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'Narrow-Minded and Oppressive' or a 'Superior Culture'? Implications of Divergent Representations of Islam for Pakistani-American Youth

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Abstract

Drawing on ethnographic data, this article examines the complex terrain that working-class Pakistani-American youth must negotiate in their daily lives. Specifically, the article illustrates how particular views of Islam and Americanization manifest in particular sites and within educational discourses, and the resulting dissonance that youth experience. On the one hand, schools view Islam as oppressive, problematic and a hindrance to the youths' academic and professional success. On the other hand, families present Islam as a type of cultural capital that can guide youth and help them navigate their lives by being a 'good Muslim.' The result of these fossilized views of culture and nationality is the production of an 'imagined nostalgia': One group longs for a world where assimilation into the dominant group is expected and accepted; the other longs for the homeland, which they try to recreate in their new home. Thus, in their own ways, both schools and communities send the message that being Muslim and being American is not compatible. Consequently, rather than view being Muslim and American in an additive way, youth believe that they can only be one or the other, which often translates into placing themselves outside the realm of American cultural citizenship.

Keywords

Muslim, youth, immigrants, 9/11, Pakistani-Americans, cultural citizenship

Disciplines

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on ethnographic data, this article examines the complex terrain that working-class Pakistani-American youth must negotiate in their daily lives. Specifically, the article illustrates how particular views of Islam and Americanization manifest in particular sites and within educational discourses, and the resulting dissonance that youth experience. On the one hand, schools view Islam as oppressive, problematic and a hindrance to the youths' academic and professional success. On the other hand, families present Islam as a type of cultural capital that can guide youth and help them navigate their lives by being a "good Muslim." The result of these fossilized views of culture and nationality is the production of an "imagined nostalgia": One group longs for a world where assimilation into the dominant group is expected and accepted; the other longs for the homeland, which they try to recreate in their new home. Thus, in their own ways, both schools and communities send the message that being Muslim and being American is not compatible. Consequently, rather than view being Muslim and American in an additive way, youth believe that they can only be one or the other, which often translates into placing themselves outside the realm of American cultural citizenship.

KEYWORDS

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I didn't understand what side you're supposed to be on or anything. Like, you know, on one hand, you're Muslim, and they're saying, "You're Muslim, go this way"; on the other hand, you're American, and you have to be like this. Like, if you go to the American side, they're never going to think of you as American, but if you go to the Muslim side, you're not Muslim enough. (Marina, 17-year-old girl)

Introduction

Marina's quote illustrates the tensions between various discourses of Islam to which Pakistani-American youth are exposed and the consequent dissonance that they experience. In this article, I examine the intersection between practices at school and at home to illustrate the complex terrain that young Pakistani-Americans must negotiate: On the one hand, schools view Islam as backward, oppressive, and a hindrance to the youths' academic and professional success. On the other hand, families present Islam as a type of cultural capital—that is, a cultural resource based on forms of knowledge and attitudes (Bourdieu, 1986)—that can guide youth and help them navigate their lives by being "good Muslims." Such fossilized views of culture and nationality produce an *imagined nostalgia--a* longing for a time and place that may not have actually existed. For the school personnel in this study, the nostalgia evoked a particular version of American nationalism, which includes some or all of the following: an insistence that Americans are rational, good, free to choose; the desire to liberate others from their ignorance or poverty; and the view of schooling as a meritocratic institution that leads to social equity. For the Pakistani immigrant families, the nostalgia was for way of life they had left in Pakistan, where

religion served as a moral compass for everyday life choices and decisions. Few scholars have used imagined nostalgia as a framework to understand the experiences of immigrant communities, particularly in the field of education. Yet these imaginings are "as political an act as is imagining a nation" (George, 1996, p.3). In this case, one group longs for a world where assimilation into the dominant group is expected and accepted; the other longs for the homeland, which they try to recreate in their new home.

Interestingly, both the school personnel and the families in my study valued academic and professional success; however, they did not necessarily agree on *how* youth were to attain success. From school personnel's perspective, the youth had to become American (at the cost of their Muslimness) to succeed; in other words, school personnel promoted assimilation. From the families' perspective, their children had to be good Muslims to succeed, which sometimes meant resisting things the family considered "American." Both positions placed the youth outside American cultural citizenship by sending the message that being Muslim and being American are incompatible, as Marina's quote shows. My intention is not to discuss what it means to be American or Muslim, or to criticize the school's and families' interpretations of being American or being Muslim; rather, my purpose is to illustrate how particular views of Islam and Americanization manifest in particular sites and within educational discourses and the resulting dissonance that youth experience.

Through my ethnographic study with Pakistani-American youth, I describe how Islam is evoked and understood in the public school, on the one hand, and the home and the working-class Punjabi ethnic community, on the other. I demonstrate how in school, Islam is simplified as a problematic religion, where boys are troublemakers and girls are oppressed. Not surprisingly, in the home and community, Islam is portrayed as a superior culture to consciously contest what

families consider "Americanization"—which they see as incompatible with Islam. Both views hold static and dichotomous notions of culture. In one, "Muslimness" is oppressive and narrow-minded, and hence opposed to democratic American values of freedom and choice (see Abu el Haj, 2010). In the other, "Americanization" is morally and spiritually corrupt. Consequently, the cultural capital that Islam affords these youth has little relevance for their schooling. While the youth seemed to view being Muslim and being American as incompatible, it was not with the effects one might expect: For youth, the "superior culture" of Islam is not so much a moral guide; rather, Islam serves to combat the indignity of racism and feelings of not belonging in the post-9/11 era. While the youth creatively contested negative views of Islam, the ensuing cultural production of identity was not always positive; for example, many youth appropriated the terrorist stereotype (see Ghaffar-Kucher, 2012), or became involved in gangs (see also Crozier & Davies, 2008).

How, then, do the practices and discourses around Islam circulating at school and home intersect? I argue that the family's view of Islam as a "superior culture" is a type of cultural capital that holds great weight within Muslim communities but not in mainstream U.S. settings such as schools, with grave consequence for these Pakistani-American students and Muslim youth more generally. For both groups, the imagined nostalgia at the root of these two discourses answers a particular need; it serves as a vision for each group to strive toward and helps to overcome the challenges that arise when the two groups come in contact with each other (Jinhua & Chen, 1997). This issue is particularly salient at a time when many non-Muslims across the United States and Europe remain skeptical of Muslims and Islamophobia continues unabated.

I begin with an overview of my methodology, followed by a description of the Pakistani-American community under study. I then present two themes that emerged from the data: (a) the

two divergent discourses around Islam; and (b) school personnel's and families' views of "success."

Methodology

This paper is based on a larger multi-sited ethnography that explored the socialization and academic engagement of working- and lower middle-class Pakistani youth in a public school, in the local Punjabi ethnic community, and at home. Traveling through these spaces over a substantial period of time (between February 2004 and January 2008), I began to see that despite good intentions, both school personnel and the families were setting the youth up for failure, albeit in different ways. In both cases, attitudes toward Islam (negative from the school; positive from the home) influenced not only with whom the youth socialized in schools (and how), but also their academic engagement and future aspirations. Even for youth who were academically engaged and had lofty career aspirations, the lack of guidance in the school coupled with low expectations from teachers made it more difficult for the youth to reach their goals.

The bulk of the school-based data was collected in Spring 2006 and the 2006-07 academic year in a public school where the school faculty and administrative staff was predominantly white, while the student body was fairly diverse (see table 1). I formally interviewed 12 school staff members (two assistant principals, a dean of discipline, seven teachers, and two counselors); I also informally engaged with several other staff members. Thus, though my sample is somewhat limited, the data relayed here does in fact reflect the majority attitude in the school. I also interviewed four parental figures and 17 youth, which together represent the family's perspective. Additionally, I engaged to varying degrees with 62 Pakistani-

American youth and 17 non-Pakistani youth. Several youth were part of six focus groups I held at the school; others interacted with me more informally. I was also able to collect several samples of student work, which included stories about their experiences in schools. On a few occasions in an Urdu language class, which had a high percentage of Pakistani-American students, I was able to assign topics for writing assignments. I did a great deal of descriptive observation throughout the data collection period, primarily in the school but also in the homes of participants and in the Punjabi community.

Like most of my youth participants, I am of Pakistani origin, specifically from the Punjab. However, while most of my participants were from smaller cities or semi-rural towns, I am from the metropolis of Lahore. I also come from a more affluent background, while most of my participants' families came from working- or lower-middle classes. Our similar religious and cultural backgrounds gave me a degree of entry into the community and made me familiar with the cultures and languages. The interviews and conversations with my Pakistani-American participants were conducted in a mixture of English, Urdu, and Punjabi. Some individuals (both youths and adults) spoke limited English; we thus spoke exclusively in Urdu or Punjabi. Many spoke English well but preferred to speak to me in Urdu, our shared national language. Most significantly for this paper, my background gave me a familiarity with Islamic practices and ideologies. Nevertheless, I consider myself an outsider to the community (see Ghaffar-Kucher, forthcoming).

Imagined Nostalgia and Cultural Fossilization

The community under study is one of the largest Pakistani ethnic enclaves in the United States. To get visas to the United States, families were often sponsored by their extended family

members and, not surprisingly, settled near their relatives. Consequently, the community that developed originated from the same (rural and semi-urban) areas in Pakistan – mostly from the Punjab province. Thus, from the outset, community members were likely to have similar views and attitudes since they shared ethnic, religious, and class backgrounds.

Similar to class-based divisions in Pakistan itself, there are at least two distinct Pakistani groups in the United States: One consists of working- to lower middle-class ethnic communities, such as the one in my study. The other is a more cosmopolitan elite of upper middle-class Pakistani immigrants who rarely reside near lower-class Pakistani immigrant enclaves. These elites typically come from urban parts of Pakistan, where contact with and influences from "the West"—through media, consumerism, access and ability to travel, and Western-based education—produces cultural capital that is similar to the kind of cultural capital that middle-class white Americans value. This makes elite Pakistanis' transition to the United States easier.

In stark contrast, most of the youth in my study were from semi-urban areas and less developed small cities in Pakistan. These two socioeconomically distinct groups rarely intersect in Pakistan or in the United States (Najam, 2007). Thus, class distinctions result in very different immigrant experiences. The lower-class Pakistani immigrant families often expressed gratitude for opportunities in the United States, particularly educational opportunities. However, lacking the economic and cultural capital that more affluent Pakistani immigrants enjoy, these families rarely challenged those in power; for example, in the four years when I was in and out of the school, parents never came to ask school administrators why their children were in an Urdu class that did not teach Urdu—an issue that I will return to later in this paper.

In general, few organizations cater to the working-class Pakistani immigrant community; the majority of those that do emerged after September 11 and generally attend to legal needs

(typically involving immigration issues). The dearth of organized support greatly influenced the type of support the community offered its members. This is not surprising: Stanton-Salazar (1997) argues "the potential for the development of supportive ties is always set in the context of interlocking class, race, and gender hierarchies" (p. 9). Here class, especially as it relates to limited economic capital, greatly affected the type of support made available to the community, since social capital is often (indirectly) derived from economic capital (Tapia, 2004). The insufficient knowledge about how "the system" works and limited economic and social capital among members of the community made it difficult to initiate support organizations.

Because the community lacked social capital, youth had few resources to support them during and after their studies. In fact, until the mid-1980s, this was largely a male community, with the men sojourning between their lives in Pakistan (that centered around family) and their lives in the United Sates (that centered around work) —what is known as *relayed migration*. Several youth talked about how their fathers had been in the United States many years before they were able to bring their families. Thus, despite the arrival of women and children over the past two decades, the community continues to be male dominated, and few services cater to women and children. The mosque generally serves as a gathering place, but again, it is a male-dominated space. The only services that are geared toward women are English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) classes at some of the local community-based organizations. And even there, few girls are permitted by their families to attend, as women's and girls' socialization is highly regulated both in Pakistan and in the diaspora (and in many Muslim-majority societies as well as other immigrant communities).

Although there were few formal community resources for the Pakistani-American youth, the community played a significant role in their lives. Research suggests that when families live

in proximity to their ethnic communities, they are more likely to follow that community's rules and expectations, and hence impose those expectations on their children (Zhou & Bankston, 1997; Jacobson, 1998; Purkayastha, 2005). Adherence to community mores is more likely in a tight-knit ethnic enclave, where the ethnic community serves as the home country by proxy and regulates behavior of community members. Jacobson (1998) vividly articulates this regulation when she describes the feelings of her Pakistani-British respondents: "even when they [the respondents] are beyond their parents' gaze, their parents' friends, relations, and neighbors scrutinize their behavior" (p. 63). The community's gaze or gossip enforces conformity among the community's members.

Given the nature of surveillance in the community, it is worth examining how "emerging emphases within families and ethnic community organizations converge and diverge to create hegemonic and alternative repertoires," which, in the case of Pakistani families, translated into the creation of a "superior culture" (Purkayastha, 2005, p. 88), a form of cultural capital that families played up to make sense of their multiple worlds. This "superior culture" is created by a confluence of interests that draws on gender, race, religion, and nationality, particularly the interests of those in power, whether in formal religious establishments or informally within the ethnic community. The result is the creation of a hegemonic version of ethno-national culture that is considered superior to other cultures.

For parents, as I will show, the "superior culture" served as a kind of cultural capital grounded in Islam and based on a "myth of pure origins" (Maira, 2002, p. 113). It served as a moral compass for families to guide children and shield them from practices in the larger community that they disapproved of or felt were contrary to Pakistani culture, which was almost always equated with "Muslim culture." Families held onto particular habits and ways, despite the

fact that things "back home" were changing. This is known as *cultural fossilization*, which Maira (2002) contends, "creates the paradox of a community that is socially and ideologically more conservative than the community of origin, clinging to mores and beliefs that have remained static, albeit contested by their children" (p. 85).

Cultural fossilization is often grounded in nostalgia. Davis (1979) defines *nostalgia* as "a positively toned evocation of a lived past in the context of some negative feeling toward present or impending circumstance" (p. 18). In Davis's definition, nostalgia derives from a "lived past." But as Appadurai and Breckenridge (1993) describe, nostalgia may also emerge "without lived experience or collective historical memory" (p. 25). And, when idealization of the home country "elicits a nostalgia for a glorious past that never was," cultural fossilization is heightened (Esposito, 2003, p. 15).

Cultural fossilization and the related isolation are by no means unique to Pakistani immigrants. Among the problems associated with isolation is the tendency for the immigrant community to stagnate, as immigrants make a conscious effort to hold onto traditions that may have in fact evolved in their home country. Esposito (2003) argues that the "remembered homeland takes on a special significance. It form[s] a lifeline to the home country and a basis for group identity in a new and often alien and oppressive context" (pp. 14-15). In shunning certain values and behaviors considered "American" and presenting Islam as a "superior culture," these Pakistani immigrant families tend to isolate themselves from the dominant culture. This isolation, a defensive reaction to assimilation policies, is beneficial to neither the immigrant group nor the host country, as it results in parallel rather than integrated societies (Ghaffar-Kucher, 2006).

For youth, however, this somewhat fossilized "superior culture" often served to combat the indignity of racism and feelings of not belonging, arising from events and attitudes in the post-9/11 era, particularly in public settings such as schools (Ghaffar-Kucher, 2012). The school is significant not only because it is a social sphere where youth absorb particular discourses and become particular types of citizens. It is also where youth engage such discourses and critique them, evade them, play with them (e.g. Willis, 1977; Crozier & Davies, 2008; Abu el-Haj, 2010; Hamzeh, 2011) and potentially develop a culture different from the culture at home (e.g. Hall, 2002). In other words, school is where young people are "making themselves and being made" (Ong, 1996, p. 738). Thus, in what follows, I discuss themes from my research that exemplify the contrasting views of Islam held by family and community, on the one hand, and school personnel, on the other.

Divergent Discourses Around Islam: Roadblock or Path to Success?

The school personnel and the families had views of Islam that were at odds: Whereas the family viewed Islam as a moral compass that would lead to their children's success in academics and social life, the school viewed the students' Muslimness as a deterrent to their academic success.

The School's View: "Narrow-Minded and Oppressive"

School personnel's view of Islam as oppressive and Muslims as narrow-minded affected the kind of guidance youth received and the expectations that teachers had for them (see Crozier & Davies, 2008). For example, several staff members assumed that young Pakistani girls would marry at a young age and/or would not be permitted to go to college, as exemplified by a statement from Mr. Henson, a white assistant principal:

I've had several girls who have been married off, I guess, for lack of a better term. It's a reality. It's a different culture. You know, it's a different culture. We're learning about those cultural differences, and we're trying to adapt to those cultural differences.

In my time at the school, I heard of only one case where there was concern that a girl might be married off. It was certainly not the norm. Yet this sort of refrain dominated the school personnel's discourses around Pakistani students and informed staff's views of "Pakistani culture"; moreover, this distorted view of "Pakistani culture" was subsumed under the umbrella of "Islamic culture," where Islam and its adherents were both seen as problematic. For example, Mr. Cowan, a white social studies teacher, seemed to distrust Muslim students in general, who, based on our conversations, he identified with brown-colored skin. He recounted that around the time of September 11, 2001, a student looked out the window and said "those buildings won't be there tomorrow." I asked whether the student was in his class, and he admitted the story was hearsay. But he appeared to believe it.

Teachers' assumptions about their Muslim students were evident in how they engaged with them. For example, during the unit on religion in the social studies class geared toward English Language Learners (ELLs), Mr. Cowan, asked the students to create a poster with artifacts from the three monotheistic religions they were studying. To clarify his expectations for the assignment, he showed the class visual examples of people and things that they could use for their posters. I was taken aback when he pulled out a picture of a person symbolizing Prophet Mohammad. The five Muslim students in the class—all recently arrived immigrants from various countries—remained silent.

Later, I asked Mr. Cowan where he got the picture. He said that his student teacher found it. I explained to him that Muslims are discouraged from depicting religious figures because

doing so could lead to idolatry. He responded that in classrooms where there were no Muslims, it should not be a problem to show such pictures. Rather than capitalize on a teachable moment to have a discussion about why some religions depict religious figures in visual form while others forbid doing so, Mr. Cowan simply thought that this was yet another example of Muslim students' lack of open-mindedness—the problem was the students, not the teacher.

After the class, I asked the student teacher where she found the picture of Prophet Mohammad. She replied, "I Googled it." She also had no idea that visual representation of important religious figures, particularly Mohammad, was prohibited in Islam, although she admitted that a Muslim girl in the fourth-period class had brought it up. Mr. Cowan then said that the Board of Education-approved textbook also had a drawing of Mohammad sitting on a horse, which is why he assumed that showing a picture of Mohammad was not a problem. He said there was another picture in a teacher resource book that he had considered giving to the students because it outlined the Muslim perspective on religion, but he now hesitated to do so because it also depicted Mohammad.

Indeed, in the ninth-grade social studies textbook, there is a black-and-white drawing of a man sitting on a horse, surrounded by three other men. The man is identified as Prophet Mohammad. The more problematic picture, however, is the one in the teacher resource guide (Miltner, Quinn & Warren, 1993/2003).

The image – by Béla Petheō[1] (artist for William McNeill's (1963) "The Rise of the West") – is quite evocative and depicts several human male figures. The top third of the page is a depiction of Allah, in large, human form, with a sword in hand. Surrounding him are what appear to be rays of light. Two of rays pointing downwards create what seems to be a pyramid. Near the apex of the pyramid is a small human figure and below him a slightly larger one. These are

renderings of Abraham and Christ respectively (neither of whom have anything in their hands). In the center of the page (near the base of the light-ray pyramid) is a representation of the Prophet Mohammad. Like the figure depicting Allah, Mohammad is drawn with a sword in his hand, standing on a mountain and looking to the sky. Below him, another man bows in prayer; his position suggests that he is bowing to Prophet Mohammad. Also portrayed are a scene of war (with references to Mecca and Medina); the "last judgment" (with a bolt of lightening that seems to be coming from Allah); "law" (depicted simply by a black tablet) and "idolaters". The drawing also include smaller images of almsgiving, prayer, fasting, and pilgrimage. The title of the image is simply "Islam". The fact that Mr. Cowan considered using this handout for the class shows that he knew little about even the basic tenets of Islam. Showing such a picture could produce an angry reaction from the Muslim students, which would only serve to confirm the stereotype of Muslims as "problem" students who are "narrow-minded." The consideration that such a picture was insulting (much like the stereotype of the miserly Jew) would probably be lost.

At the same time, Mr. Cowan tried to show that he was empathetic toward Muslim students, saying that during Ramadan, he did not drink water during class, as he normally did. Though this is a kind gesture, it does little to understand the perspectives or situations of these youth.

Mr. Cowan expressed feeling most uncomfortable teaching the unit on religion—an admission he repeated several times during the course of our conversations. A frequent "problem" he identified with Muslim students was that they did not seem to understand the chronological order of religion and would often express their dismay that Islam was the last of the monotheistic religions to be taught. This may certainly have been the case. But it could also

be that the students felt that the unit on Islam was rushed. For instance, in Mr. Su's social studies class, since Islam was the last unit to be taught, it was the session that the class had to rush through. Mr. Su, who was Chinese-American, acknowledged this by mentioning several times to the class that "we better get to Islam or Tanveer will get upset." Not only did he admit that the teaching of Islam often gets truncated, he also singled out a (Pakistani-American) Muslim student, Tanveer, in a way that framed him as a problem student. Rather than accepting responsibility for his own issues with time management, Mr. Su shifted the blame to the student.

When the youth challenged their teachers on what the teachers were incorrectly presenting as "Islam," the youths' challenges were dismissed. Ms. Dietz, a novice white teacher who taught a large number of Pakistani-American students, explained,

> I don't know much [about Islam], but I have a friend who has studied fundamentalist Islam, so any questions, I ask him. But the things that he tells me differ from what the kids tell me, but I don't—I'm more inclined to believe him because he's done a thorough study of it.

Ms. Dietz's dismissive statement illustrates a lack of trust in the students. Moreover, her friend whose knowledge she relied on was studying "fundamentalist" Islam, which is not the same as studying Islam (an analogy might be Pentecostalism verses Christianity as a whole). School personnel thus had particular ideas or visions of Islam that represented not only static culturalist thinking regarding Islam, but also about difference and national "purity" and what it means to be "American." They looked at Muslim youth through these preconceived notions that in turn informed their relationships with the youth.

The Family's View: "A Superior Culture"

In contrast to the schools, the families drew on Islam at home and within the community to provide lessons that ostensibly would ensure that the youth would be good students, work hard, and eventually secure good jobs, leading to social mobility. In other words, the families believed that the school would value these "Islamic traits" as much as Muslims, or at least these Pakistani families, did. Despite the gulf between their and the school personnel's attitudes toward Islam, the underlying discourse suggests that the families were just as prone as school personnel to equate Islam with Pakistani culture. This may be particular to Pakistani families; Pakistan was founded as a homeland for Muslims, and Pakistani nationalism is tied deeply to Islam. The phenomenon is not restricted to Pakistani-American Muslims; Werbner (2004) found that, in general, British-Pakistanis' national identity was subsumed under a Muslim identity. Not surprisingly, then, a way for families to maintain cultural purity was to teach their children that the "Muslim way of life" was superior to the American way. Here, religion served as a way to hold on to what was culturally valuable to the families while settling in a new place (see Zine, 2007 and Abbas, 2010 for parallel examples for Muslims in Canada and the UK).

Many of the lessons that families taught the youth revolved around gender roles and expectations. Young women and their sexual virtue served as a marker of community boundaries and became an important part of Pakistani immigrants' self-representations of cultural difference. This sexual policing was highly gendered, in that it was often young men policing young women and, often enough, Islam was used to justify this. Moreover, these lessons were juxtaposed against an American culture and society that was seen as full of problems and vice and hence a deterrent to being a good Muslim. The "American" attributes from which the families were trying to shield their children related to sexuality, particularly in terms of dress and gender relations. One mother said:

We aren't unfair to them so that there is some sort of longing. We just try to explain to them that there are good and bad things. We tell them to come near their religion. That there is Allah, and his Prophet. Follow him. Meaning, we do this a bit but we don't have many restrictions. The girls too, we don't just tell the boys. We also tell the girls that this environment—these cigarettes, alcohol, clubs—these are things that are forbidden by Allah. We frequently tell both our sons and our daughters about these kinds of things. (Mehbooba; translated from Urdu)

Undoubtedly, Pakistani immigrant parents are not the only ones who find cigarettes, alcohol, clubs, and so on, to be undesirable. The point, however, is that Pakistani families identified these things—rightly or wrongly—with "Americanization" and saw them as contrary to Islamic values, practices, and beliefs ("they are forbidden by Allah"). Moreover, the question of what constitutes "authentic Muslims" is a burden that was borne by women more than by men, and by girls more than by boys. Hamzeh (2011) refers to this gendered discourse as "hijab" discourse (p. 482), which she describes as the "unexposed complex pattern of normative values and practices, which act as a social force that sets the conditions for the construction of material reality of Muslim females' body" (p. 485). In other words, it represents the values and practices that Muslim families wish their girls to follow in terms of dress, mobility in public spaces, and interactions with the opposite sex.

In deed, the families' and community's surveillance of daughters was often conducted through the sons. Brothers—both older and younger—were quite vocal about what their sisters should and should not do. Ghazi, a 16-year-old boy who had three younger sisters, explained in his interview, "Well, I tell her that, because I'm a Paki—I mean we're Pakistani, we're not American—so I have to tell her, 'Don't wear this, don't go outside,' like, stuff like that."

Similarly, Nisreen recounted that her oldest brother often told her how to dress and how to behave in public to maintain the family's *izzat*, or respect.

Not surprisingly then, boys often made sharp distinctions between *sharif* or "good" girls and *baysharum* or "shameless" girls. The defining factors were how the girls dressed and their relations with the boys, grounded in Islamic views on modesty. In his interview, 14-year-old Usman listed the girls who were *sharif* and those who were not:

> Usman: (in Urdu) Tanzeela is good. Nasifa auntie too. Jahnara is okay, well not that okay.
>
> Me: And Tareen?
>
> Usman: Tareen? God forbid! Her clothes are too tight. Everyone talks about her. Iffat— not okay. Mishal is good, modest. Mahnaz is not okay.
>
> Me: Why?
>
> Usman: (switches to English) Because she went out with Walid's brother. Girls should not go out with boys—except me, because I'm good. (giggles)

The girls who were identified as good were quiet and did not interact with boys. Usman's reference to Nasifa as an "auntie" was to establish that she acted older than her years, but it was not a compliment. Regarding Tareen, he based his assertion that she was not a good girl only on the superficial issue of her clothes. Fourteen-year-old Tajdar repeated this sentiment during a focus group with the boys: "Another way you can tell [a good girl from a bad one] is the way they dress; you could tell."

Although fear of "Americanization" was certainly a concern for families, they also feared the ethnic community's gaze. Families were particularly concerned about the marriageability of their daughters and thus encouraged their sons to "look out" for and "protect" their sisters. Thus,

young men used their masculinity as a defense of femininity (Archer, 2003). Yet while brothers

forbade their sisters to date, they themselves would date Pakistani-American girls. During one of

the boys' focus groups, I asked how they could date other Pakistani-America girls when they

themselves had sisters whom they would not allow anyone to date anyone. They seemed to

believe that "girls should know better." Usman argued, "It's not my problem if she's interested

in me." These girls were thus considered to be "less Pakistani" and too "Americanized."

According to Tajdar, it was "different for girls because girls have a weak heart" and were more

likely to be influenced by American ways. Basaam agreed, saying, "The culture we have, the

culture we follow from our religion and our ancestors, the girls come here and forget. But for

boys it's a different story, but for girls, it's different."

Most fascinating was that girls were especially critical of other girls. In fact, the girls who

were identified as *baysharum* (shameless) by the boys because of their clothes believed that other

girls, especially some of those who wore a hijab, were the ones who deserved the bad reputation.

They're not innocent at all, that's the thing, they go and they do everything and we –

because the way we dress–we don't do anything, but yet, especially us, our crew, we get

so *badnaamed* [given a bad name] in our school like we're the *gushties* [whores] but yet,

we don't even do anything and the girls in the scarf do all the stuff, they get the respect.

(Marina, Focus group)

The "stuff" the girls were referring to was dating boys and, often enough, making out with their

boyfriends on school grounds (since leaving school was not always an option and meeting

outside of school was difficult). The girls from the focus group felt that the headscarf was a

symbol of piety and respect, and for hijabi girls to disrespect it in this way was not only

hypocritical but gave Islam a bad name. Soroiya further elaborated: "Like, I know that I'm not

the perfect Muslim, like, look at me, like, you know [points to her clothes]. Like, people can say, 'Look at her, she's a frickin' whore and she doesn't even look like a Muslim.' That's what people think." Marina continued in a similar vein: "It's so weird, the girls who wear the hijab, they get all the respect, but they're not even doing respectable things, but we, just 'cause the way we dress, we get no respect because we apparently are too American."

Again, girls were judged on superficial attributes such as dress and not on actual behavior, and their poor reputations were based largely on views that they were not "Muslim" enough and too "American." However, the boys recognized that not all girls who wore a hijab were innocent. In fact, several of them said that the hijabi girls were "the worst." Mrs. Habib, an elementary school community liaison and parent whom I interviewed, made a similar observation:

> Some girls, instead of school, go on with their boyfriends. Their mothers drop them at the bus stop and in front of them, the girls are wearing their scarves, but in their bags is a T-shirt, which they've purchased on the sly or borrowed from a friend, a *bighiree* [corrupted] white girl or Mexican. And then they go and change in the school bathroom. And then they go with the bad crowd—there are good Americans too, it's not like they're all bad—but these girls go with the wrong crowd. (translated from Urdu)

Although Mrs. Habib quickly corrected herself to say she was not referring to "all Americans," it was clear from our conversation that she saw "Americanization" as a problem and, like many Pakistani-Americans, she viewed Americanization as moving away from Islam. Thus the superiority of "Islam" over a narrowly defined view of "Americanization" was extremely important for the family and community, especially in terms of gender roles and expectations.

In the instances described here, *both* the family and school personnel have a very static notion of culture. The families see "Americanization" as morally and spiritually corrupt, and Islam as "goodness"; the schools see "Muslimness" as oppressive and narrow-minded. The result of these contrasting views of Islam is "the emergence of nostalgia [that] answers a cultural need. It attempts to provide not only an imagined haven in the face of a reality of weariness and toil, but also, more importantly, a positive construction" (Jinhua & Chen, 1997, p. 148), at least from the perspective of those doing the imagining. For the school personnel, the imaginings are of an assimilated world; for the families, of a world where the Muslim way of life is preeminent. I turn to this issue next.

School Personnel's and Families' Views of "Success:" Assimilation or Isolation?

Both the families and the school personnel valued academic and professional success, but they did not agree on how the youth were to obtain that success. The school clearly promoted assimilation, while the family promoted Islam to combat this very assimilation.

The School Personnel's View: Assimilation

The school personnel's assimilationist views that were informed by static culturalist thinking was evident in the many ways that they managed diversity, and also in teachers' discourses about their students. Ms. Dietz, a young, white, novice foreign-language teacher (and daughter of a German immigrant) epitomized a narrow understanding of what it means to be American:

> In this country, though it is a country of immigrants, there still is an American culture,
> there's a very American culture. And this thing, American culture, has been around since
> 1778 or 1776. […] You know, this is something that when immigrants came, they came

> because they wanted to come to America. And what America is built on is the American
>
> culture. That's how we became what we are and why people still continue to come. So
>
> when you don't assimilate, when you try to make it, turn it into a Little Mexico or turn it
>
> into a Little This or a Little That, it doesn't function as well, and it's just like, I mean, my
>
> personal view is that they need to assimilate and acculturate because they're here in our
>
> coun—in this country. And I don't go to Mexico or Pakistan and try and make them do
>
> what we do in America. So why do they come here and try and do that here?

This quote exemplifies the static notion of "American culture" held by a young white woman.
While she acknowledged that America is a "country of immigrants," she did not consider a more
dynamic notion of citizenship, which is more fluid and flexible than fixed and monolithic (see
Rosaldo, 1994; Ong, 1996; Maira, 2004). She went on to explain her views of the "fundamentals
of American culture":

> Number one, the English language. There cannot be 10 languages running around
>
> the country. There has to be one major language. Even in Pakistan, they have one
>
> major. There's what? Urdu? And then they have their little dialects […] 'Cause in
>
> Spain they have the dialects, but they all speak Castilian Spanish. In, like, pretty
>
> much everywhere—in Germany there's German—there might be little dialects but
>
> there's also the standard German. There is Standard English, and there might be
>
> different accents and different slang that goes around the country, but they
>
> [immigrants] need to learn English. That's just the way it is. […] Religious
>
> diversity? Be whatever, keep your own religion, whatever you want to do, but
>
> there's also some rules, like school, for example. I mean, these kids cutting school
>
> all the time—I'm not saying Pakistani kids in general, it's all of them. There are

rules for school. They should be in school, and they should not be out doing this and that, their parents should not be able to take them out 62 times a semester 'cause they need to baby-sit their little sister. […] Here's another one. Sure, you're of Pakistani descent, but you're in this country, stand up and say the Pledge of Allegiance, or don't be here. If you're going to be here, especially if you're born here, yeah, you might be of Pakistani descent, but if you're born here, you're American. That's the way it is. You're born here, you earn an American passport, so if not, then why are you here? To take our money? Because you want to have our jobs? And you want—you know—you like our education system? Good, it's ours. You want it, you have to earn it.

This quote illuminates how, as Thea Abu el-Haj (2007) argues, schools help construct the symbolic boundaries of the nation by defining membership. For example, Ms. Dietz implies that you have to assimilate to the dominant culture.

Abu el-Haj further discusses how these boundaries are constructed through the kinds of knowledge and resources that help immigrants make sense of their new homes. The school's efforts to provide particular kinds of knowledge can be seen in the foreign language department. The assistant principal of the foreign language department explained how the school responded to the changing nature of the community by providing language classes. Because there was a growing Chinese population in the neighborhood, they offered a Chinese class, which they added to classes in Russian, Polish, Spanish, and Italian. In fact, the only language class that did not cater to an immigrant population was French. In 1997, the school administrators realized that they had a large Pakistani population, so they began offering an Urdu class. It is worth mentioning that not only is the school's Pakistani population primarily Punjabi speaking, but the

community never asked for this class. The class was offered on the school's own initiative and was part of its efforts to reach out to the community but also to "manage" diversity.

These language classes had two purposes—to provide the students a "safe space" and, in the words of Mr. Salvatore, a white Assistant Principal, to serve as a "citizenship orientation program" through which students would "become acquainted with the culture and expectations for citizens in the United States." Yet there was no explicit syllabus or guidelines to indicate how teachers should go about orienting these "new citizens."

The main challenge with the Urdu class was that the school administration never found an Urdu speaker to teach it—school personnel claimed they could not find a certified Urdu teacher. During the four years in which I was in and out of this community, I observed four different teachers for varying lengths of time. Three of the teachers were immigrants themselves—three of European heritage, and one of Middle-Eastern heritage. Each had his or her own perspective; the male white teacher who helped establish the class, was interested in valuing the students' cultural and linguistic capital, but, most of the time, the class was taught as a way to assimilate the students.

Over time, the class essentially became a space to warehouse students, meaning that any student from the Middle East or South Asia was placed in it. Though the majority of the students in the class were Pakistani, there were also Yemeni, Indian, Bangladeshi, and Palestinian students—all "learning" Urdu in a class that did not teach Urdu. Ms. Colombo, one of the white guidance counselors, explained why she had placed the Bangladeshi students in the class:

> We had only the Bengali and the Urd—the Pakistani students in that class to begin with.
> Bengali, I only had, like, three or four; to give them a space and since it's run in English
> and since they're natives and most of them can manage [the class]. Those that can't

manage are a handful.

Ms. Colombo's statement is illuminating in several ways. It reflects the lack of knowledge that school personnel, or at least this guidance counselor, had about Pakistanis and Bangladeshis. Although Pakistan and Bangladesh were a single country between 1947 and 1971 (though divided geographically by India), Bangladesh's independence in 1971 was the result of a very bloody civil war, the roots of which were differences in language and culture, among other things. In fact, in terms of script, the Pakistani students had more in common with the Arab students, since the Urdu script is based on the Arabic one, whereas the completely different Bengali script is based on the Devanagari system. Moreover, Ms. Colombo's reference to the Bengali students as "natives" implied that she believed they were similar to or the same as Pakistani students, again reflecting a poor knowledge of the population.

Assigning certain students to the Urdu class based on their race and ethnicity was actually a form of tracking in the school. As Lopez (2002) observes, "School practices (re)produce racial and gender inequalities by using race, class, and gender as markers to track students within schools" (p. 56). Students were thus denied an opportunity to learn another language. While this might have been necessary for ELL students, there were many students who were fluent English speakers and easily could have taken another language. Even when students wanted to take a different language class, they were placed in the Urdu class. Iffat explained:

> I was never into these Paki people until I came here. In freshman year, there were only two Paki people that I knew in this school, and they were both in my honors program. … My counselor, […], put me in Urdu because there was no space in the Italian class and she said my schedule was not matching up.

> Whether the issue was of scheduling is not something that I was able to uncover, but

what was clear is that students were quite deliberately placed into this class. Despite Ms. Colombo's belief that the students were gaining English instruction at least, the reality was that there was no language learning in the class. The Urdu class thus created the "…'illusion' of an honest linguistic and cultural embrace" (Garcia, 2006, p. 171) on the part of the administration toward the Pakistani community. But it was only a "cosmetic" accommodation, "one which gives the appearance of integration" (Garcia, 2006, p. 170).

Even as an "English" class, the content of instruction was problematic. Although some teachers tried to teach it as a history class, other teachers used it as a means to "civilize" the students. This is reflected in the "common sense" exercise that Ms. Krebski, one of the longest-serving Urdu teachers, made the class do at least three times during the Spring 2007 term (never in my presence). The following questions are just a sample of some of the questions on this exercise (relayed by students in interviews).

Where do you cook?

A) Chicken   B) Kitchen   C) Living Room

Your sister or brother's daughter, what would you call her?

A) Niece   B) Nephew   C) Cousin

After taking a shower, people wipe with what:

A) Towel   B) Napkin   C) Tissue

In the United States, what do you call your mother:

A) Mother   B) Mommy   C) Mom

When a woman is having a baby what do you call her

A) Pink   B) Pregnant   C) Popular

The students were, unsurprisingly, vexed to have to engage in such an activity. In fact, 30 such questions were used as the final exam for the year. Although I was not in the classroom when the exam was given, according to two female students, Mahnaz and Tareen, when Ms. Krebski read out the question about a woman having a baby, Usman, a male student, shouted out, "Ms. Krebski, do you think that we are so uneducated that we don't know the answer to this? It's 'pink' of course!" The entire class had burst out in laughter. Not only does this vignette exemplify the lack of knowledge and understanding that members of school personnel had for its various populations, but it also illustrates the assimilationist view of the school and the desire to "educate" the youth who were seen as backward. It also displays the youths' frustration with this perspective and explains why many students were disengaged and at times even acted out.

The Family's Perspective: Isolation

Given a school context where assimilation was the goal and where Islam was viewed negatively, the families were concerned with sheltering their children from particularities of what they considered to be American culture. They believed that an Islamic orientation was not only a way to keep their children on the "right path" but also would lead to their "success." Mahnaz's mother articulated such a belief this way: "To be frank, I think the education in Pakistan is much better. There's too much freedom here. It's more strict there, there's more of an *Islami* focus. It's good here, but there's too much love." Like several parents, this mother refers to superiority of an Islamic focus for her children's education and also the problems with what they viewed as the more coddling American education. In several instances, the families talked about how they tried to provide an Islamic orientation through lessons at home, but again, these lessons were often presented in contradistinction to "American" culture in its entirety. One aunt explained, "When a child sees this kind of environment—boy or girl—in their heart they will also want to be like

that. So when they're all day in school in this same environment, then it's our attempt that within the four walls of the home, whatever we can do, whatever we can teach about our Muslim religion, this is what we teach" (translated from Urdu/Punjabi). In contrast to Greta Gibson's (1988) work with Sikh immigrants, where the families promoted accommodation without assimilation, working-class Pakistani-American families in particular are more likely to reject anything American, although their sense of what is American is quite limited. As 16-year-old Mishal (female) rationalized, "Maybe it's because of the way we act at home. We don't act American." Another mother explained,

> We don't know if our household is really different because we are only in contact with one or two other families who've been to our homes, and they have said, "your kids are different from other kids. There is a Pakistani atmosphere in your homes. Your children seek permission from you, they listen to you, they attend to their guests, they say 'salaam.'" Otherwise, kids say "yo, ho." It's like that, and no one looks at the parents or the guests. A few people have said that, otherwise, we had thought that perhaps we were behind the times. Then we are at ease and we thank Allah. (Mehbooba, translated from Urdu)

Again, the mother juxtaposed the Islamic greeting of "salaam" to the American greeting "yo" reflected her idea of the superiority of Islam and the inferiority of American ways. Similar to school personnel's narrow view of Islam, the families had a narrow view of what constituted "American" ways, thus exhibiting parallel cultural essentialism.

The religious-based home lessons were not always easy for the youth, especially girls. As 14-year-old Tareen explained:

> You know how it is, right? And when your parents stress you out, like, "Don't do this,

don't do that," "Oh, don't make a boyfriend, don't do this, don't get cool with boys, don't

do this," and I don't say anything to them, but I think in my brain, "Hello, we're going to

live here for the next –." Let's say we go somewhere, of course there are males and

females, and it's not good if you're only cool with females and don't know how to say a

word to males. I think it's supposed to be—you're supposed to be equal with both of

them—but my parents stress on the fact that, "No, it's better to be a girl, it's blah blah

blah this happens, that happens," and I'm just, like, "Okay, whatever."

When I asked Tareen's mother, Mehbooba, why she treated her daughters differently from her

son, she explained,

It's in our nature. I can't give you one answer. There is no one answer. There are many

considerations that come to mind. Our religion does not permit *bay pardagee* [lack of

modesty] or *avaragardee* [to roam around without care] for girls. (translated from Urdu)

Once again, religion is invoked to explain why the families have particular expectations for their

daughters (Hamzeh, 2011). And again, it is juxtaposed with an observation of what is common

among mainstream America. The families promoted views from "back home" and tried to guide

their children as best they could based on their yardsticks of what constituted morality and what

would lead to success. As a result, both schools and communities were relying on an imaginary

and glorified past to interpret the present, in the context of a social political milieu that shapes

and hardens their thinking. Similar to Esposito's (2003) findings with her female Filipino

participants, these examples highlight "the gendered differentials embedded in these ethnic

traditions and show that identities forged from below are often no less essentialized that the

hegemonic identities imposed from above" (p. 15). The resulting imaginings of the "other"

(American/Muslim) create a tension that youth have to navigate.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article is to illustrate how particular views of Islam and Americanization manifest in specific sites and within educational discourses and the resulting dissonance that youth experience. Using "imagined nostalgia" as a framework to examine the culturally essentialist perspectives of school personnel and Pakistani immigrant families, this article shows how both school personnel and families strive to do what they think is best, but with unanticipated consequences for the youth. On the one hand, school personnel reproduced anti-Islamic discourses circulating in media and politics, which suggest that a Muslim cannot be American; this perspective was grounded in their imagined nostalgia for a "good," "democratic," "non-sexist" America, where for example, girls are "free" to make their own choices – an America that has never existed. On the other hand, the working-class families worried about "Americanization," which they saw as an obstacle to being a "good" Muslim. They feared that their children would stray away from Islam by embracing particular aspects of American culture that are at odds with Islam, particularly drinking and dating. Both perspectives presented a one-dimensional understanding of what it means to be Muslim and American. Thus, in their own ways, both schools and communities sent the message that being Muslim and being American was not compatible, a message that the youth internalized. As a result, rather than view being Muslim and American in an additive way, youth believed that they could only be one or the other, which often translated into placing themselves outside the realm of American cultural citizenship.

The imagined nostalgia at the root of these discourses provides a tangible way for educators and researchers to make sense of differences that are heightened by the current

Islamophobic climate. Thea Abu el-Haj (2010) offers some excellent suggestions for teachers to make better sense of these differences: First, teachers need to given opportunities to critically examine their ideas of citizenship and belonging. Room for this kind of self-reflection is particularly needed in pre- and in-service teacher education, which also must strive to "help expand educator's understanding of citizenship in and for our global community" (p. 270). Second, teachers need to make efforts to become more knowledgeable about the world we live in and the various points of view around the United States' foreign policy. A first step would be to go beyond apolitical celebrations of cultural diversity and see immigrant youth as resources they can learn from about the world.

Families too need to make the effort to engage more with the mainstream community and to learn from other immigrant communities that have successfully made accommodations to American ways without becoming assimilated. The Indian Sikh community is a particularly good example of how one can participate fully in the public sphere while still maintaining cultural mores.

In realizing that both school and community are striving for the same goal of academically and socially engaged youth, educators and community members can better understand and respond to the needs of these youth and move beyond imagining a future that benefits only a select group to striving together for a future that benefits all.

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[1] For more information about Béla Petheō's artwork, see "Picturing History: Bela Peteo, artist of the *Rise of the West*", a digital exhibit by the Ohio State University Libraries available at http://library.osu.edu/projects/bela-petheo/home.htm. While the drawing described in this article is not available on this website, other similar drawings are.