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Abstract

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Keywords

Disciplines

Education | Other Religion | Race and Ethnicity | Social and Cultural Anthropology

The Religification of Pakistani-American Youth

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ABSTRACT: This article describes a cultural production process called religification, in which religious affiliation, rather than race or ethnicity, has become the core category of identity for working class Pakistani-American youth in the United States. In this dialectical process, triggered by political changes following the September 11 terrorist attacks, the Muslim identity is both thrust upon Pakistani-American youth by those who question their citizenship and embraced by the youth themselves. Specifically, the article examines the ways in which schools are sites where citizenship is both constructed and contested, and the roles that peers, school personnel, families, and the youth themselves play in this construction/contestation of citizenship.

Introduction

Like the Rushdie Affair in the UK, the 9/11 terrorist attack was a watershed for Muslims in the US, with ramifications for Muslims across the world. [1] As a result, there has been a barrage of research, particularly on young Muslims living in the US (see, for example, Bayoumi, 2008; Cainkar, 2009; Ewing, 2009; Sirin and Fine, 2008; Maira, 2009). Common themes in this research include questions of citizenship and identity. Moreover, much of this research responds to the construction of Muslims as an "an alienated, problematic minority" (Werbner, 2004, p. 897) and traces its genealogy to September 11. Maira (2009) refers to scholarship in this period as "post-9/11 area studies" (p. 29).

My research also falls under the rubric of "post-9/11 studies." However, I did not start out to explore "how it feels to be a problem," as Bayoumi (2008) asserts in the provocative title of his book on young Muslims in America. Rather, as a Pakistani Muslim myself, I wanted to challenge what had become a common sense categorization of Muslims as a monolithic group by paying attention to one group that fell under this umbrella term: working-class and lower middle-class Pakistani-American [2] youth. I was especially interested in the local processes of cultural production in an urban public school and the ways in which Pakistani-American youth were negotiating the expectations of school personnel, their families, and their communities. Although I did not ignore the importance of September 11 and how it had made Pakistani and Muslim youth in general more visible and more vulnerable, I had not anticipated the ways in which the post-9/11 world grouped Muslims as a homogenous, single entity, with

grave implications for notions of citizenship. Thus, while my larger research project focused on academic engagement and socialization of Pakistani-American youth, this paper focuses specifically on Pakistani-American youth's constructions of citizenship and national belonging and its implications for their socialization in schools.

Drawing on ethnographic data, I argue that we are witnessing a post-9/11 shift in the ways in which Pakistani-American youth (and presumably other similar groups) identify themselves and are identified by others. While racialization continues to be the dominant form of categorizing individuals and groups, in the case of Pakistani-American youth, religion trumps race, although race, class, and gender are implicated in this process. Not only do peers and school personnel view these youth through a religious lens, the youth (and their families) define themselves more through a religious identity than through a racial, national, or ethnic one. I call this dialectical process religification.

This article describes the cultural production process of religification: how working- and lower middle-class Pakistani-American youth are positioned at the national and local level as outsiders, and how they position themselves in relation to their own notions of citizenship and national belonging. I argue that the religification of urban, working- and lower middle-class Pakistani-American youth, that is, the ascription and co-option of a religious identity, trumps other forms of categorization, such as race and ethnicity. Furthermore, religification significantly influences the youth's identities, socialization, notions of citizenship, and feelings of belonging. As Amartya Sen (2006) argues, the ascription of Islamic identity over all other "affiliations,

priorities, and pursuits that a Muslim person may have" is something that needs to be taken seriously (para. 4). Certainly race and ethnicity are complicated in ways in which Muslims are imagined to look; as one white non-Muslim student in my study observed, "some people assume that all the Muslims … have to have black hair and dark skin" (focus group, 05/15/08). In an age of insecurity, the connotations that Muslim imagery holds over the imagination (as illustrated in the drawings created in the infamous Danish cartoon controversy), as well as media representations of Muslims and Pakistanis in particular [3], not only affect the ways in which Pakistani-American youth are viewed by others, but also how they view themselves. However, my research suggests that it is ultimately religion that is used to define Pakistani-American youth and serves to mark them as noncitizens. While the ascription of a religious identity over all other possibilities is not entirely new—we have observed this before with Jews—there is a notable difference in the way that youth themselves are choosing and using their religious identity. Thus, the Muslim categorization is not only bestowed on the youth by those who question their citizenship but also embraced by the youth themselves as a form of resistance. I contend that this *dialectical* process of religification can be directly attributed to the changes in the world order after September 11.

Questioning Citizenship: Geopolitics and Pakistani-Americans

The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in September 2001 drastically changed the lives of many Pakistani-Americans. Thousands of men disappeared from Pakistani-immigrant neighborhoods across the country, particularly in major cities such

as Chicago (Bahl, Johnson, and Seim, 2003) and New York (Powell, 2003). In January

2002, the Department of Homeland Security enforced the National Entry-Exit

Registration System (NSEERS) as part of the USA PATRIOT Act; accordingly,

noncitizen males from 25 countries that were "designated as threats to national

security," most of which have a predominantly Arab or Muslim populace, were

required to register with the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (Kim,

Kaourosh, Huckerby, Leine, and Narula, 2007, p. 3). Pakistanis made up the largest

immigrant group from those 25 nations (Powell, 2003). Perhaps as a direct consequence,

Pakistanis were "disproportionately targeted" for deportation and detention (Maira,

2007, p. 44), constituting 40% of deportees in the immediate aftermath of 9/11

(Schulhofer, 2002, p. 11).

The increased surveillance of Muslims further affected Pakistanis because of

Pakistan's role in global politics over the past decade: On the one hand, Pakistan, a

predominantly Muslim nation, has been named a key ally in the US-led "War on

Terror"; on the other hand, Pakistan has been implicated in terrorist attacks due to the

proliferation (and support) of extremist *Madaris* (religious seminaries) within Pakistan,

where many terrorists allegedly received training. Additionally, the government of

Pakistan is constantly criticized in media and politics for how it handles militants living

within its borders. The 2010 arrest and conviction of Faisal Shahzad, the would-be

Times Square bomber, who was born in Pakistan but is a naturalized US citizen, once

again brought negative attention to Pakistani-Americans. The recent discovery that

Osama bin-Laden had been living in Pakistan for the past five years has only

heightened the growing distrust for Pakistanis. In the face of these global and local political events, and by virtue of their religion and nationality, Pakistani-Americans have come under increasing scrutiny in the US (Buchen, 2008; Maira, 2007; Sperry, 2004). Working- and lower middle-class Pakistani-Americans, and their children in particular, face two hurdles: they are Muslim in a part of the world where Muslims are viewed with suspicion, and they are working class immigrants with little access to social capital and institutional supports because of social and linguistic barriers (Maira, 2009; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). How, then, do working- and lower middle-class Pakistani-American youth in the US cope with rising levels of suspicion in their schools? How do these youth position themselves in relation to others, and what roles do peers, teachers, family, and community play in this positioning? In the following pages, I explore these questions to illustrate the cultural production of "religification."

Methodology and Theoretical Frame

This study heeds Kathleen Hall's (2004) call for multi-sited ethnography as a way to understand the cultural politics involved as immigrants work to be recognized as citizens of a nation. Hall (2004) argues for greater attention to the production of immigrant cultural identities within cultural politics in the public sphere. Multi-sited ethnography is particularly useful for studying immigrant incorporation, as it enables researchers to "illuminate the more complex cultural processes of nation-formation and the contradictory and at times incommensurate forms of cultural politics within which immigrants are made and make themselves as citizens" (p. 108). This notion of making

oneself and being made (Ong, 1996, p. 156) is the central concern of this paper. I explore

this idea through data from a multi-sited, ethnographic study in which I discuss how

geopolitical shifts shape the cultural production of immigrant youth's identities and

solidarities in one community in New York City—the city that was most directly

affected by September 11. Within this community, I followed youth through three sites:

a public high-school, their homes, and the ethnic (Punjabi) community in the

surrounding neighborhood.

The seeds for this study were sown in 2004 when I was conducting a small

research project in a primarily working-class Pakistani-immigrant community in New

York City. This community has one of the largest Pakistani-immigrant populations in

the US, largely drawn from rural Punjab. However, it does not by any means reflect the

experiences of all Pakistanis in the US (see Najam, 2008, for a detailed account of

Pakistani immigration to the US). Within this community, the arrival of women and

children was a fairly new phenomenon; thus most of the youth in the study were from

the 1.5 generation; that is, they arrived when they were between the ages of 5 and 12

years, although their fathers had often been in the US much longer than they had. The

fathers were typically construction workers, taxi or limo drivers, or retail workers (in

corner stores and 99-cent stores).

At various times in 2004 and 2007, I interviewed four community leaders and

conducted a focus group with non-Pakistani community organizers. I also conducted

observations at a local community center. Between February 2004 and January 2008, I

collected data at a public high-school that not only had the second largest number of

recently arrived Pakistani–American students in its borough but was also near the aforementioned Punjabi-ethnic community. Table 1 provides demographic information for the school. Among the adults in the school, the only group with any significant racial diversity was the school safety personnel; the majority of the administration and teaching staff was white.

[TABLE 1]

There was a sizeable Muslim population in the school, the bulk of which originated from Pakistan (100 out of 3,000+ students); others came from Palestine, Bangladesh, Yemen, and India. The significant percentage of Muslim students in the school explains to some extent the pull that the students felt toward a religious identity.

I first visited the focal high-school in February 2004 and again in December 2004. I conducted participant observation once a week in spring of 2006. Between November 2006 and June 2007, I visited the school three times a week. A final visit was conducted in October 2007. In addition to taking copious field notes, I conducted an in-depth, one-on-one interview with each of 17 youths and 12 members of school staff, and facilitated six focus groups with students (both Pakistani and non-Pakistani). In total, I engaged with 62 Pakistani-American youths (27 girls, 45 boys) and 17 non-Pakistani youths during my research. About half of them participated in the focus groups held at the school; the others interacted with me more sporadically or informally, such as in the lunchroom, outside school, and in joint student-faculty workspaces. I always had my

notepad with me and would write down our exchanges during or immediately after the conversation.

Furthermore, the Urdu class, a unique offering of this school, gave me access to a concentration of Pakistani-American students. I observed this class consistently and saw it taught by four different teachers (none of whom were Pakistani or spoke Urdu, an issue I discuss below). I often assisted the teachers at their request and was therefore able to solicit writing assignments in which I asked students direct and pointed questions.

I learned a great deal about some of the youths' family lives by visiting their homes. During two of these three visits, I interviewed siblings who did not attend the focal school, as well as four parental figures. Even when home visits were not possible, I asked the youths many questions about their home life.

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. Most spoke English well but preferred to speak to me in our shared mother tongue.

Through these multiple interactions across time and space (home, school, ethnic community), I developed an appreciation for the ways in which local and global politics were shaping constructions of citizenship and influencing notions of belonging among these working-class and lower middle-class Pakistani-American youth. Drawing on cultural production theory (Levinson and Holland, 1996), I explored the ways in which the youths' positioning reflects a kind of social practice that both "responds to, and

simultaneously constitutes movements, structures, and discourses beyond the school"

(p. 12). This paper illustrates the complex process that occurs as the youths negotiate the

various expectations of peers, school personnel, families, and communities, and how

this process affects their sense of citizenship, belonging and socialization in schools.

Before discussing citizenship, I would like to reflect on my own identity and its

implications for this study. Like most of my 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 the

middle or lower-middle classes (in fact, many experienced downward social mobility in

the US). Our similar religious and cultural backgrounds gave me a degree of entrée into

the community and made me familiar with the cultures and languages, but I still

consider myself an outsider to the community.

Citizenship, Belonging, and the Politics of Identity

Historically, citizenship has been defined in terms of individual rights, operating

under the assumption of equality as sameness. Mirón, Inda, and Aguirre (1998) contend

that contemporary notions of citizenship in the US (and other Western states) no longer

operate under these assumptions, nor do they focus solely on people as individuals

with equal rights; rather, in some cases, rights depend on group membership.

Consequently, there has been a revival of "cultural nativism," which calls for a more

restrictive and exclusive citizenship (Mirón et al., 1998, p. 665). Given such questions of

citizenship, Ong (1996) appeals for greater attention to the quotidian practices and processes by which immigrants in particular are made into subjects of a nation-state (p. 737). Similarly, Kathleen Hall (2004) calls for an understanding of the ways in which "national identities and citizenship statuses are continually redefined, negotiated, and debated as they come to be articulated within different forms of nationalist discourse" (p. 113).

While questions of Muslim (immigrant) incorporation can be traced as far back as the Rushdie affair of 1989, if not the Iranian revolution, the events of September 11, and the heightened surveillance and xenophobia that followed, have reified the idea that the American and Muslim identities are incompatible. Abowitz and Harnish (2006) argue that since 9/11, there has been a resurgence of "civic, republican values of patriotism, community, and loyalty to America" (p. 675), which, in effect, questions who can be American. In this situation, legal citizenship is not enough to claim oneself as an American or to push back against the construction of non-White immigrants as perpetual foreigners (Maira, 2009, p. 82). For American-Muslims, the post-9/11 discourse has contributed to the conflation of "Middle Eastern, Arab, or Muslim" identities with "terrorist" and "noncitizen" (Vlopp, 2002, p. 1576); the subtext of this discourse is that one cannot be both American and Muslim. Several youths in this study articulated the irreconcilability of an American-Muslim.

The escalating anti-Muslim xenophobia is particularly evident at schools, where Muslim youth are constructed as "national outsiders and enemies" (Abu el-Haj, 2007, p. 301). Abu el-Haj (2007) observes that schools not only help to construct the symbolic

boundaries of the nation by defining membership, but also by providing particular knowledge and resources that help immigrants make sense of their new homes. For example, the focal high-school offered an Urdu class to cater to the growing Pakistani population in the school. This class was not initiated as a language class but as a "citizen orientation program" to help students "become acquainted with the culture and expectations for citizens in the US" (interview with assistant principal, 03/07/2006). In fact, Urdu was not even taught in the class because it was difficult to find a certified Urdu teacher. Furthermore, Pakistani-American students who did not want to take the class were told they must by their guidance counselors. Thus the class was a strange contradiction: it touted citizenship as well as inclusiveness through the validation of students' backgrounds and languages, but in reality it served to segregate the students.

As this article has already begun to demonstrate, the experiences of Pakistani-Americans in public schools in the US (and especially New York City—the area most directly affected by the 9/11 attacks) reflect a complicated relationship between the notions of citizenship and national belonging, particularly for these transnational youths in this historic moment. While the usefulness of the idea of a nation-state has been weakened by globalization and the flow of goods, information, and people across borders, the desire to belong to a national community maintains a strong hold on the imagination (Yuval-Davis et al., 2005; Abu el-Haj, 2007). In a parallel case with Palestinian youth, Abu el-Haj (2007) argues that, on the one hand,

Youth experience their position as outside the "imagined community" of the

United States nation, framing them as "enemies within." As a result, they struggle

to feel a sense of belonging to the nation to which they hold citizenship. On the

other hand, these Palestinian-American youth view their United States citizenship

positively in terms of legal and political rights and economic success. Yet, they tie

their national identities—their sense of where they belong—to a Palestinian

homeland. (p. 287)

Middle East politics may make the Palestinian-American experience different from that

of Pakistani-Americans. But for Pakistani-American youth in the post-9/11 climate, like

Palestinian-Americans, legal citizenship does not necessarily evoke feelings of

belonging to the US, which is compounded by the ways in which these youth are

positioned by teachers and peers, as well as themselves. Belonging, Yuval-Davis and

her colleagues (2005) suggest, is not simply about "membership, rights, and duties, but

also about the emotions that such memberships evoke" that manifest in the ways in

which "subjects feel about their location in the social world" (p. 526). It is thus

emotionally charged, which makes it a "thicker" concept than citizenship (p. 526).

Because citizenship and belonging are entwined with the goals of assimilation, which

are based on sameness and are hence exclusionary, when people sense that they are

being excluded, "the notion of belonging is activated" (pp. 526-527).

These questions of belonging are not entirely new for Muslims: In reference to pre-

9/11 research on Muslims, Gibson (1997) suggests that religious markers, such as the

hijab, serve as areas of contestation between Muslim immigrants and their schools and

societies (p. 441). The critical factor, she argues, is not "the origins of the differences …

but rather that the differences are viewed as markers of identity" (p. 441). This is exacerbated in the post-9/11 context. Purkayastha (2005) observes that post-9/11 media and political discourses and policies about difference have encouraged this use of religion as a marker; as a result, "Muslims are a new globally racialized category, irrespective of national and cultural difference" (p. 12). I would add that not only do others categorize individual groups of Muslims, such as Pakistanis, through a religious lens above any other, but in the post-9/11 climate, Pakistanis and other groups themselves more actively participate in the production of a religious identity. This is what I term religification.

"Self-making and being made": The cultural production of religification

Religification is the simultaneous ascription and co-option of a religious identity over all other common markers of difference (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender). It is a process of both "self-making and being made" (Ong, 1996, p. 156). Thus, to understand religification in action, we must study the ways in which Muslim and non-Muslim peers, teachers, families, and the larger community view Muslim youth, and the ways in which the youths themselves contribute to and react to the climate surrounding them.

For many Pakistani-American youths in my research, September 11 was a turning point in their academic and social lives because of the ways in which they were verbally (and sometimes physically) attacked and ostracized by peers and, occasionally, even by teachers. Despite steps taken by schools and other groups to increase awareness and

understanding about Islam and to reduce stereotypes surrounding Muslims, such actions are usually simply "cultural embraces" or "cosmetic accommodations" (Garcia, 2006, p. 170). For example, when I asked to see the curriculum for the Urdu class, one Urdu teacher (a white Christian immigrant) showed me a thick binder from a daylong professional development session about Muslims that was held immediately after 9/11 at a local university. Aside from the fact this professional development session had little to do with teaching Urdu (except that most of the students in the Urdu class were Muslim), the teacher never used any of the lessons in her class. Abu el-Haj (2002) suggests that education about Muslims generally tends to reflect "the most banal and benign sense of multiculturalism. The script is a familiar one: We may do culture differently, but underneath it all we are all essentially the same" (p. 311). Thus, the view of "Muslim as other"—terrorist, narrow-minded, oppressed—remains embedded in public discourse. However, this was not always the mainstream view of Muslims and Pakistanis.

From the perspective of the youth in this study, before September 11, no one really knew or cared who Pakistanis were or whether someone was a Pakistani. As one 16-year-old Pakistani-American high-school girl put it: "After September 11, I think everybody started knowing who Pakis [4] really are. … Before that it wasn't really common. No one really cared" (focus group, 05/15/2007).

Similarly, Saad, a 14-year-old boy, explained that before September 11, people were ambivalent about whether someone was a Pakistani; after September 11, in contrast, being Pakistani meant being Muslim, which meant being different: "They see

Muslim people as different. Like, before there was just, like, regular people, you're from Pakistan … they don't think of it [being Pakistani] as a good thing or a bad thing" (interview, 04/24/2007).

One result of "being different" was that many youths who once got along with students of all backgrounds reported that friends changed their behavior after September 11. For example, Bano, a high-school sophomore who was away in Pakistan on September 11, returned to school in 2002 to find that "it felt like people looked at me differently. Even my old friends would say, 'you're, like, one of them, too'" (interview, 05/29/2007). Students reported such experiences both within the school walls and in the larger community. Huriya, a high-school junior, recounted, "People look at you like you're a terrorist. Like, they just look at you, and they don't want to sit with you, like, in the train … especially old ladies" (interview, 06/11/2007). Another 16-year-old girl, who did not attend school [5], explained her frustration at this negativity toward Pakistanis this way: "It's not like the World Trade Center was brought down and that Pakistanis are responsible for bringing it down" (*yeh to nahee hai keh World Trade Center gir giya hai key Pakistanio ney giraya hai")* (interview, 3/29/2007).

In regard to increasing scrutiny that Pakistanis in general experienced after September 11, one mother reasoned, "Perhaps it was in our minds" (*Shahid hamaray zehen mein tha),* suggesting that they themselves imagined a change in people's behaviors (interview, 04/03/2007). Whether the changes in other people's attitudes were real or imagined (an interesting caveat that warrants further exploration), the fact is that the lives of young Pakistani-Americans changed. Their sense of exclusion

translated into behaviors that only served to compound their outsider status. Several

youths talked about how they got into verbal and physical fights or caused trouble for

their teachers. Most significantly, the youths circumscribed their social lives, preferring

to associate with Muslim (and usually only Pakistani) students rather than their

previous diverse group of friends. In doing so, the youth identified strongly with a

religious identity that was ascribed to them but that they also embraced.

On the one hand, the Pakistani-American youth in this study were essentially

stripped of their national and ethnic identities—Pakistani, American, South Asian, Desi

[6]—and their religion became the primary prism through which they were seen by

peers, teachers, and members of the school community. In effect, religion segregated

Pakistani-American youth, by marking their similarity to other South Asian and Middle

Eastern students, all presumed to be Muslim, and their significant difference from most

peers. On the other hand, the Pakistani-American youth increasingly identified

themselves as Muslim because doing so allowed them to transform the negative

experience of being ostracized into a positive experience of solidarity and group

membership with other Muslims, both in their immediate community and globally.

Embracing a Muslim identity might make it seem that Pakistani-American youth

were becoming increasingly religious. However, this was not necessarily the case.

Kaviraj (2010) argues that the growing religiosity in many parts of the world is quite

different from our traditional understanding of religion (in his writing, he refers to

rising Hindu identity and nationalism). He argues that we need to distinguish between

"thick and thin religion." Thick religion encompasses traditional rituals, practices, and

beliefs, whereas thin religion intersects religion, politics and nationalism and serves as a tool to bring people together for a cause, such as Hindu nationalism or Muslim victimhood (a ploy of terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda).

Many students recounted that September 11 was a turning point in the way they experienced schooling, and they used it to explain why a religious identity had become more attractive to them. The following are some of the students' written responses to a question about whether race or class had affected their school experiences. Rather than focus on racism, several students wrote about September 11:

> My school experience was pretty good before 9/11. However, in sixth grade, after 9/11, I have been looked [at] as a stereotype. Everybody used to call me a terrorist. All through Junior high-school, people used to call me Ossama or Saddam. (Latif, 15-year-old boy)

> At one point after 9/11 it really did [change] because of my religion and where I come from. The kids in my class used to call me "terrorist" but that really didn't bother me because I didn't care for what they said. (Yasir, 14-year-old boy)

> There was no concern for it [race, ethnicity] until 9/11. Then kids would talk trash, and they would get beaten up. (Tariq, 16-year-old boy)

> Around 9/11 students use to bother me and tease me because I was the only Muslim there (except my brother who was teased too). (Ishra, 17-year-old girl)

The ostracism that the youth experienced after 9/11 strengthened their identification as Muslims while widening the gap between Muslims and non-Muslims, thereby making the possibility of being "American" less attainable. This was poignantly articulated by a group of Pakistani-Muslim girls in a focus group:

Soroiya: Everything has a stereotype, and there's a stereotype for Americans.

AGK: What is that stereotype?

Soroiya: Like, being White.

Iffat: Italian.

Soroiya: Christian.

Marina: Definitely not Muslim. Ever since September 11, definitely not Muslim.

(focus group, 05/15/2007)

Marina's statement—"ever since September 11, definitely not Muslim"—is particularly telling. She had just started seventh grade in 2001, and before September 11, she did not associate with other Pakistanis. Like several high-achieving Pakistani-American students I talked with (particularly those who were second generation), she expressed a lack of trust and trustworthiness for and among Pakistanis and explained that her parents taught her to avoid Pakistanis in order to remain focused on her studies. But after September 11, increasing anti-Muslim sentiment pushed Marina to associate with Pakistanis and other Muslims, a group where she now felt a sense of belonging. As a result, she started to identify herself as Muslim (but not Pakistani). This was not so much because she was a practicing Muslim but because she felt she could no longer claim an American identity. Marina, who was born in the US and had never traveled to

Pakistan, continued, "I feel weird saying I'm American because American people, they don't like Muslims so much" (focus group discussion, 05/15/2007).

The dislike for Muslims that the youth experienced ranged from verbal spats to physical fights. Almost every Pakistani-American youth I spoke with said that at some point after September 11, he or she had been called a terrorist. Many said that by the mid-2000s, fewer people labeled them as terrorists, but the term continued to come up. For example, during a focus group with primarily non-Muslim and non-Pakistani students, one (non-Muslim) girl explained how her attitude toward Pakistanis evolved after September 11:

> I wouldn't even look at them, but now, like, I became friends with them, and I noticed that it's not their fault, that, you know, they're not all bad. You know. It's just that one group that makes everybody look bad. Like, I know Marina; Marina is not a terrorist. (05/22/2007)

Despite her change in attitude, this student's final comment that "Marina is not a terrorist" indicates that the association of Pakistani youth with terrorism continued for years after September 11. It is highly unlikely that *any* of the students at the high-school were terrorists, yet the stereotype still hung in the air. Table 2 exemplifies this and also illustrates Vlopp's (2002) assertion that within political—and hence public—discourse there has been a conflation of the terms "Muslim," "terrorist," and "noncitizen":

[TABLE 2]

Interestingly, the Pakistani-American youth similarly conflated "Muslim" and "non-American" and increasingly identified as Muslims as a way to find a community where they were easily accepted, since they felt they could not be American. Thus this increasing identification with Muslims was not necessarily due to heightened feelings of religiosity; in fact, at times, the youth took advantage of school personnel's heightened awareness of Islamic practices (or political correctness) in order to gain certain privileges. For example, a number of boys frequently cut school on Friday afternoons, using the excuse, unofficially sanctioned by the school, that they had to go to Friday prayers. However, most of the boys simply went to the park instead of, or immediately after, attending the mosque. Thus the boys were in fact practicing what Kaviraj (2010) describes as thin religion. This is important to understand as it forces us to distinguish between religiosity that is transcendental versus that which is more instrumental. However, I do not wish to suggest that thin religion is devoid of spiritual content or that thick religion is lacking political or instrumental motivation—religious practice and belief are far more flexible than that.

An example of the complexity of religion in these young people's lives comes from the girls in my study, some of whom wore a hijab (the Muslim headscarf). Some girls wore a hijab because they believed it was their religious duty (thick religion); other girls wore a hijab to make a political statement about their religious identity (thin religion); others wore a hijab simply because their parents made them do so. In fact, I heard many times that some girls wore a hijab as they left their house and then put it away at school; their reasons included not wanting to stand out, fear of discrimination,

and a desire to rebel against their parents. It might appear that the girls who removed the hijab in school were rejecting a religious identity, yet these same girls would refer to themselves as Muslim.

Despite the varying reasons that youth were drawn to religious identities, religification had serious ramifications for them, particularly in public settings such as schools. For example, Walid, a high-school senior who arrived in the US at the age of two, had experienced many overt and covert moments of stereotyping, especially since September 11. Partly as a reaction to this, he provoked teachers in class. He often challenged teachers by saying that certain things, such as listening to music, were "against his religion." However, I observed him listening to music on someone's iPod in the lunchroom. When I asked whether he really held the views he expressed in class, he replied with a laugh: "I just say that to get them mad. Because I like it when people get angry … I do it to a lot of teachers" (fieldnotes, 06/12/2007).

Thus religion helped Walid cope with the discrimination he experienced as a young Muslim man; in other words, religious identification served as a kind of defense mechanism. Although this may seem like a reasonable strategy under the circumstances, it creates a vicious cycle: Peers and teachers ostracize Pakistani-American youth, who react and provoke their peers and teachers, thereby reaffirming the initial stereotypical beliefs. This cycle, which often ended with the youth being punished, heightened these students' sense of victimization even in cases where they were in the wrong. For example, Iffat, a 1.5 generation youth, discussed her most "racist" teacher (here, racism was equated with being anti-Muslim), who had failed her

in summer school because she missed a few classes. Iffat was unwilling to accept that

her poor attendance was the cause of the failing grade, preferring to blame the teacher's

views about Muslims (interview, 04/24/2007). Such problematic perceptions of self and

others are particularly evident in the way the "terrorist" stereotype was used by both

students and teachers.

Dangerous Boys, Oppressed Girls

The terrorist label came up frequently in discussions with the youth and seemed to

be one of the reasons they started ascribing a Muslim identity to themselves. At times,

youths criticized the terrorist stereotype. Iffat recounted how, in middle school, her

peers would say things like, "Oh, they're Pakis, oh, they're terrorists." Such statements

would anger her, and she recalled fighting back, asking, "What makes me a terrorist?

It's not like I was involved in it" (Focus group, 05/15/2007). More often, however,

youths co-opted the terrorist stereotype and used it to suggest power over non-Muslims

and a shared identity with fellow Muslims, as the following excerpts illustrate:

> Walid: People in school were scared of me … I said something bad to them, "Yo,
>
> I'm going to blow up your house."
>
> AGK: Why did you say that?
>
> Walid: Just to scare them. So I became, like, an outcast, a rebel, and it felt good.
>
> AGK: It felt good?
>
> Walid: I felt different. … They threatened me, Miss. I didn't just say, "I'm going
>
> to blow up your house." Only if they picked on me, then—"Oh, I'm going to
>
> fight you outside!" "Oh yeah? I'm going to blow up your house." (interview,

06/12/2007)

Walid's story was just one of many where, when Pakistani-American youth felt cornered, they took on the ascribed persona of terrorist. In another example Soroiya recounted how she and a male student were speaking Urdu when they were reprimanded by a teacher, "This is America; talk in English," to which the boy replied "No miss, we're terrorists" (Focus group, 05/15/2007). This appropriation of the terrorist stereotype is analogous to Willis's (1977) working-class lads "having a laff" (p. 29). Willis argued that the use of humor and lack of seriousness in school was the lads' response to their understanding of schooling as a dead end. In a similar way, playing into the terrorist stereotype was how Pakistani-American youth responded to the ways in which they were viewed, and it is through the production of these forms that the youths' subjectivities developed, especially their sense of citizenship and belonging.

Although the appropriation of the terrorist label was more common among the boys in the study, some of the girls also took this route to deal with the hostile environment at school. Marina recounted: "At first I did not fight so much, but I got into so many fights. Because we couldn't sit there while people called us 'terrorist, terrorist.'" She continued, "Now we just joke about it. We'll be, like, 'Get away from us, or we'll bomb you.' … You know how you make a joke out of stuff because it bothers you but you don't want to show that it bothers you? You joke about it, I guess." (focus group, 05/15/2007). Thus, while the youth no longer took the name-calling seriously, they continued to play into it. Moreover, the ostracism Marina experienced after September 11 drew her to fellow Pakistanis and to a common Muslim identity that had

not appealed to her before:

> Before we came to this school, we mostly didn't talk to Paki kids or Muslims; we
> didn't even like being Muslim back then. We didn't even want to be Pakistani,
> we didn't want to be talking to our own kind of people; we just didn't like them.
> (focus group, 05/15/2007)

While the above examples are of incidents between peers, the ascription of the

terrorist label and negative behaviors toward Muslim students was also evident in

teachers' interactions with Muslim students. Talah, a high-school sophomore, relayed

an incident in a classroom where an Arab student was asking his teacher how she came

to school. The teacher allegedly replied, "The Verrazano Bridge. Why, do you want to

blow it up?" (fieldnotes, 05/07/2007). Regardless of the intention of such remarks, or

whether they were even true or not, they reproduce the trope of the youth as terrorists;

this trope circulates among the youth seemingly unchallenged and thus remains on the

minds of students for years, directly affecting their sense of belonging to the nation.

Teachers also made remarks in jest or without apparent malice that, nevertheless,

contributed to a climate whereby Pakistani-American and other Muslim students were

seen as terrorists, which in turn affected their sense of belonging. Recall the focus group

where one girl said, "Marina is not a terrorist." The girls' teacher, who was also part of

this group, jumped in and laughingly replied, "Oh yes she is!" (focus group,

05/22/2007). Although the remark was meant to be humorous, and the teacher who

said it is loved and respected by the students, this sort of seemingly benign statement is

what psychologist Derald Wing Sue calls racial micro-aggression (Sue, Bucceri, Lin,

Nadal, and Torino, 2007). Micro-aggression is a contemporary form of racism that is invisible, unintentional, subtle in nature, and typically outside the level of conscious awareness, but it creates a hostile and invalidating climate nonetheless. According to Sue and colleagues, the cumulative effect of micro-aggressions may be just as harmful as outright racism, although more research is needed in this regard (p. 279).

Reacting to the perceived behavioral problems of some Pakistani-American students, teachers often reminisced about a "golden era" of past students, who were described as submissive and quiet. Teachers who had worked with Pakistani-American students since the mid-1990s talked about how the students had changed. In Valenzuela's (1999) ethnography about Mexican-American immigrant youth, she writes that contemporary students fail to conform to the "misty, mythical image of their historical counterparts," that is, the good, quiet, deferential immigrant; thus, newer immigrants "seem deficient, so teachers find it hard to see them in an appreciative, culture-affirming way" (p. 66). In the same way, teachers in my study saw contemporary Pakistani-American students as having more behavioral problems than their predecessors, which the teachers correlated with length of time in the US and with the students' religion. On several occasions, teachers used the words "narrow-minded" or "inflexible" to describe Pakistani and Muslim students in general (especially boys); they attributed these qualities to the students' religious beliefs. For example, when I asked a social studies teacher about his experiences with Pakistani-American students specifically, he replied:

The biggest problem that I have, and I have had, I think, over the last couple of

years with the kids is, sometimes, when there are political discussions in class, um, right or wrong, I find that the, the Muslim kids in general are very—they're not flexible to really listen to the other side of the story. (interview, 05/18/2007)

Notice that my question was about Pakistani-American students specifically, but the answer was about "Muslim kids in general." This kind of lumping together under a narrowly defined but broadly applied category strengthens the idea that Muslims are a monolithic group, ignoring individual differences—an idea that is reinforced by media representations of Muslims. In fact, many teachers simply assumed (often incorrectly) that students were Muslim based on their skin color, thus conflating racial and religious and sometimes even national categories.

At other times, teachers failed to see their own role in instigating problematic behavior. In another social studies class, a teacher wanted to show the students a picture of Prophet Mohammad (fieldnotes, 12/5/2006). Given that this occurred on the heels of the Danish cartoon controversy, I cautioned the teacher that doing so could provoke an angry reaction from the Muslim students because depicting Mohammad in visual form is considered blasphemous in Islam. The potential for such a reaction only confirmed the teacher's stereotype of Muslims as "problem" students; the teacher never considered the possibility that the picture could truly be insulting.

While teachers often viewed Pakistani-American boys as problem students, Pakistani-American girls were sometimes seen as oppressed victims of Islam to be pitied. In their interviews with me, teachers frequently brought up the restrictions placed on girls by their families and equated them with Islamic tradition. "Sexual

policing" occurs in many groups, immigrant or otherwise (see Harris, 2004; Lopez, 2003; Purkayastha, 2005; Zhou and Bankston, 1998), but many teachers believed that it was a product of Pakistani culture, which they considered to be synonymous with Islam.

As a result of this belief, several teachers assumed that many Pakistani-American girls would not be allowed to go to college and that they would be "married off" or would only be allowed to study in a short vocational program. Such viewpoints affected the kind of guidance the girls received at the school. For instance, one of the guidance counselors told me that girls tried to stall graduation so that they could avoid marriage (interview, 04/15/2007). Similarly, one of the assistant principals recounted: "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" (interview, 05/18/2007).

In fact, only one of the 27 focal girls in the study indicated that she might be facing such a fate, and in that case, there was a very particular reason that this was a possibility. [7] Nor were any of the girls trying to stall graduation. This might have occurred in the past, but it no longer appeared to be a concern for the girls, even though the perception remained that early marriage was a part of Pakistani culture. School personnel's view of culture as static and impervious to change affected the ways in which the youth were treated in school. However, as the next section illustrates, notions of culture among the Pakistani (immigrant) community were also somewhat static. *Questioning "Authenticity"*

Most young Pakistanis reported that their parents were quite religious, and the youth's religious identities were entwined with national ones. This may be particular to Pakistanis, as Pakistan was founded as a homeland for Muslims: For most families, then, being an "authentic Pakistani" required simultaneously being an "authentic Muslim." Despite their working-class backgrounds, which meant they could travel to Pakistan only infrequently, if at all, the youth maintained strong ties to Pakistan through media (the homes I visited all subscribed to Pakistani cable channels via satellite), and connected with family via video chat, email, and phone. Further, given the configurations of culture and nation in the US, where middle- and upper-class white Anglo-Saxon Protestants are marked as the norm and others are hyphenated Americans (Alba and Nee, 1997), these youth rarely entertained the idea that they could be American without giving up their "Pakistani-ness" or "Muslim-ness." Thus the youth felt significant dissonance in their efforts to be "authentic" Pakistanis or (more often) "authentic" Muslims while also being teenagers in an American high-school. For the youth in my study, being an authentic Pakistani meant resisting all things American, or what the youth and their families referred to as Americanization. Rashaad, an academically engaged 14-year-old boy, explained: "Americanization is the worse thing that can happen to you. Americanization is like when you lose your culture" (interview, 06/08/07). To the higher-achieving youth, Americanization meant that peers were trying to act "ghetto" or "black." For lower-achieving youth, Americanization meant that peers were "acting white" (see Fordham and Ogbu, 1986). Though the definition of Americanization varied among the youth and their families, the common

(essentializing) themes across these definitions were a lack of religiosity, sexual

promiscuity, drinking, and taking drugs. As a result, youth felt caught between two

contrasting ideologies (see Hall, 2002)—the ideology of being Pakistani and the

ideology of being American. Walid explained that it was extremely difficult for him to

reconcile his Muslim identity with an American one:

> It's like on one side you're pushing religion and on the other side being
>
> American, but you can't have both. Being Muslim is hard. Our parents never told
>
> us that being Muslim is going to be easy. You have to hold on to that heritage
>
> and not let it go. (fieldnotes, 05/07/2007)

Schools were the particular sites where this struggle took place.

Although being Muslim and being American were viewed as static and in binary

opposition, in fact, the conflicting expectations that these youth faced were not conflicts

between two distinctive "bounded" cultures (Hall, 2004); rather, they were tensions

surrounding the different expectations for them as Pakistanis and as Americans. Being

Pakistani or following tradition was seen as superior to being American or modern. The

Pakistani community's construction of a binary classification, in which

Pakistani/Muslim meant culturally superior and Western/American meant culturally

inferior, was, as Maira (2002) suggests, "an attempt to reverse the racial hierarchy

imposed on immigrant communities of color by asserting a cultural nationalism in

response, a defensive move to compensate for the degradations of racism" (p. 133).

For Pakistani families, cultural nationalism is directly tied to Islam. Abu el-Haj (2007)

criticizes the mainstream view of situating Islam within the discourse of culture. But

Muslims, or at least these Pakistani families, are just as prone to equate Islam with (Pakistani) culture. In fact, some families were highly critical of Pakistanis but embraced aspects of Pakistani culture that were grounded in religion. This is not particular to Pakistani-American Muslims; Werbner's (2002) research on South Asian Diasporic communities in the UK found that, in general, British-Pakistanis' national identity was subsumed under a Muslim identity. Thus, 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. As such, religion provided a "metaphor of continuity … a postcolonial means of recuperating a (continuous) tradition in the face of a (disjunctive) modernity" (Biswas, 2002, p.192).

This strategy of using religion as a moral compass might not have been as successful for Pakistani youth were it not for the way Pakistanis and Muslims in general have been discriminated against on the basis of their religion in the aftermath of September 11, particularly in schools. For most of the youth, in the post-9/11 climate, the expectations of tradition associated with being Pakistani from the family and ethnic community were generally stronger than the expectations of modernity associated with being American from the school and larger society. Negotiating these different values and expectations was not easy for youth, and many of them attested to this struggle. As Marina explained:

> 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. (focus group,

05/15/2007)

Soroiya concurred. Referring to both the Pakistani-Muslim and mainstream

communities' views, she said: "We're not Muslim enough, and we're not American

enough" (focus group, 05/15/2007). Not being "Muslim enough" was a serious issue

for the youth and their families, and as a result they questioned who was an authentic

Pakistani, a conversation that was juxtaposed with what was considered Islamic and the

negative attitude toward Americanization.

A Muslim identity was thus a way for Pakistani youth to connect to a larger

community without losing their heritage and culture, which many of them and their

families deemed incompatible with American culture. This identification with Islam did

not necessarily increase their religiosity, but it did affect their socialization. For

example, Rashaad identified himself as Muslim but nonetheless said that he did not

consider himself religious (in fact, he was drawn to Confucianism), yet most of his

friends were Muslim (though not necessarily Pakistani). For him, having Muslim

friends, even though he was not religious himself, gave him a sense of belonging and

camaraderie with other youths who also experienced discrimination in school and

society in the wake of 9/11. Thus home-lessons, coupled with experiences in schools,

affected who youth socialized with.

Concluding Remarks

The research presented here pushes us to understand the ways in which the global makes the local and, in turn, the local makes the global by illustrating how socio-political discourses are appropriated and/or resisted on the ground: Not only are Pakistani-American youth frequently positioned by others as outsiders based on their (perceived) religion, their sense of exclusion translates into behaviors and the co-option of identities that serve to reinforce their outsider status. Religification thus has serious ramifications for Pakistani-American youth and the ways in which they are constructed as "noncitizens."

The humiliations and exclusions that the Pakistani-American youth in my study experienced post-9/11, when many were in middle school, heightened their need to find acceptance and belonging in high school. In an era where security concerns and uncertainty dominate, the cultural production of identity, particularly in school sites, develops in unexpected ways: While these youth creatively contested negative views of Islam, the ensuing cultural production of identity was not always positive. The youth felt that an American identity was no longer an option in the post-9/11 world, a realization that increased their desire to find other ways to belong, such as elevating their Muslim identity, playing into the terrorist stereotype, and, in a sense, rejecting their American citizenship.

This notion of belonging at the cost of one's "American-ness" is being challenged by young Muslim-Americans who lay claim both to their religion and to American citizenship; however, this seems to occur when youth have access to certain kinds of

social and cultural capital, for example, in college (see Bayoumi, 2008). Thus, class and social networks are key variables that need to be explored more systematically and across multiple sites and spaces.

In suggesting that class is a contributing factor in the religification process, I am not implying that race has lost its significance. Rather, religion *mediates* the interplay of global politics, national political and ethnic ideologies, and local interpretations of race and nation in the lives of Pakistani-American youth". While it is difficult to ascertain the durability of religification, it is clear that religification the process is intimately tied to the "War on Terror". As long as the "War on Terror" remains central in US and global politics, religification will continue to have serious implications for Muslim youths' education, employment, and socialization.

Notes:

1. Muslims around the world rioted after *The Satanic Verses*, bringing attention to themselves; however, in the case of the terrorist attack on September 11, it is because the perpetrators were allegedly Muslims (from Saudi Arabia) that Muslims were brought into the limelight.

2. Pakistani-American is the term I use for all first- and second-generation youth of Pakistani origin, irrespective of citizenship or immigration status.

3. Examples of news magazine titles published during my research: *National Geographic* (September 2007): Islam's Fault Line, The Struggle for Pakistan's Soul; *Newsweek* (October 29, 2007): The most dangerous nation in the world isn't Iraq. It's Pakistan; *The Economist* (January 3, 2008): The World's Most Dangerous Place. Pakistan; *Time* (January 14, 2008) No one could save Benazir Bhutto. Why we need to save Pakistan; *New York Times Magazine* (September 7, 2007): Talibanistan

4. "Pakis" is a pejorative term used in the UK for South Asians, particularly British-Pakistanis. However, the majority of youths in my study were unaware of this and used it in a positive sense.

5. When I first visited a Pakistani-immigrant community in New York, I met girls of school-going age who were not permitted by their families (usually their fathers) to attend public school. This is an alarming trend in such communities and warrants further research.

6. Desi is a term of endearment used loosely to identify people from South Asia, primarily Pakistanis, Indians, and Bangladeshis.

7. This girl's family was exploring the possibility of marriage for her and her sister due to unique circumstances: the father was on disability and unable to work. He had four daughters and no sons. The eldest daughter was married, the second eldest was in community college, the younger two were at the high-school. The middle two girls had to work to help make ends meet for the family. The father felt ashamed that his daughters had to work, thus he wished for his daughters to be married quickly so that their husbands could support the girls rather than them having to support him and his wife.

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Table 1. Demographics of the focal high-school

DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS 2005-06	# of students [out of **3067**]	% of student body
Eligible for Free Lunch	1925	63%
Reduced-Price Lunch	290	9%
Limited English Proficient	573	19%
RACE/ETHNICITY		
American Indian or Alaska Native	6	0%
Black or African American	303	10%
Hispanic or Latino	865	28%
Asian or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	783	26%
White	1110	36%

Table 2. Responses From Peer Mediators Who Participated In A Focus Group.	
What three words come to mind when **you** think of Pakistanis?	What are three things (words, phrases, images) that come to mind when **you hear about** Pakistanis? (e.g. in class, when they come up in mediation, on the news, outside of school, etc.)
Muslim, Strict**,** Indian movies	Girl fight, Guy jumpings, **Terrorist**
Ethnic, Culture, Music	**Terrorist,** Bad English**,** Nothing
Swimming	People, Language
Spicy food, **Muslim,** Long shirts with pants	Smell , **Terrorists**
Muslim, Hajab [sic]	-
Muslim	-
Sexy, Girls, Holla	-
War, 9/11	Nothing
A girl in my class	Arabic, Nose ring, **Terrorist**

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