airport and undergoes an interrogation with an inspection of his luggage, with his photographs and fingerprints taken by the authorities. He is questioned on his work, religion, love for the country, thoughts on jihad, ties with any Islamic terrorists, his travelling history concerning Afghanistan, and so on. The problems faced by immigrant passengers due to 'suspicions' at the airports or flights forms a common scene in post-9/11 fiction. For instance, in Shamsie's *Home Fire* (2017), Isma, a British-Pakistani student, bound for the US, rehearses her scenes of being interrogated at the airport in anticipation. Such scenarios impact the bearing of the individual who questions his/her belonging. Mo grows to be more circumspect in the interrogation room: "His effort to avoid being seen as criminal was making him act like one, feel like one" (*Submission* 27). For instance, in order to evade suspicion, he gulps down a chewing gum instead of walking up to a trash can for the fear of it being used to retrieve his DNA. He realizes how his former "brusque" (25) attitude at the work place has transmuted into a polite and cautious demeanour in order to neutralize any sense of threat from his side. His submission of a beardless photo along with the design to the memorial competition is a result of Mo's submission to the process around him. In fact, his initial stance on the treatment of all Muslims as potential security threats changes radically as he stands at the receiving end, exposed and vulnerable.

The novel shows how precarity emerges in the context of an individual's professional life and what their profession creates. While Asma's predicament gets exacerbated due to her provisional residential status, Mo faces discrimination despite being an American-born, as he is of Indian Muslim origin. As an architect, he realizes that his art—a garden proposed for the 9/11 memorial—is subject to othering. Although the entries for the memorial design competition were open to all and anonymous, the disclosure of a Muslim winner causes a stir amongst the jury: "The piece of paper containing the winner's name was passed from palm to palm like a fragile folio. There were a few gasps and "hmmms," an "interesting," an "oh my." Then: "Jesus fucking Christ! It's a goddamn Muslim!" (16). The jury in order to assuage their disbelief also indulge in possibilities of

Mo not being a practising Muslim, or his being a Jew or a converted Jewish-Buddhist. One of them also implies a leeway to dismiss his candidature by rules meant for criminals or terrorists, thus equating him with them, while another dismisses his selection with "no time for multicultural pandering" (17).

Even without any reason to doubt, people see Mo as a representative of his community that is seen in a negative light: "I'm not sure I want it with the name Mohammad attached to it. It doesn't matter who he is. They'll feel like they've won. All over the Muslim world they'll be jumping up and down at our stupidity, our stupid tolerance" (18). His personal details are retrieved, including that of his parents, such as inquiries into a particular mosque for the donations they made: "If they had to present a Muslim as the designer, it was critical to probe what kind of Muslim he was" (64). Again, the public too indulges in generalizations and stereotypes. For instance, Frank protests Mo's design by placing him distinctly in the "us and them" rhetoric: "They killed my son…It's supposed to be his memorial, not theirs" (56). The prejudice is intricately webbed as practicing a particular religion organically renders them as the problematic other. It exposes the hypocrisy of the jury that fails to apprehend or accept the cultural mosaic of American society.

In the common consciousness, America epitomizes democracy. The chaos in the jury concerning the "democratic process" (20) adopted in the memorial contest is a model of the illusory democracy promoted by America, evident in the post-9/11 governmentality. The irony is palpable as Paul Rubin, chairman of the jury, who formerly considers the win of the Garden over the Void as "appropriately American" (12), now seeks Mo's withdrawal post the revelation as its architect. The textual reference to Maya Lin, an American designer of Chinese roots, who landed in a controversy in 1981, following her win in an anonymous competition for the design of Vietnam Veterans Memorial, highlights the othering of select groups based on prevalent politics. Furthermore, the ordeals of the immigrant find expression in the case of Paul's grandfather, who had changed his Russian surname from Rubinsky to Rubin on his move to America, or the caution adopted by Laila Fathi's family in America after the hostage crisis because of their Iranian origins.

As in the previous chapter, wherein othering extended to the geographies where the other inhabits, here, the generalizations concerning Mo extends to his designed garden. After his religious identity is revealed, the garden is viewed differently. While the jury

views the garden for what it is, Mo's background complicates their attitude. With the speculations rife in the media, they and the majority of the pubic come to consider his garden an Islamic one, especially the martyrs' paradise featured in the *Quran*. His art is called a "Trojan horse" (117) to smuggle the ideologies of jihadists. This shows an inseparable tie between the art and the artist that furnishes the grounds for othering; the art is denounced for its artist while the artist is othered for his art. That is, while the jury finds it difficult to reject Mo for the fear of backlash, his design serves as a ploy to effectuate it; the discrimination is shifted to the reception of his art. The following conversation between Lou Sarge, a radio host and Mo is an example of the interrogations faced by the latter regarding his intent and output:

> "Got it. So it is, actually, an Islamic garden?"
> "It's just a garden."
> "A martyrs' paradise?"
> "It's a garden."
> "A jihadi playground?"
> "It's a garden."
> "A joke on the American people?"
> "Excuse me? The American people include me." (*Submission* 189)

Not only this shows a disregard for him as an American but also his agency for participating in a democratic competition is questioned. Akin to the solution on how illegals victims' death could have been averted if they stayed at home, Mo is subjected to a similar question by Alyssa blaming him for Asma's death: "No, you did, by entering the competition, by insisting on your right to win, even though it offended so many Americans, hurt so many of the families' feelings" (261). In the aftermath of 9/11, the co-existence of two identities—Muslim and American—within one individual lay in incompatible terms.

Hilal in *Innocent Until Proven Muslim* dwells on this relationship between the categories of Muslim and American, a religion and a nation-state in the wake of 9/11. She uses the lens of Susan Opotow's theory of moral exclusion to understand the differential treatment sustained by Muslim and Muslim Americans at the behest of the state. It refers to a situation wherein individuals or groups have no access to the realm of moral values, rules and chances of fairness; they are rendered as "nonentities, expendable, or undeserving" (qtd. in Hilal 29). Opotow further states that when an outsider is harmed, it

may not generate moral concern from others as it may not be considered a violation of their rights (30). In the novel, the opposition to Mo's win furnishes a similar circumstance, wherein his origins thrust him beyond the realm of normative justice, freedom, and equality. His fair win is juxtaposed by arbitrary markers, thus deeming him as an undeserving candidate.

As an architect, Mo considers his garden to be American in spirit as it draws on several multicultural sources, including elements that pre-date Islam (for the gardens now called Islamic) with agriculture and not the religion behind its ideation. In the novel, such exchanges are highlighted wherein the host of the counterterrorism seminar in London suggests the utility of cypress trees as defense in cases of blasts which Mo later spots in a mosque in Kabul. This shows how art is inspired from one another, however, in the prevailing political climate it is relegated to the binary of "us and them." Mo also does not shy away from admitting his innocence concerning the speculations that the names patterned in the buildings of his design might bear "Islamic antecedents" (*Submission* 267). Claire's claim to be among "liberals" (200) is complicated by her prejudice: "Your design becomes more threatening if you won't change it; it tells me there's something there, something hidden, you want to preserve" (270). Thus, the novel serves as a critique of the established view of America as the epitome of equal opportunity. It is clear when Mo is asked and expected to either withdraw from the competition, or associate with someone else, hide his name behind his firm, alter his designs, make accommodations, and explain his design. He is expected to clear his take on religion, explain his participation, and give his reaction to the attacks and the proposed memorial.

The change in Claire's attitude, who once saw "more than beauty" (4) in Mo's garden and convinced the jury members to vote for it, is ironic. Though her ardent support for the garden even after knowing Mo's religious background suggests a normal way of siding with a legitimate artist, her expectation of gratitude from Mo is obvious when she inquires if he thanked Asma. On the other hand, Mo too does not thank Claire for it would validate that "she was doing something extraordinary" (11). Moreover, her stubbornness in asking Mo to explain his design is seen as a personal demand to assuage her internal conundrum: "Mr. Khan says he shouldn't have to say what the Garden is, or where it came from, and he's right...But I want him to" (277). His decision to hold his ground by not giving into the expectations from others is out of his asserting the rights that a non-Muslim

candidate would have gained: “To do so would be to betray not only myself but the country’s credo that merit matters, not name or religion or origins” (92). On a similar note, the novel exposes the shams of justice in America. Despite fighting against the injustice, the helplessness in such a situation compels Mo to withdraw his design.

The sense of belonging for an immigrant abroad emanates not just from one’s distance from the home country but is majorly shaped by the host nation. Despite being an American citizen by birth, Mo inhabits the position of an ‘other.’ The disenchantment for the individual abroad arises over the questions on his belonging. For instance, Mo’s parents who migrated to America in the 1960s now “doubt for the first time about whether this country has a place for us” (195). In this case, Mo’s Americanness becomes a matter of contention that alienates him from his place or rather he abandons it on his own. This results in his seeking of a place where “the name Mohammad wouldn’t be a liability” (292), and hence, years later as a successful architect he is found to be mostly out of the country turning into a “global citizen, American only in name” (286). Furthermore, the American myth of equal opportunity is perpetuated in the form of Mo’s unbuilt design now housed at the museum in New York that credits the controversy for the exposure of his talent. While his career trajectory is called a “quintessentially American story” (287), it is in fact the narrative of the whole memorial process that does not criticize its own doing but continues to benefit from the controversy.

The popular attention concerning his win overnight disrupts Mo’s normal life compelling him to lead a life “compressed to suitcase, laptop, air mattress, the trinity less of a man hunted than of one being slowly erased” (186). The presence of demonstrators near his home, media, police, and onlookers make him seek temporary refuge in his attorney’s studio and later at a hotel and at his colleague’s apartment. The protests against him also materialize as death threats via phone, email, letter, etc. It also reflects in his professional life, as Mo’s anticipated promotion at his office is given to someone else which he speculates to be a result of his religious identity. He is “analyzed, judged, and invented,” and called decadent, abstinent, deviant, violent, insolent, abhorrent, aberrant, and typical (126). In spite of his Indian origins and American passport, he is rumoured to be a donor to organizations supporting terrorism and have Pakistani, Saudi and Qatari backgrounds. This fake news also transgresses boundaries of personal life. For example, his dating history is examined, he is believed to have a brother who is behind a radical

Muslim students' association at his university, and his father is linked to a questionable Islamic charity. Mo's demonization is based on nothing but prejudice. His work-related visit to Afghanistan for his own firm is construed as a suspicious event that demands explanation. His public trial reduces him to an "enemy" (109), and links him to terrorism and jihad.

The novel exhibits how the acts of an otherized individual can further otherize the community they belong to. Such acts are not only directed against Mo but spread all over the country, including the desecration of mosques in eight states. Again, Sean's tugging off a headscarf from a woman's head out of anger towards Muslims is replicated all over the country. The serious threats to American interests abroad are made by Islamic extremists as a response to the persecution of Khan again which can affect the innocent members of Islam abroad. Mo's father reflects on how an individual action can trigger a threat for an entire population: "You are drawing attention to yourself, to us—all of us, all Muslims in America—in a way that could be dangerous" (194). Asma's individual act of 'transgression' in the form of her 'visibility' risks the position of the "vulnerable community" which delimits her to carry on with her life in the US: "Because of her, Bangladeshis were being lumped with Pakistanis as a threat" (251).

Likewise, Mo is blamed by the Muslims for jeopardizing their stay in America. Though he initially receives support from the community, individuals and organizations want him to voluntarily withdraw from the competition to primarily stop their own positions abroad getting precarious. For instance, the Islamic organization, the Muslim American Coordinating Council (MACC) that initially takes up his case later blames him for participating and deciding to not withdraw. A member of the council betrays a case of conflict of interest, accusing Mo of not aligning with their religious ideologies: "You're leading us to a bad place. It's you, not the terrorists, who've hijacked our religion. At least the terrorists believe. What's your excuse?" (195). Moreover, he also invites hostility from Muslims outside the US "for not being Muslim enough" (240). Mo stresses on the need of how sometimes America "has to be pushed—it has to be reminded of what it is" (195). However, in the case of the 'other' abroad, the individual is bogged down by the absence of support and fear of showering precarity on equally vulnerable others. Mo is caught in a political conundrum. Though he receives community support initially, eventually he is excluded from different sites in different ways.

Representation and Political Play

The novel explores the various levels of representation that shape the narratives. The role of the media during the 9/11 attacks and its aftermath is significant. In fact, the live telecast of the event could be accessed by anyone in any corner of the world. Even in its 'wake,' 9/11 continued to create new political imperatives. In Waldman's novel, it is seen how representations directly and indirectly contribute to one's precarity. Representations can cast detrimental shadows on the targetted individual and persuade a chosen audience accordingly. As Butler says, the idea of "face" advocated by Levinas actually refers to the edifice that communicates "what is human, what is precarious, what is injurable" (*Precarious* xviii). She shows how media representations of the face as one that belongs to the "enemy" erases human links to the "face" of the other. The premature and unauthorized disclosure of Mo's win by the media as an "explosive exclusive" (*Submission* 37) adds chaos to the already volatile setting, and highlights its irresponsibility.

Here, the figure of the journalist, Alyssa Spier, typifies the profit-driven agenda of the media: "She had no ideology, believed only in information, which she obtained, traded, peddled, packaged, and published, and she opposed any effort to doctor her product" (60). Her hunt for sensational news feed is driven by opportunism, more to create a narrative than share a piece of information with the public. Her shift to a different newspaper is driven by the demand of her editor to withhold the news of Mo's win for some time. Her current editor too sees Mo as an opportunity: "This story has more legs than the Rockettes!" (69). Though Alyssa credits herself for disseminating the news of Mo's win to the public, she also contributes significantly in shaping the negative attention towards him. In the competition of collecting the fastest news stories, she treats Mo into an avenue to upscale her career.

The novel exposes the mechanism of media, wherein the news is not limited to the relaying of facts and real occurrences, but is packaged with unnecessary information and stereotypical projection. Alyssa displays the unethical and biased attitude of the media without accountability: "Facts were not found but made, and once made, alive, defying anyone to tell them from truth" (126). The tactics used by media-persons to avail information to create sensationalism is seen in Alyssa's attempt to extract Claire's reaction to the already prevailing volatile situation by playing with insufficient information. She shares half-truths without apprehending the consequences it might relay: "Fabricating

reality was criminal; editing it, commonplace" (160). Her half-truth regarding Mo's 'threat' against the American embassy in Kabul, based on an "offhand comment" (160) made by him and reported by a competing architect, contributes in creating doubts in Claire's psyche who was hitherto the most supportive towards his design. Again, Alyssa distorts a statement made on Claire by her friend concerning her soft spot for Mo due to her unwavering support for his design: "If, metaphorically speaking, she's sleeping with the enemy, whose side is she on?" (109). Alyssa also tries to instigate Mo's friend and business partner Thomas to extract something negative about Mo. The apathetic role of journalism is further echoed by Alyssa's editor who guides her the way to be a good columnist:

> The most important quality in a good columnist, he explained, was certainty: "No 'he said, she said,' just 'I say.'…"People want to be told what to think," …"Or they want to be told that what they already think is right." (*Submission* 105)

The novel highlights how speculations are peddled to stay relevant and popular. For instance, the newspaper *The New York Post* questions Mo's capabilities behind hiring of an expensive lawyer and insinuates help from the Saudis which in reality is backed by his father's retirement account. There are also "dark advertisements" (167) paid for by unidentified beings against Mo and his design with images such as that of terrorists, explosion of nuclear bombs, burqa-clad women, Muslim mass praying, Iranians chanting against America, armed Taliban, bearded terrorist leaders, harrowing snippets from the 9/11 attacks, that overall reinforces the narrative of the other.

The act of image-making promotes stereotypes and contributes in perpetuating existent denigrating narratives. For instance, even before meeting Mo, Alyssa presents him with a photo of a "scary as a terrorist" man in a baklava along with the headline "MYSTERY MUSLIM MEMORIAL MESS" (52). She also goes on to say in a radio program that the fear behind Mo is because he may be "some one-eyed, bearded killer wearing pajamas" (91). Even after Mo reveals himself to the public, Alyssa continues to frame her stories with stereotyped projections, such as placing a ski-mask photo alongside Mo's. Such frames have the potential to project the Muslim man as a potential terrorist on American soil. It is her personal bias or the demand of her job, Alyssa's work has the potential to rouse the public. Mo is made to undergo a media trial that alters the course of his life and career altogether. This also impacts the individual as he finds himself from the

projected image of him "as if that were another man altogether" (126). Hilal in her book discusses that the composite precarious position of the Muslim lives is created by the institutionalized and internalized veins of Islamophobia. She attributes the latter to the dominant narratives or perceptions about Muslims and Islam that render them in a pejorative context. Such views and opinions lay unchallenged and create the need for means to tackle the "exceptionally problematic behaviour" (*Innocent* ix). In her report, Alyssa questions Mo's win by targeting his religion claiming its "violent propensities, its opposition of women, its incompatibility with democracy and the American way of life" (*Submission* 109). Her preference of Mohammad over Mo is due to the latter's lack of the "theological, historical, hysterical" (96) touch given out by the former. Thus, Mo's holding a public meeting to introduce himself dampens Alyssa's spirit as she now lacks the sole authority over the subject: "Nameless, Khan had been hers. Now he was everyone's" (93). Zohreen Murtaza in her article "9/11 and the Politics of "Othering" in Text-Based Art" (2021), highlights how Appadurai's disjunctures could be witnessed in the post-9/11 period through the workings of mediascapes. It indulged in disseminating images of the other that created a tremendous impact on the mass. Murtaza cites how international media turned Muslims and Islam as an ideology across the world. In this context, Baudrillard's views in *Simulacra and Simulation*, regarding the takeover of all reality and meanings to signs and symbols is pertinent.

The novel is a commentary on the visibility derived from the media. For instance, the media coverage of the memorial debate focuses on Asma's speech that renders her visible. The lack of accountability of the media is discernible in heightening this visibility by printing her face in the newspaper labelled as "ILLEGAL" (*Submission* 246). Additionally, media ethics is questioned as the newspaper also credits itself to have successfully engineered her deportation, publicizes her impending itinerary and the government compensation. This carelessness of the media results in a huge crowd on the Bangladeshi community as she leaves for the airport which provides a convenient moment to fatally stab her by unidentified entity/entities.

The matter of representation also corresponds to the different organizations. For instance, the jury of the memorial project is careful concerning not just what their decision might bring but also the image they will issue out to the frenzied public. For instance, Wilner, a jury member, considers the current crisis concerning Mo could have been averted

by making changes to the process: “He could have been a finalist, but he wouldn’t have had to win. We would have looked liberal, but we wouldn’t be stuck” (22). Similarly, the MACC, which deliberates to support Mo in the ordeal, starts treating him differently for not sharing similar ideologies, or to avoid the risk of falling out with the country. The immigrant abroad then faces another form of othering for not aligning with one’s own community. For instance, the relationship of MACC with Laila is purely professional for her not complying with their idea of tradition, such as her lack of hijab. Similarly, they also do not want to land in precarity by associating with Mo. Their campaign initiated in support of Mo as he observes seem to be motivated by “fund-raising potential” (172). Hilal defines the concept of “defense othering” (*Innocent* 206), as a part of the larger process of othering, wherein members of a subordinate group distance from one another to evade the stigma ascribed with the group. This may also occur when the other members embody something which does not align with the dominant group. Here, a few members of MACC display their disapproval of representing Mo and consider how his withdrawal would denote that “we are more interested in healing than confrontation” (*Submission* 196). Again, the role of representation is apparent in the effort to counter the ones launched by the media. For instance, Mo feels like a “new product” in the campaign by MACC to “humanize” (172) him. Similarly, his new lawyer attempts to create a public image of him by accentuating his appearance that resonates with America: “We’ve got to humanize you. No, Americanize you” (209). This implies how in the post-9/11 landscape, the image of the ‘American’ is preferred over the human.

The novel also offers an insight into the role of political representatives. For instance, Laila observes the current political order that lends the government ultimate power: “The law is political, especially now. If the government wants to find a way to forget the Constitution and detain people without charges, it will. Just as they will deny your memorial if they want” (82). Here, in particular, the government interference is seen in the form of governor Geraldine Bitman who capitalizes on the whole controversy. She seems to indirectly support the campaign against Mo’s withdrawal. While she blames the jury for it, she assuages the frenzied public regarding their agency to reject the artist by targeting the design: “I think it’s safe to say that if you don’t like the designer, you’re probably not going to like his design” (86). It is seen that she has risen in the polls every time she speaks against Mo who “was her oxygen” (249). By siding with the majority of the public, she believed that “Even if the state lost, she would win” (249). Moreover, in

her admission of "taken care of" (247) the change brought by Asma's speech leaves Paul and us to wonder if she leaked the latter's immigration status to the media that caused her deportation and ultimately death. The representation of America on individual terms is captured and critiqued in the novel. Despite having lost her husband or facing discrimination in its aftermath, Asma without support or basic knowledge of the society's common language does not wish to go back to Bangladesh. In fact, she chooses to miss her father's death to avoid being caught while travelling and forfeit the chance to continue living in America. Even in the absence of Inam, she resolves to give birth to her son on American soil to ensure his citizenship that she and dead husband lacked. Asma does not lose her faith in the American system, and for once even dares to fantasize a life beyond the neighbourhood in Kensington – the only familiar space. Even when she faces deportation, her suitcase is filled with items that echo the American ethos such as metrocards, T-shirts with images of Disneyland and the White house, DVDs of American movies, American flags and more, in order to carry home a "Little America" (250) for her child to experience in future in Bangladesh.

The novel that begins with the discussion over a memorial however ends up with a "hideous" (295) Garden of Flags on the memorial site. While it would have nestled Mo's garden based on the votes of the jury in favour of it, thus their lack implies its missing out on a work of art. This can be interpreted as the results of othering, as how disregard for inclusivity impedes in the flourishing of not just an individual but also the collective.

IV

Laila Lalami's *The Other Americans* (2019)

The precarity in Lalami's novel owes to the systemic othering of the immigrant other interweaved into the American fabric. It refers to the post-9/11 period saturated with questions on one's Americanness and the actions that accompany attempts to negate it. The novel centers on the alleged accidental death of Driss Guerraoui, a first-generation Moroccan immigrant, which gradually unravels layers of ingrained communal tension. The precarity here can be understood through the network of the American Dream, embedded racism, and cultural hegemony.

The Price of the American Dream

The opportunity to start anew and strive for better prospects is a characteristic feature of America in popular consciousness. The nation's diverse demography and the soaring immigration rate evince the influx of people from all across the world in search for socio-economic mobility, apart from other causes that were lacking in their home countries. In the novel, the migration of Driss and his family to the US thirty-five years ago was incited by the political turmoil in Morocco. In contrast, Efraín Aceves and his wife Marisela are undocumented Mexicans who left their homes in search of better livelihood. The Guerraouis epitomize the American Dream, a classic case of transnational migration that materialized in success in the host nation: "American Dream: Immigrant Crosses Ocean, Starts a Business, Becomes a Success" (Lalami, *Americans* 35). Their success is also backed by the financial assistance initially provided by the brother of Driss' wife Maryam, which can be treated as another success story. However, the aftermath of 9/11 de-stabilizes such endorsed narrative by uncovering the cost exacted in exchange for the dream.

The American Dream of the Guerraouis is rooted in the ordeals undergone by them. The backdrop of a chaotic climate rife with protests and its retaliation by the state in Morocco, and Driss' close encounter with death in addition to Maryam's fear for her family drive them to America. This prevailing situation of Morocco echoes the stirring of economic precarity evident in riots against the government as well as Driss' indignation against the rampant corruption, lack of fair wage, plight of workers, etc, especially fuelled by the ongoing war in Sahara. However, their arrival to the US mimics a similar state in the form of a recession that renders Driss' graduate scholarship in philosophy or Maryam's incomplete education and unacquaintance with English inadequate for employment. Despite these constraints, their setting up of a donut shop testifies to their hard work in a foreign land. The lack of agency in the socio-political and economical adversities in Morocco recurs abroad in the form of Driss' line of work: "the graduate student who spoke so fervently about the plight of workers laboring under the boot of capitalists suddenly wanted to start a business" (43). It underscores the means of survival adopted by the immigrant other that may not necessarily be in tandem with their ideals.

The national crisis brings to the fore certain existing fault lines. For instance, the sense of being the other is experienced by Nora even before 9/11, right from her school. The 9/11 episode only widened this gap between the insider and the outsider. It becomes

perceptible in the arsoning of Driss' business "Aladdin Donuts" by unidentified perpetrators in the wake of 9/11. Despite moving countries to evade precarity, it surfaces in a new form in his adopted country: "he had moved six thousand miles for safety, only to find he was not safe at all" (36). Moreover, apart from the apparent financial collapse that directly impacts their lives, it also leads to domestic discord between Driss and Maryam. While the former chooses to continue with their American life and pursue the Dream, the latter yearns to relocate to Morocco. This highlights how the idea of home for Driss is predicated on the latitude that America conspicuously advertises. However, this is contradictory as while he had renamed his previous business that was reflective of his roots, the name of his new diner – the Pantry – however implies a 'safe' choice after what happened to the former: "What could be more American than that" (37). The putting up of an American flag outside it denotes a way of expressing his allegiance to the country: "like he had to prove he was one of the good ones" (25). A similar scene operates in *Welcome to Americastan*, wherein the name of the auto-dealership "Joe Tanweer Honda" is fashioned by its Pakistani immigrant owner to lend it an American touch and not "scare potential customers away" (Akhtar 9). The Americanized versions of the names of businesses suggests the obscuring of the obvious markers of their non-American backgrounds to avoid discrimination and harm.

The novel set years after 9/11 foregrounds how the immigrant does not get rid of their image conceived in the socio-political set up. Driss' death corroborates that the 'outsider' would always occupy a precarious station in the host country. Though the novel never explicitly states the death as a murder, the ample indicators are suggestive of it being a hate-crime at the hands of Anderson Junior (AJ), the son of Anderson Baker who owns the bowling arcade next to Driss' diner. In contrast to Driss, the business of Baker suffers: "But the place was busy. Perhaps this was what Baker had begrudged my father" (Lalami, *Americans* 182). For instance, Baker lacks money to make new additions in the business while Driss comes up with a new sign for the shop. It is prominent from Driss' narrative that intimates about AJ's observation of his installation of the new sign and that his "direct gaze" subjected the former with a "feeling of being watched" (294) that takes place just before on the night of his death.

The fallout between Driss and Baker occurs due to the former's expansion of his business by buying a shop also sought by the latter by paying more. Moreover, another

incident concerning Driss' alleged customer taking up extra car parking space is met with dispute from Baker. He barges into the restaurant and complains about it not just in person to Driss but also to the seated customers depicting sheer intolerance and lack of respect towards the other. The mix of personal and the political is reflected in Driss' experience of "being watched constantly, that the slightest misstep on my part could cause another eruption" (159). The intolerance of Baker is bolstered by his unhappiness regarding the influx of 'outsiders' in the locality which may pertain to tourists or/and business owners like this "Muslim guy" (103): "All kinds of people have been coming here. I go to store these days, I don't recognize anybody… Some people say I should be grateful for the business that the newcomers are bringing to the town, but the way I see it, they're changing this place and wanting me to be grateful for it. They didn't ask if we wanted them here, they just came" (213). This evokes the concept of hospitality. Baker, a representative of the host country does not exhibit the welcoming demeanour as suggested by Derrida concerning unconditional hospitality. It however evokes Derrida's concept of 'hostipitality' wherein hospitality carries tension concerning the stranger to be hosted.

In a similar vein, AJ's racist behaviour is evident at different stages of his life. For instance, he defaces Nora's school locker with "raghead" after 9/11, questions on the discontinuation of the Classics department as the others such as Asian-American, African-American or Chicano studies remained, calls Detective Coleman a 'nigger', and so on. He fails to see the injustice and struggles of the 'outsider': "It's funny, everyone goes on and on about celebrating diverse cultures, but the minute you bring up white culture, the oh-so-called-enlightened liberals turn on you and call you names…Everyone else can be proud of their heritage, but not me" (Lalami, *Americans* 289). Richard Dyer in *White* (1997), notes the US as a "highly multiracial society, but the idea of becoming an American has long sat uneasily with ideas of being any other colour than white" (qtd. in Bell 3). It is particularly prominent in the case of losing AJ's dog daycare business that makes him move in with his parents and work at his father's business. While Grace Chin, the owner of a dog that dies under AJ's care blames him and defames his business, he denies accountability and puts it on her, the "Chin-Chong lady": "I couldn't believe it – this woman came into my country, could barely speak my language, and then sued me for negligence" (Lalami, *Americans* 290). Instead of gauging the issue, he makes it all about the "other" intruding into a space that he considers to be his own.

The irony is visible in the death of Driss that occurs on the intersection of Highway 62 and Chemehuevi Road, named after the eponymous Indian tribe, indicating how lands of America were taken over from natives while relegating them to the margins. AJ's views also disregard the presence of Islam in America that dates back to the Africans brought as slaves in the country for their labour (Bayoumi, *Muslim American* 29). Though Baker owns up to the accident that kills Driss, it is later revealed that he did it only to protect his son who was actually driving. The issues that AJ was facing in his personal life seem to intertwine with his professional realm, and hence Driss' death can be regarded as a murder. While AJ claims it to be an "accident" and that he "didn't mean for him to die" (Lalami, *Americans* 291), his speeding up his car just before hitting Driss and fleeing the scene substantiates his actions to be deliberate.

In the context of the illegal immigrants, the route to the American Dream is not similar to that of their legitimate counterparts. Though both these categories are at risk, their trajectories display different kinds of challenges. In contrast to Driss, who lawfully enters and stays in the country, Efraín represents those majority of cases wherein an immigrant fails to achieve the Dream. He is an undocumented immigrant who feeds his family as well as remits money to his relatives back home. He toils for carpet-cleaning service during the day while washes linens at the motel in the evening. His wife Marisela used to work in a senior-care center to assist the needy in bathing and grooming. Their lifestyle depicts no upliftment, also evident in his failure to repair the used car he had bought and instead resorting to a bicycle received for free: "Marisela complains that people come to this country to get ahead, and all we're doing is getting behind. I'm doing the best I can, I tell her, I can't do more than that" (Lalami, *Americans* 11). He is typical of the countless paperless precariat who maintain a cautious attitude for fear of being discovered by the authorities. Here, Efraín who witnesses the hit-and-run case refrains from helping Driss at the site of accident or reporting the incident to the police for the fear of being traced and exposing his questionable residential status. His guilt is overshadowed by his fear of law:

> No, I told myself, I hadn't witnessed the accident. What I had really seen was a man falling to the ground and a white car speeding away in the night, and I wasn't even sure about the color. It could be white, or maybe it was silver. But I really didn't know what make or model it was, and I didn't catch the license plate number.

> So you see, there wasn't anything I could do. All I saw was a man falling to the ground. (Lalami, *Americans* 13)

This internal conundrum in Efraín arises from an earlier account of how an immigrant faced Immigration Law following her reporting of a neighbour's crime. His (in)action emanates out of his already insecure state which he justifies as an approach to protect his children: "Both citizens, I want to be clear about that" (13). The stress on the citizenship status of his children emphasizes the vigilant attitude of the immigrant in fear of a possible deportation.

The novel shows how the struggles of immigrants reflect on the psyche, evident in the distance between Driss and Maryam. Again, in the case of illegals who spent their lives under a cover of invisibility, it causes them emotional strain. For instance, the erasures that Efraín and his kind are subject to in the public space is highlighted when an ordinary affair like his surname printed as part of his daughter's name in a booklet of her school program, someplace other than ID papers brings him "small thrill" (83). Hence, the precarity in terms of materialities while pursuing the Dream seeps into the emotional sphere making his everyday living miserable. The guilty conscience of not reporting Driss' case builds on him in the form of the figure of the dead man often visiting him. He even names him Guerrero and considers him to have disrupted his life even materially. However, his prolonged strife with his guilt is a barter that he chooses to ensure the safeguarding of his family: "I wanted their ignorance, their peace of mind, because I knew I had lost those things for good" (84). It is observed that his cooperation with the police occurs much later, and that too motivated by the monetary reward offered by Nora, with which he even considers to start a new life in another place "where the police wouldn't know where we lived" (221). It is observed that their presences are ordinary in the societal set up, however highlighting them may result in adverse consequences.

Cultural Distancing and Its Perpetuation

The precarity of immigrants also emanates from the exposure to the new cultural hegemony. While they are physically uprooted from their home soil and undergo the plight associated with it, they are expected to conform to the already existing norms of the new land. Despite attempts to fulfil this demand of assimilation, their physical appearances or any traditional markers which lay beyond their control renders them vulnerable especially

in the post-9/11 climate. It is perceived how attuning to such dominant affairs, even their whole life and career are shaped by these experiences of othering. For instance, Nora's inclination towards music and her subsequent career choice is backed by her music classes where she "only had to play" and escape from "What are you?" (Lalami, *Americans* 19) questions.

The casual othering of Nora since her childhood eventually embeds the sense of exclusion that stretches to her adult years. Despite being born in America, her first encounter with othering occurs in an institution. For instance, her elementary school teacher falters in pronouncing her name Nora Zhor Guerraoui and following up with a typical association with it and her place of origin: "What an unusual name. Where are you from?" (17). Consequently, her tiffin consisting of a Moroccan dish makes her an object of ridicule among her classmates. Such incidents at the early stages of development seem to cater to one's personality. Nora's silence as a coping mechanism against bullying in the class is misconstrued as a learning disability. This instance can be read in contrast to her classmate Jeremy's speech articulation disorder which is cured by therapy. In fact, Nora chooses to repeat a year in order to distance herself from the bullies. In her case, "the sense of being different never completely went away. The fault lines usually appeared when I was asked what church I went to, or when my mother spoke to me in the school parking lot, or when the history teacher asked a random question about the Middle East and all eyes turned to me for an answer" (20). This sense of othering also makes her befriend an Indian girl, who is quiet just like her, suggestive of a similar experience of othering.

The novel indicates how this othering has been an existent phenomenon even before 9/11. Its augmentation is seen in the homogenization after 9/11 wherein Nora, a Muslim and Sonya, a Hindu are assumed to be of the same religious background and therefore treated in the same way: "in September of our sophomore year, two planes were flown into the World Trade Center and strangely that distinction seemed to matter less, not more. We were both called the same names. Ragheads. Talibans. Sometimes, raghead talibans" (92). They preferred the Spanish class to be among other brown children "an anonymity we craved all the more for its new rarity" (87). In the recent episode of AJ calling officer Coleman as 'nigger,' the term evokes her past traumatic encounters even in her 40s: "And I was nine years old again. Or eleven. Or fourteen. It didn't matter, it hurt the same every time. The only thing different was who said it, and what I did" (283).

During Jeremy's term as a marine in Iraq the 'enemies' were called "Hajji," "Camel jockey," "Dune coon," "Ali Baba," monkeys, savages, etc. He had then considered it as a part of war wherein "we had to dehumanize the enemy in order to fight it" (167). This name calling which in the text appears to prevail both in the school and warfront depicts the lasting damages cast on the individuals addressed and it also perpetuates derogatory stereotypes.

The novel depicts other minor incidents of normalizing and imposing an exclusive 'American' culture reflective in the ingrained views since childhood. For instance, the appearance for the role of a good fairy played by Efraín's daughter in her school play comprises of a blond wig which denotes a customary perpetuation of the ideal American visualization:

> "Can't the good fairy have black hair?"
> "Fairies have blond hair, Papá," Elena said. (Lalami, *Americans* 82)

This indicates the inculcation of the dominant standards in the society that fails to recognize and acknowledge existing plurality. The novel ironically counters such fixities apparent in the central action that occurs in a street point that meets the Chemehuevi Way. This road, named after an Indian tribe, marks the death of a Moroccan immigrant, caused by a White 'American,' witnessed by a Mexican immigrant, investigated by a Black detective, and the support of a policeman with a supposedly Polish background.

The sense of displacement and seeing oneself as a misfit lingers in Nora's adult life who visualizes alternate scenarios without the migration: "I would've felt that I belonged somewhere. I wouldn't have been taught, by textbooks, the newspapers, and the movies, to see myself once through my own eyes and another time through the eyes of others. I wouldn't have wanted so badly to fit in and, paradoxically, to stand out" (274). The othering also occurs in her adult years in the form of searches at airports: "It had started years ago, this experience, and it was unavoidable. It didn't matter if it was a state-of-the-art machine at San Francisco International Airport or some rinky-dink contraption at a sports arena in Kern County, I was always pulled aside for the random pat-down" (161). In contrast to the victims in war on terror violence, Nora endures the precarious positions of immigrants in post-9/11 American mosaic, ranging from bullying to non-belonging, the destruction of her father's business to his murder, which shows how the

political is personal. As Jeremy notes: “Long before I’d gone to war, war had come to her—a brick thrown in her father’s window, a slur written on her locker” (227). This also relates to Nora’s sister Salma who gives in to the pressure of being a child of immigrants suffers from the typical trajectory she chose in life by living “someone else’s dream” (249). Moreover, for Maryam, the lack of any family members in the US, except a brother who lives far from them, precipitates a sense of the lack of “home” and of “being orphaned” (31). Their non-belonging in the society is underscored in the vandalism of their shop after 9/11. Hence, while it was Maryam who was keen on moving to the US now wishes to go back to Morocco. Moreover, other issues offshoot from it, such as the conflict with Driss and her gradual orientation towards religion.

The sudden change in environment also induces estrangement for the displaced individual. For instance, Maryam on her arrival to America struggles to make sense of the new environs owing to the drastic shift in socio-cultural and linguistic exchanges. She is astonished to witness things like the random positioning of gun shops, the different kinds of milk on sale, the kind of roads, individuals preaching about Jesus at people’s homes, blatant signboards on no-parking zones, the public admission to private issues on TV, and so on. The attempt to fit into society by emulating people on television programs highlights not just the individual effort but also shows the distress and urgency associated with it. Maryam’s picking up on words like ‘paternity test,’ ‘artificial insemination,’ ‘AIDS epidemic’ (Lalami, *Americans* 30) offers a farcical attempt at learning English. Again, she encounters a humiliating experience due to a linguistic barrier, particularly in pronunciation, while trying to communicate with a woman at the store. Here, the distance generated by this attempt at acculturation causes her emotional disturbance. For instance, her “shaky grasp of English” (42) becomes a factor of unemployment. Again, Efraín cannot communicate in English evident in his difficulties to narrate Driss’ death to the police and later helped by a translator: “It was a strange way to tell a story” (113). Lalami notes bilingualism or multilingualism as “almost always the standard” in other multiethnic and multicultural nations in contrast to English considered “normal or desirable” in the US (*Conditional* 77). She observes how proficiency in English is insisted for immigrants that “establishes a link between citizenship and linguistic origin” that indicates how speaking in English has to be the “only legitimate way” (77) in order to be an American. In terms of AJ, his contempt towards Grace Chin is also because her English is “so bad” (Lalami, *Americans* 271).

The novel thus infers the ethos of the melting pot that America embodies, however, its conditionality is cemented by discrimination. For instance, Baker owning up to his son's crime under the guise of an accident puts him in a bailable position by simply paying a fine. This is countered by Nora who is used to the prejudiced environment by questioning the outcomes of a similar action if committed by her father: "Growing up in this town, I had long ago learned that the savagery of a man named Mohammed was rarely questioned, but his humanity always had to be proven" (Lalami, *Americans* 164-65). This can be read in terms of the racialization of the accident caused by Jassim in *Once in a Promised Land*. The instance of Nora reflecting on dates in an American supermarket that are from palms originally sourced from Morocco and planted in California in the 1920s, demonstrates the way natural elements flourish in foreign soil when nourished, unlike discrimination amongst their human counterparts. This adaptability of other species can be read in contrast to arbitrary markers of human society that separates one group from the other.

The immediate aftermath of 9/11 unlocked avenues to demonstrate visceral animus on a section of people based on arbitrary markers. The instances of bullying, assault, unwarranted dismissal from jobs, unlawful detention, and more against the "other" within the American territories are visibly rampant: "I had noticed this before about Americans—they always want to take action, they have a hard time staying still, or allowing themselves to feel uncomfortable emotions" (124). This can be seen in the light of the post-9/11 war on terror campaign of which occasional glimpses of its viciousness are offered in the narrative. According to Nora, the celebrations for the participation and sacrifices made by the American soldiers lie contrary to the silence for civilians who lost their lives in American wars: "National memory was built from such erasures" (223). While the apparent organized violence was happening in foreign territories, actions like that of AJ's contours the ongoing othering in the American homeland. For the individual families then the grief and its associated "private memory was nothing but a struggle against erasure" (223). Driss' death could be reflected upon in the lines of a victim of the similar kind of war but with different modes of operation. The novel however foregrounds how lives continue to be under threat and events like 9/11 contributes to the anti-immigrant attitude.

The novel, panned out in chapters, titled after the different corresponding narrator-characters, including the dead Driss, offers an insight into their individual psyches. This highlights how every voice counts which also happens to be the essence of this thesis as

opposed to a sole central narrative. The narrative by not setting Driss' death in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 points to the sustained anti-immigrant attitude. The death that Driss escapes in the obviously volatile state of Morocco finally catches up with him on a seemingly ordinary day in the US much later after 9/11.

V

Conclusion

The chapter shows how 9/11 advanced the insider-outsider dichotomy wherein the position of the 'outsider' is sabotaged. While it does not dwell on the conspicuous post-9/11 othering such as the warscapes in foreign countries or indefinite torture at detention camps, it looks at life-altering accounts in the domestic front, mostly through subtle to severe means. The position of the immigrant will always be at risk especially when concerns for national security and protection surfaces. Hence, the preference of an alternate shelter by the immigrants offers no solution and as seen in spite of it all one continues to hold on to hope for better prospects. The discussion of the novels establishes how an immigrant's allegiance for the host country is always subject to question. In *Saffron Dreams*, the Pakistani immigrant Arissa's experiences in the US highlights how loyalties should not be put to trial for people like them: "…when you leave a land behind, you don't shift loyalties – you just expand your heart and for two lands in. You love them equally" (Abdullah 168). The precarity emanates out of this position assigned to the immigrant, that is, of doubt and a potential threat.

The characters in these narratives display tremendous love and allegiance towards America which however remains unrequited. Again, apart from other immigrants in the discussed novels, Mo, Salwa, and Nora are American-born however their lineages render them as outsiders, and thus they too in a way spend their lives 'abroad.' These novels overthrow the grand narrative of American ideals, such as equal opportunity, liberty, and justice that remains elusive for immigrants. Here, the immigrants are majorly driven by the precarious circumstances of their homelands but precarity however remains a definitive feature of them in the host country after 9/11. They undergo material as well as physical, psychological, and emotional challenges in both direct and indirect ways. With regards to the undocumented immigrants, precarity is doubled, first as Arabs and Muslims akin to their legal counterparts, and second being rendered as non-entities for their

unlawful stays. The study evinces how certain human lives exist at sub-par levels and deaths despite owing to the same cause are hierarchized. The three narratives function as a site to contest the American Dream as well as to show how even abstract ideas such as grief become externally and institutionally administrable. These narratives underscore America's continued legacy of discrimination that has found a new impetus after 9/11.