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# Citizenship and Belonging in an Age of Insecurity: Pakistani Immigrant Youth in New York City

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## **Disciplines**

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## CHAPTER NINE

### **Citizenship and Belonging in an Age of Insecurity:**

#### **Pakistani Immigrant Youth in New York City**

*Ameena Ghaffar-Kucher*

Much like the Iran hostage crisis of the late 1970s and the Rushdie affair of the late 1980s, the September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 terrorist attacks on United States soil are a flashpoint for a particular generation, once again bringing Muslims into the limelight and reifying the position of Muslims as the Other. In tandem with increasing xenophobia across the United States (Vlopp, 2002; Yuval-Davis, Anthias, and Kofman, 2005), the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> have resulted in a resurgence of patriotism within the United States (Abowitz and Harnash, 2006). Exacerbated, perhaps, by the war in Iraq and media attention to Al Qaeda, Muslim immigrant youth are increasingly constructed as “national outsiders” and “enemies to the nation” (Abu el-Haj, 2007, p. 30; Yuval-Davis et al., 2005). While there has been some popular press regarding the effects of September 11<sup>th</sup> on Pakistani/Muslim communities in the United States, until very recently, the ramifications of this event and subsequent developments on students in public schools have not been adequately explored (Abu el-Haj, 2002, 2007; Maira, 2004; Sarroub 2005, Sirin and Fine, 2008). Yet what happens within the four walls of a school is a vital part of the larger picture of changing social relations: Public spheres such as schools often reflect and shape the relationships and tensions that exist in society at large. By reflecting on the socialization experiences of Pakistani immigrant youth in public schools, this chapter examines the ways in which transnational geo-politics have created a hostile political climate in the United States for Muslim students, and the ways in which increasing feelings of insecurity translate into distrust

towards individuals that are (or assumed to be) Muslim. This phenomenon especially affects the everyday lived experiences of Pakistani-American and Pakistani immigrant youth as Pakistanis form the largest Muslim immigrant group in the United States (Powell, 2003).<sup>1</sup>

Drawing on a three year multi-sited ethnography, this study explores vertically the ways in which 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-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 (see Bryan; Lopez, 2003). Furthermore, I contend that religification significantly influences the youth's identities, notions of citizenship, and feelings of belonging. As I will illustrate below, Pakistani-American youth in American high schools are drawn to their Muslim identity, not solely for religious reasons but primarily for political ones. The ways in which these youth construct themselves and are constructed by others has significant ramifications in regards to their academic engagement and socialization.

I begin by providing some contextual background in terms of the prevailing geo-political environment, followed by a brief description of the methodology and research sites. I then move on to a discussion on transnationalism and its effects on notions of citizenship. Drawing from ethnographic data collected in a neighborhood with a large working- and lower-class Pakistani immigrant population in New York City, I describe the religification process that the youth experienced in their school. In doing so, I show how global and local politics intersect and shapes the construction of the citizen and non-citizen.

### **Geo-politics and Pakistani Youth: The Making and Unmaking of Citizens**

The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in September 2001 drastically changed the lives of many Pakistanis in the United States. Newspaper reports described the disappearances

of thousands of Pakistani men from neighborhoods across the country, particularly in major cities such as Chicago (Bahl, Johnson, and Seim, 2003) and New York City (Powell, 2003). In January 2002, the Department of Homeland Security (formerly Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS)) enforced the National Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS) as part of the USA PATRIOT Act; accordingly, non-citizen males from 25 countries that were “designated as threats to national security” were required to formally 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 of the 25 nations (most of which have predominantly Arab or Muslim populates) required to register (Powell, 2003).

In the years since the World Trade Center was destroyed, additional events across the globe have focused international attention for Muslims. These include the July 7th, 2005 train bombings in London, the riots in Paris in November and December 2005, the Danish cartoon controversy in 2006, and the alleged London plot to blow up airlines in the summer of 2006. As a consequence, Muslims living in the West have repeatedly been positioned as “an alienated, problematic minority” (Werbner, 2004, p. 897) and as “most cultural Other, inimical to ‘Western’ values and traditions in an essential ‘clash of civilizations’” (Abu el-Haj, 2002, p. 309). This increased surveillance of Muslims greatly affects Pakistanis because of Pakistan’s role in current global politics: On the one hand, Pakistan has been 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 their training. The recent (2008) terrorist attacks in Mumbai have compounded such suspicions. In the face of these events, and by virtue of their religion and nationality, Pakistani immigrants have come under increasing scrutiny in the United States (Buche, 2008; Sperry, 2004) and around the world. Thus, working- and lower-middle class

Pakistani immigrants and their children, in particular, face the dual difficulty of being Muslim in a part of the world where they are viewed with suspicion and having less access to social and cultural networks due to social and linguistic barriers (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). How, then, do Pakistani-American youth in the U.S., growing up in an era of increased suspicion and surveillance of individuals from the Middle East and South Asia, cope with rising levels of hostility in their schools and in the nation? What effects does this hostility have on youth's sense of identity and belonging? Finally, in what ways does this hostility affect the youth's experiences in schools and hopes for the future? These are questions explored in the following pages as a picture of the religification of Pakistani youth comes into focus.

### **Methodology**

This research heeds Marcus's (1998) appeal for multi-sited research in places that are "simultaneously and complexly connected" (p. 51) as well as 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 argues for greater attention to the ways in which "immigrant statuses are defined and debated, citizen rights and responsibilities invoked, structural inequalities challenged, and cultural identifications created" within cultural politics in the public sphere (2004, p. 110). Multi-sited ethnography 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" (Hall, 2004, p. 108). Drawing on this approach, vertical case studies pay heed to the "ethnography of global connections," remaining cognizant of the ways that the 'global' comes to exist as instantiated in local interactions (Tsing, 2005, p. 1). In this multi-sited, vertically constructed ethnographic study, I discuss how geopolitical shifts shape the cultural production of immigrant youth's identities and solidarities in one community in New York

City.

In addition to visiting the local community during the spring of 2004, between February 2006 and January 2008, I collected data at a high school that not only had the second largest number of recently arrived Pakistani immigrant students in its borough but was also located in close proximity to a large community of Pakistani immigrants. I visited the school three times a week over a period of eight months. I interviewed 17 youth, 12 members of school staff, four parental figures, and three South Asian-American community leaders. I also conducted focus group discussions, primarily with students but also with a group of (non-Pakistani) leaders of a local community organization. I engaged more informally with forty-seven youth during the course of fieldwork, and several of these youth were part of the six focus groups I held at the school. I was also able to collect several samples of student work, which included stories about their experiences in schools. On a few occasions in a language class with a high percentage of Pakistani students, I was able to assign students a topic for writing assignments. A great deal of descriptive observation was done throughout the data collection period, primarily in the school but also in the homes of participants and the ethnic in community itself. I often visited community leaders in their offices, had lunch with them at local restaurants, and became, as much as possible, an observer of my surroundings. Through these multiple interactions, I developed an appreciation for the ways in which local and global politics were shaping the construction of “citizenship” and influencing notions of belonging.

### **Glocal Forces: The Religification of Identity**

Ethnic diasporas exemplify transnationalism, which, broadly defined, refers to “multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation-states” (Vertovec, 1999, p. 447). This is especially the case for “newer” ethnic communities, such as the post-1965 Pakistani community in the United States. The growth of instant communication



through telephone, email, mobile phones, videoconference, and faxes make daily contact across national boundaries an “experienced reality” for transmigrants such that migration is no longer a uni-directional process (Werbner, 2004, p. 896). However, a transnational lens does not posit a set of abstracted, dematerialized cultural flows; rather, it pays heed to the constant changes in people’s lives and their reactions to these changes (Nonini and Ong, 1997). Using such an approach, I endeavor to examine the “friction” created when universalizing concepts like nation and religion become “charged and enacted in the sticky materiality of practical encounters” (Tsing, 2005, p. 3). In a similar vein, Werbner (2004) observes that diasporas are culturally and politically reflective, that is, they are constantly changing and negotiating their cultural and political identities, as such, they “cannot exist outside representation” (p. 896). Questions of identity and representation have thus become important ones to consider. Stuart Hall (1996) suggests:

Identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not ‘who we are’ or ‘where we came from,’ so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves. Identities are therefore constituted within, not outside representation. (p. 4)

In recognizing the importance of such questions of identity, this chapter argues that while race may have overpowered ethnicity in the ascription of identities for other minoritized<sup>2</sup> groups (see Lopez, 2003), in the case of Pakistani youth, religion trumps both ethnicity and race. This ascription of an Islamic identity over other “affiliations, priorities, and pursuits that a Muslim person may have” should be taken seriously because of the way in which such an essentialist view of identity affects the social positioning of individuals in the nation (Sen, 2006, ¶ 4). Certainly, race and ethnicity complicate the ways in which Muslims are ‘imagined;’ however, in contemporary social processes in the United States, nation and religion seem to outweigh these factors. Issues of nationalism, citizenship, and belonging are particularly salient

to Pakistani immigrants given the “politics of immigrant incorporation and those of the ‘global war on terror’” (Abu el-Haj, 2007, p. 300). Questions of nationalism, however, have remained conspicuously absent in the sociological literature on the cultural processes involved in ‘becoming an American.’ Kathleen Hall (2004) contends:

The nation – the boundaries of which imply the very terms of distinction between migrant and immigrant – is reified as an enduring context within which the immigrant experience takes place. This reification of the nation and of nationalism limits our ability to explain fully the cultural dynamics of immigrant incorporation. (p. 109)

The problem with holding ethnicity or national identity static is that while it is telling of how people make sense of their lives, it provides little explanation as to how such “classificatory schemes are produced, circulate, and organize social practice” (Hall, 2004, p. 112). In the case of Pakistani youth, the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> have significantly influenced questions of citizenship. As Yuval-Davis, Anthias, and Kofman (2005) argue, the mounting surveillance of individuals who are seen to be “different” after September 11<sup>th</sup> has “increased racialization of ‘Others’ in Western countries and affected constructions of national boundaries” (p. 517). However, my research suggests that religion is used to define and categorize Pakistani youth (and their families) in the United States more than race and ethnicity. I refer to this as the “religification” of identity. Although religification resembles racism, in that it is a social construction, I contend that it is in fact different from racism, as elaborated in the next section.

### **Religification in Action**

The religification of identity works bi-directionally. The Pakistani youth in this study were essentially “stripped” of their other – national and ethnic – identities, such as that of Pakistani, American, South Asian, and Desi,<sup>3</sup> and their religion became the primary prism through which they were seen by peers, teachers, and members of the community. In effect, religion segregates Pakistani youth, by marking their similarity to other South-Asian and Middle-Eastern students (who are all presumed to be Muslim) and their significant difference

from most peers. Further, the Pakistani youth increasingly identified themselves as Muslim because this move allowed them to transform a negative experience of being ostracized as different into a positive one of solidarity and group membership with other Muslims both in their immediate community and globally.

However, the Pakistani youth with whom I worked also increasingly identified as Muslims not so much because of heightened feelings of religiosity but for more personal, and occasionally political, gain. At times, the youth co-opted a religious identity to find a community where they were easily accepted, and at other times they took advantage of the heightened awareness by school personnel of Islamic practices in order to gain certain privileges. For example, a number of boys in the study frequently cut school on Friday afternoons, using the excuse of Friday prayer that was unofficially sanctioned by the school. However, some boys never made it to their prayers and simply went to the park to play. How then did the Pakistani youth make sense of the ways in which they were viewed by their peers, teachers, and fellow Pakistanis, and how did they themselves contribute and react to the hostile climate surrounding them?

For many Pakistani-American youth in this study, September 11<sup>th</sup> was a turning point in both 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 teachers. Despite steps taken by schools and other groups to increase awareness and understanding about Islam and to reduce the stereotypes surrounding Muslims, the Muslim terrorist stereotype continues to flourish. How the increased focus on Muslims in public schools influences the religification of Pakistani immigrants requires greater attention. Abu el-Haj (2007) observes:

Schools play an important role in the construction of the symbolic boundaries of the nation – in constructing who is and is not a member of the nation – and in the provision of resources with which immigrant youth learn to belong and navigate their new society. (p. 288)

From the perspective of the youth in this study, prior to September 11<sup>th</sup>, no one really knew or cared about who Pakistanis were or whether someone was a Pakistani. As one 16-year-old Pakistani-American high school girl that I interviewed put it:

After September 11<sup>th</sup>, I think everybody started knowing who Pakis really are... before that it wasn't really common. No one really cared. (focus group discussion, May 15, 2007)

Similarly, a 14-year-old Pakistani-American boy explained that prior to September 11<sup>th</sup>, people were ambivalent about someone being a Pakistani; after September 11<sup>th</sup>, 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, April 24, 2007)

One result of this 'being different' was that many youth who had once gotten along with students of all nationalities, races, and ethnicities reported changes in behaviors of friends as a consequence of September 11<sup>th</sup>. For example, Bano, a high-school sophomore who had been away in Pakistan on September 11<sup>th</sup>, returned to school in 2002 to find that people looked at her differently: "When I came back, it felt like people looked at me differently. Even my old friends would say, 'you're like one of them too'" (interview, May 29, 2007). In regards to increasing scrutiny that Pakistanis in general experienced after September 11<sup>th</sup>, one mother reasoned, "Perhaps it was in our minds," suggesting that they themselves imagined a change in people's behaviors (interview, April 3, 2007). Whether changes in attitudes were real or imagined, the fact is that for the youth, their lives changed. Their sense of exclusion translated into behaviors that only served to compound their outsider status (see also Willis, 1981).

The feelings of "us and them" continued well past the events of 2001. Many students talked about how September 11<sup>th</sup> was a turning point in the way they experienced schooling in the United States from that point forward. The following are some of the written responses that

students in 2006 gave to the question, “Did race, gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status affect your experiences at school? How?”:

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)

For many youth, the ostracizing and negativity around being a Muslim 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 discussion:

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<sup>th</sup>, definitely not Muslim. (focus group discussion, May 15, 2007)

Marina’s statement, “ever since September 11<sup>th</sup>, definitely not Muslim,” is particularly telling. She had just started the 7<sup>th</sup> grade in 2001, and prior to the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, she had never wanted to associate with Pakistanis or even Muslims. Now, however, she identified herself as a Muslim. This was not so much because she was a practicing Muslim but because she felt that she could no longer claim an American identity. Marina, who was born in the United States, continued, “I feel weird saying I’m American because American people, they

don't like Muslims so much" (focus group discussion, May 15, 2007). The dislike for Muslims that the youth experienced ranged from verbal spats to physical fights. Almost every Pakistani-immigrant youth I spoke with said that at some point during their post-9/11 years in school, they had been referred to as a terrorist.

*Playing into the Terrorist Stereotype*

The terrorist label was one that came up frequently in discussions with the youth and seemed to be one of the reasons why they started ascribing a Muslim identity to themselves. Boys were more likely to have been called a terrorist, but girls also described such experiences. As 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 also explained that the ostracism she experienced after September 11<sup>th</sup> 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 discussion, May 15, 2007)

While many youth reported that fewer people ascribed the terrorist label to them by the mid-2000s, they continued to bring up the term during the period of my research. For example, during a focus group session in 2007 with primarily non-Muslim and non-Pakistani students, one (non-Muslim) girl explained how she had avoided all Pakistani immigrants prior to September 11<sup>th</sup> but now affiliated with them:

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. (May 22, 2007)

Most Pakistani immigrants and Muslim students, however, were not give these kinds of second chances and students did not make the effort to "get to know" them. Even in this particular

situation, the final comment about knowing that “Marina is not a terrorist” indicates that the suspicion of Pakistani youth being terrorists continued for years after September 11<sup>th</sup>. It is highly unlikely that *any* of the students at the high school were terrorists, yet the terrorist stereotype still hung in the air.

While at times youth criticized the terrorist stereotype, at other times they co-opted and used it to suggest power over non-Muslims and a shared identity with one’s fellow Muslims. The following excerpt from an interview with Walid, a high-school senior who arrived in the United States at the age of two, illustrates this:

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, June 12, 2007)

Walid’s story was just one of many where Pakistani Muslim youth felt cornered, and one way they dealt with this was to take on the ascribed persona of a terrorist. Although this was a more common tactic among the young men in the study, some of the girls also took this route to dealing with the hostile environment at the school, as one young woman described:

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 discussion, May 15, 2007)

The ascription of the terrorist label and negative behaviors to Muslim students was not limited to their peers. It 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 apparently replied, “The Verrazano Bridge. Why, do you want to blow it up?” (fieldnotes, May 7, 2007). Regardless of the intention of such

remarks, they inflict symbolic violence on youth (see Bryan) and remain on the minds of students for years.

Teachers also made remarks in jest or without apparent malice that, nevertheless, contributed to the climate in the school whereby Pakistani and other Muslim students were seen as terrorists. Returning to the focus group when one girl said, "Marina is not a terrorist," their teacher, who was also invited to be part of this group, jumped in and laughingly replied, "Oh yes she is!" (focus group discussion, May 22, 2007). Although this was meant to be humorous, and the teacher who said this is greatly loved and respected by the students, these sorts of seemingly benign statements are what psychologist Derald Wing Sue calls racial micro-aggressions (Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, and Torino, 2007). Micro-aggression is a contemporary form of racism that is invisible, unintentional, and subtle in nature, and typically outside the level of conscious awareness, but it creates a hostile and invalidating climate nonetheless. As a result, it can be just as harmful, if not more harmful, than outright racism.

This form of racism affected the socialization and academic engagement of many Pakistani youth. For example, Walid had experienced many overt and covert moments of stereotyping. In part, as a reaction to this, he purposefully provoked teachers in class. He often challenged teachers and would say that certain things were "against his religion," such as listening to music; however, when I asked if he really held such views, 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, June 12, 2007)

This is just one example where the youth "used" their religion but did not necessarily mean that they were religious. In this example, religion helped Walid cope with the racism that he experienced as a young Muslim man though not in the sense of increased religiosity; rather, religious identification served as a defense mechanism. Although this may seem like a reasonable strategy under the circumstances, it creates a vicious cycle: Peers and teachers



ostracize Pakistani youth, who react and provoke their peers and teachers, thereby reaffirming the initial stereotypical beliefs. This cycle, which often ended in the youth being punished, heightened these students' sense of victimization even in cases where they were the ones in the wrong. For example, Iffat, a sophomore who had arrived in the United States a few years before September 11<sup>th</sup>, talked to me in an interview about her most "racist" teacher, who had failed her in summer school because she missed a few classes. She was unwilling to accept that her poor attendance was the cause of the failing grade, preferring to ascribe responsibility to the teacher's views about Muslims (April 24, 2007).

### *Bad Boys, Oppressed Girls*

Reacting to the behavior problems of some Pakistani students, teachers often reminisced about the "golden era" of past students, who were described as being more deferential and quiet. Many teachers who had worked with Pakistani students for a few years talked about how the students had "changed." In Valenzuela's (1999) ethnography about Mexican-American immigrant youth, she writes, "Contemporary students, in failing to conform to this misty, mythical image of their historical counterparts, seem deficient, so teachers find it hard to see them in an appreciative, culture-affirming way" (p. 66). In the same way, teachers in this study saw contemporary Pakistani students as having more academic and behavioral problems, which the teachers attributed to their length of stay in the country and to their religiosity. On several occasions, teachers used the words "narrow-minded" or "inflexible" to describe Muslim students in general but especially boys, which they attributed to religious beliefs. For example, one social studies teacher explained:

The biggest problem that I have, and I have had, I think over the last couple of years with the [Pakistani] 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, May 18, 2007)

In another social studies class, a teacher had wanted to show the students a picture of Prophet

Mohammad. In this situation, I had interjected and cautioned the teacher not to do so as it could result in a very angry reaction from the Muslim students because depicting Mohammad in visual form is considered blasphemous (fieldnotes, December 5, 2006). The potential for such a reaction seemed to confirm the teacher's stereotype of Muslims as 'problem' students, while the possibility that this picture could be truly insulting was not taken into consideration by this teacher.

While teachers often viewed Pakistani boys as problem students, Pakistani 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 this with Islamic tradition even though 'sexual policing' occurs in many groups (Lopez, 2003; Purkayastha, 2005; Zhou and Bankston, 1998). Beyond immigrants, Anita Harris' (2004) book *Future Girl* suggests that the regulation of the sexuality of girls is alive and well in the United States. Nevertheless, the many teachers at this school believed that Pakistani culture, which was considered to be synonymous with Islam, is responsible for this policing.

As a result of this belief, several teachers assumed that many Pakistani 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 kinds of guidance the girls were provided 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, April 16, 2007). In addition, one of the assistant principals told me: "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, May 18, 2007).

Despite these views, not one of the twenty-seven focal girls in the study indicated that she would be facing such a fate, nor were any of them trying to stall graduation. It may have

been an issue 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.” The view of culture as static and impervious to change affected the ways in which these youth were treated in school. However, as the next section illustrates, notions of culture among the Pakistani community were also somewhat static.

*A Question of “Authenticity”*

I was able to gain a deeper understanding of the choices and decisions that the youth made – about marriage, schooling, and other matters – by visiting their homes and the largest Pakistani community in the city. The youth reported feeling significant dissonance in their efforts to be an ‘authentic’ Pakistani, or (more often) an ‘authentic’ Muslim, while also being teenagers in an American high school. Because their parents were, for the majority, quite religious, the youth’s religious identities were entwined with national ones: For most, being an ‘authentic Pakistani’ required simultaneously being an ‘authentic Muslim.’ Despite their working class backgrounds that made travel to Pakistan infrequent, if at all, the youth maintained strong ties to Pakistan. Further, given the configurations of culture and nation in the United States, wherein middle- and upper-class white Anglo Saxon Protestants get marked as the norm and others are at most 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.’ 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.” Though the definition of Americanization varied among youth and their families, the one common theme was the lack of religiosity, sexual promiscuity, drinking, and taking drugs. As a result, youth felt caught between two contrasting ideologies – the ideology of being Pakistani and the ideology of being American. For instance, 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, May 7, 2007)

Although being Muslim and being American was viewed as static and in binary opposition, in fact, the conflicting expectations that these youth faced were not conflicts between two distinctive 'bounded' cultures; rather, they were tensions surrounding the different expectations for them as Pakistanis and as Americans (Hall, 2004). For most of the youth, the expectations of 'tradition' associated with 'being Pakistani' were generally stronger than the expectations of 'modernity' associated with 'being American.' 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 discussion, May 15, 2007)

Thus, being Muslim even fell outside of the more common race/ethnicity categorization that is characteristic of American society. Soroiya summed up this feeling of not knowing where she and her Pakistani friends belonged: "We're not Muslim enough and we're not American enough" (focus group discussion, April 3, 2007).

Religion was thus a way to connect to a larger Muslim community without 'losing' one's heritage and culture, which many youth deemed incompatible with American culture. This identification did not necessarily increase the religiosity of the youth, but it did increase the importance of adopting a Muslim identity. For example, Rashaad, an academically-engaged fourteen-year-old who identified himself as "Muslim," explained that he did not consider himself religious, but that most of his friends were Muslim (though not necessarily Pakistani).

For him, having Muslim friends, even if not religious himself, gave him a sense of belonging and camaraderie with other youth who also suffered in the wake of 9/11. Thus religion also became a way to “mediate the vicissitudes of class and race” in the United States (Maira, 2002, p. 138).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter demonstrates the ways in which Pakistani youth encounter and respond to racism in a post-9/11 world. The religification of identity has serious ramifications for both the academic and social arenas for Pakistani American youth and the ways in which these youth are constructed as “non-citizens.” Certainly, in the case of the Pakistani youth in this study, global politics affect the way these students are constructed as outsiders to the nation, but the youth themselves also contribute to the local and national milieu by the ways in which they construct their identities in a religious, and frequently oppositional, light. As observed by Purkayastha (2005) in her work with South Asian Americans:

[the] ideological fragmentation of their identity into religious versus national identity (for example, Muslim versus American) simply did not reflect who they were .... Consequently, the South Asian Americans felt that they were forced to defend their religion actively, and this conscious effort makes religion more significant (though not in way described by the critics) in their everyday lives. (p. 39)

This study also shows that religion is increasingly being used as a formal marker of difference by the mainstream in the United States and by ethnic-religious groups themselves. As a result, Pakistani-Muslim youth see themselves as outsiders in the United States because of the religification they encounter in their daily lives, but they imagine themselves to be part of a ‘Muslim community’ that provides an alternative identity as an ‘insider’ even though this feeling of belonging is in a community that is increasingly being ostracized by the mainstream. It softens their “outsider” identity by giving them a place where they feel they ‘belong,’ even within an inhospitable environment.

This “othering” along religious lines is neither a new social discourse nor simply a phenomenon in the U.S.: Zakharia’s case study of language policy in Lebanon and Bryan’s examination of multi-cultural policy in Ireland both illustrate how such religification manifests in a variety of discourses, both at the national and local levels. What this volume suggests is that these discourses must be studied and understood vertically. As both Valdiviezo’s and Bryan’s chapters demonstrate, the political economy of diversity influences the official and unofficial conduct of inter- and multi-cultural education in schools. Furthermore, similar to other chapters in this volume, I contend that in an era where security concerns and uncertainty dominate, the cultural production of identity, particularly in school sites, develops in unexpected ways that can best be understood through vertical case study analysis.

The interplay of global politics, national political and ethnic ideologies, and local interpretations of race and nation in the lives of Pakistani youth has implications for their education, employment, and socialization in the years to come, and for U.S. society more broadly. Returning to interview these youth in several years, as planned, will provide further insights into the durability of religification in their lives.

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<sup>1</sup> The majority of participants in the study were American citizens; a handful had permanent-resident status, and a few were undocumented. However, in this chapter, I use the term “Pakistani-American” for all three categories.

<sup>2</sup> The term ‘minoritized’ comes from Teresa McCarty, who asserts that the term minority can be stigmatizing and is often numerically inaccurate: “Minoritized more accurately conveys the power relations by which certain groups are socially, economically, and politically marginalized. It also implies human agency and the power to effect positive change” (2004, p. 93).

<sup>3</sup> This is a South-Asian term to describe individuals of South Asian origin.

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