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Here, There, and Elsewhere:

A Multicentered Relational Framework for Immigrant Identity Formation

Based on Global Geopolitical Contexts

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Sociology

by

Tahseen Shams

2018

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Here, There, and Elsewhere:

A Multicentered Relational Framework for Immigrant Identity Formation

Based on Global Geopolitical Contexts

by

Tahseen Shams

Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2018

Professor Roger Waldinger, Co-Chair

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The scholarship on international migration has long theorized how immigrants form new identities and build communities in the hostland. However, largely limited to studying the dyadic ties between the immigrant-sending and -receiving countries, research thus far has overlooked how sociopolitics in places *beyond*, but in relation to, the homeland and hostland can *also* shape immigrants' identities. This dissertation addresses this gap by introducing a more comprehensive analytical design—the multicentered relational framework—that encompasses global political contexts in the immigrants' homeland, hostland, and “elsewhere.” Based primarily on sixty interviews and a year's worth of ethnographic data on Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and Indian Muslims in California, I trace how different dimensions of the immigrants' “Muslim” identity category tie them to different “elsewhere” contexts. As self-identifying Muslims, the immigrants are religiously and

politically oriented towards the histories, conflicts, and people in “elsewhere” places of the Middle East that sustain the “Muslim” identity, sometimes even prioritizing these connections over those towards their homelands in South Asia. Yet, it is the Muslim-related conflicts in “elsewhere” Europe that determine how the immigrants are identified by others in America, thus reflecting the different ways in which global politics shapes both how Muslims view themselves and how they are viewed by others.

The dissertation of Tahseen Shams is approved.

William Rogers Brubaker

Nile Spencer Green

Roger Waldinger, Committee Co-Chair

Rubén Hernández-León, Committee Co-Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2018

For Dadu

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CHAPTER ONE: SOCIETIES INTERCONNECTED

The scholarship of international migration has long theorized how immigrants form new identities and build communities in the hostland. As immigrants leave one country to settle in another, they do not forget the people and places they have left behind. Instead, they bring with them the beliefs, practices, conflicts, and histories from back “there” in the homeland to “here” in the host society. The contexts of their sending society thus continue to influence the immigrants’ worldview, shaping who they consider as “we” as opposed to “them,” even as they build new communities in the hostland. However, how the immigrants view themselves and where they draw the boundaries between “us” and “them” do not always converge with how the hostland’s society view the immigrants. In fact, immigrants’ views of themselves are quite unique because in contrast to most people at the place of origin and destination, immigrants’ lives straddle two or more national societies. Moreover, both the processes of identification—that by the immigrants themselves and that by others—are located in a larger geopolitical tapestry that runs through particularistic territorial borders.

For example, in the month after 9/11, Vasudev Patel, a Hindu Indian, Waqar Hasan, a Muslim from Pakistan, and Rais Bhuiyan, a Bangladeshi Muslim were shot in Texas by Mark Stroman who called himself the “*Arab* slayer.” Vasudev and Waqar died, whereas Rais survived but partially lost his vision. Stroman proudly admitted to the killing spree, claiming to be an American patriot avenging the 9/11 terrorist attacks by Arab Muslim extremists. None of his victims, however, were Arab—one of them was not even Muslim. Even as recently as February 2017, two Hindu immigrants from India Srinivas Kuchibhotla and Alok Madasani were shot in Kansas by Adam Purinton who later bragged about killing “two Iranians.” This incident had taken place just three weeks after President Trump had rolled out his first executive order to ban people coming from

seven predominantly Muslim countries—including Iran—to keep out “radical Islamic terrorists.” Neither Srinivas nor Alok, of course, identified as Iranian—or even Muslim.

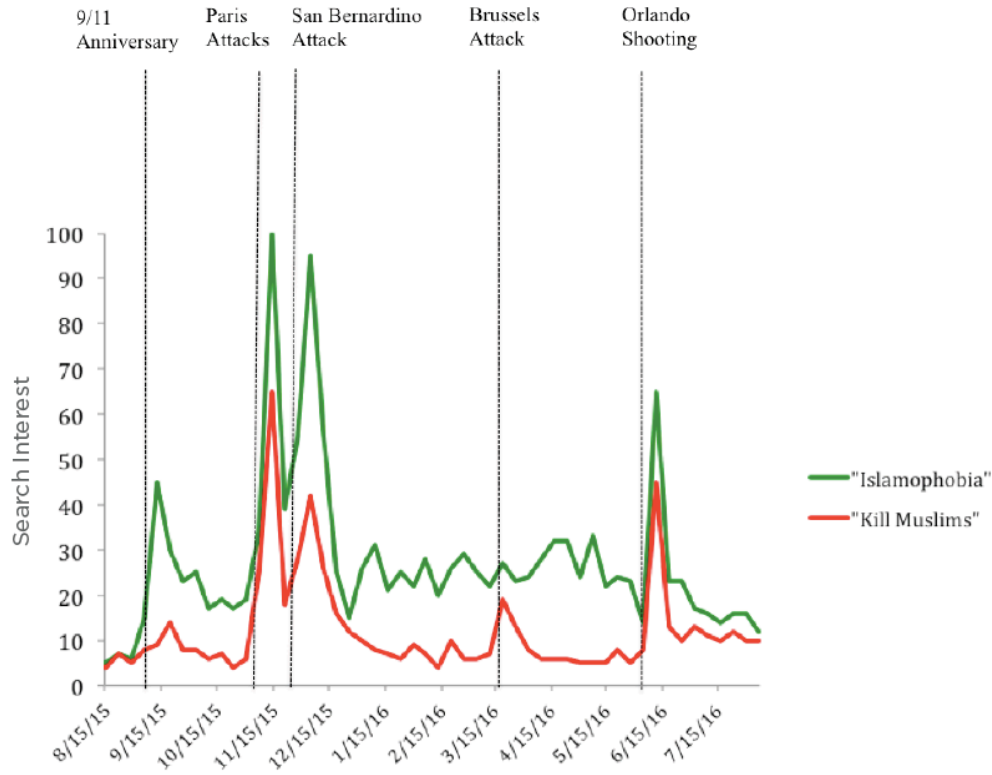
This dissonance between identification by oneself and that by others is largely undertheorized in the literature on immigrant identity formation. The foundational theories have largely focused on the contexts of the sending and receiving countries. Assimilation perspectives analyze how hostland contexts shape immigrants’ homeland identities over time (Alba and Nee 2003; Portes and Rumbaut 2001). The transnationalism perspective studies how the sending and receiving societies converge through immigrants as they pull the contexts of their homeland on to the hostland (Waldinger 2015). And diasporic frameworks draw attention to the various interconnections that link members of a dispersed population to a common homeland and to each other but largely leaves out the hostland context (Dufoix 2008).

What remains largely overlooked is how sociopolitical dynamics in places *beyond*, but in relation to, the homeland and hostland *also* shape immigrants’ identities. The answer to this question is particularly consequential as immigrants have myriad global connections, which transcend homeland-hostland borders and influence not only how others view immigrants but also how immigrants view themselves. It is this question that this dissertation aims to unravel, using the case of South Asian Muslim immigrants’ identity-work and engaging with the scholarship on international migration, race and ethnicity, nationalism, and religion.

Religion is one example of immigrants’ global connections and how their sense of self stretches over territorial borders. As immigrants arrive from one society to settle in another, they both produce and experience globalization through their interactions with other diverse immigrant and native groups while also connecting societies that may have previously been distinct (Shams 2017a). Through these interactions, they generate not just contacts across cultures but also across religions. As communities of believers, religions tie together people in ways different than migrations

from “there”—i.e., the homeland—to “here”—the hostland. Rather, religions tend to transcend state boundaries and societal borders (Cesari 2005; Levitt 2007; Wuthnow and Offutt 2008)—thus connecting “here,” “there,” and beyond.

Figure 1.1: Google Trends Data on U.S. Response to ISIS Terrorist Attacks (Zakaria 2016)



Data: Google Trends Public Data, Figure: Alexandra Siegel

Some world religions like Islam have structures and institutions built within the religion itself that connect believers from across the world in a bond of brotherhood. In particular, a core notion of Islam is the *Ummah*—the imagined worldwide community that transcends borders and connects all Muslims by producing shared beliefs, rituals, duties, and sense of membership. A religious framework of this sort can invoke a sense of community and a collective identity that people use to make sense of their world and relationships, creating group boundaries between an “us” and a “them” that transcends state boundaries (Lichterman 2008).

As vectors of globalization, immigrants often face an almost immediate spillover effect from global events. Interconnections and group boundaries across state borders are facilitated by advanced telecommunication technologies and are shaped by global political dynamics. Consequently, the effects of conflicts reverberate across state borders, making themselves felt at opposite ends of the world. For instance, Muslims in the United States faced upticks of anti-Muslim sentiments following Islamist attacks in not just America, but also in Paris and Brussels, as indicated by spikes in Google Searches for the terms “Kill Muslims” and “Islamophobia” shown in Figure 1.1. At the same time, telecommunications allow immigrants to both follow global events and collectively interpret their meaning, with Muslim Americans—most of whom are immigrants (Pew Research Center 2011)—anticipating and taking precautions against the very antagonism that these global conflicts may provoke.

This dissertation challenges the dyadic homeland-hostland paradigm for studying immigrant collective identity formation based on data collected primarily from 60 in-depth interviews and a year of ethnographic fieldwork from 2015-2016 on Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and Indian Muslim immigrants in California. Instead, the dissertation introduces a broader, more comprehensive analytical design—the “multicentered relational framework”—that can encompass the global geopolitical contexts in the immigrants’ homeland, hostland, and beyond. In so doing, I theorize what I call “elsewhere,” which is my concept for places that are neither the immigrants’ homeland nor hostland but that which are nonetheless important to their identification processes. I refer to identity formation as the collective struggles among social actors over recognition and meanings attached to the boundaries of an identity category. Recognition is required not only from those who claim to be members of that identity category but also from those outside of it. As such, identity formation has two halves that interact with each other—self-identification and identification by

others—with social actors being located at the intersection of these two processes (Brubaker 2004, 2016; Jenkins 1996; Lamont and Molnár 2002; Wimmer 2008a, 2008b).

Locating the South Asian Muslim American participants in the multicentered relational framework, I argue that different dimensions of the immigrants’ “Muslim” identity category (such as, spiritual and political) tie them to different “elsewhere” contexts in distinct yet overlapping ways. As Muslims, these immigrants are members of the *Ummah*. However, the heartland of that imagined global community is not found in South Asia, but rather in the Middle East, that part of the Muslim world that shares a contentious geopolitical relationship with the West, particularly the United States. As the birthplace of Islam, the Prophet Muhammad, and the location of Islam’s holiest sites, the Middle East is arguably the spiritual and political center of the Muslim world. And, as self-identifying Muslims, these immigrants subscribe to the various histories, places, peoples, and conflicts in the Middle East that sustain the “Muslim” identity category. In effect, as will be shown, many South Asian Muslim Americans engage in politics aimed at “elsewhere” places in the Middle East, such as Palestine and Turkey, rather than towards their homelands. Yet, how the participants self-identify does not determine how they are identified by their host society at large. Rather, Muslim-related contexts in “elsewhere” European places, such as France, trigger domino effects in the form of anti-Muslim backlash in the U.S. society.

Thus, the multicentered relational framework captures three specific points of focus or “centers,” thereby expanding the homeland-hostland dyad: 1) “here,” i.e., the hostland (the United States); 2) “there,” which refers to the immigrants’ homeland (in this case, Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan); and 3) “elsewhere” (the Middle East and Europe). As each pole in this triad tugs at the immigrants’ sense of self, this dissertation shows how political conflicts in and between these places shape immigrants’ identity-making processes, tracing how the interconnectedness of societies at the global level shapes immigrants’ everyday lives on the ground.

Islam As an Analytical Lens For Tracing the Interconnections of Societies

Taking religion as a site to gain insight on social actors and how they interact with larger social processes (Guhin 2014), this dissertation uses Islam as a strategic lens to capture the myriad ties immigrant co-religionists share both within and across various countries, even those from which they do not originate or to which they have never traveled. In so doing, this dissertation locates immigrants at the heart of a dialectical tension between transnationalism on one hand and territorialization on the other. Whereas transnationalism highlights the ties and flows of information, people, and resources transcending state territories (i.e., deterritorialization), territorialization is the limiting of these trans-border connections by imposing state borders. To that effect, although immigrants can have global ties that are pertinent to their sense of self, they are nonetheless located within the jurisdiction of the host state and are thus subject to its legal, political, and social control (Eickelman and Piscatori 1996; Grillo 2004; Leonard 2009; Mandaville 2011; Waldinger and Fitzgerald 2004; Zubaida 2004). As such, state borders can still limit, and thereby, to some extent, reconstruct immigrants' global memberships.

Islam has subsumed this dialectical tension between transnationalism and territorialization throughout much of its history. On one hand, the emphasis of territorialization in Islam can be traced back to the pre-Arab era when Meccan tribes imposed geopolitical boundaries around the *Ka'aba* as part of their sophisticated socioeconomic system (Aslan 2005). On the other hand, based on its principle to refuse particularistic loyalties to ethnic and national groups, Islam prioritizes the creation and observance of the *Ummah* (Mandaville 2011; Schmidt 2005). Although abstract in nature, this notion of an *Ummatic* or deterritorialized nation of Islam manifests itself in actions such as, movements of people, flows of information, debates, interactions, community and institution building, political acts, financial correspondences, and exchange of knowledge, thus serving as a strong unifying force despite “the continued fragmentation and pluralization of interpretations of

the Islamic message” (Cesari 2004: 92; also see Bowen 2004, Leichtman 2010, Schmidt 2005). With the creation of modern nation-states by the collapse of European imperial rule in many parts of the Muslim world, including the Middle East and South Asia, “Muslims have been struggling to reconcile their dual identities as both citizens of independent sovereign entities and members of a unified worldwide community” (Aslan 2005: 137-8).

For instance, although there is an overarching sense of solidarity based on the notion of *Ummah*, there are also more local, national religious communities, such as “Muslim American” and “British Muslim” based on feelings of belonging to national societies. International migration adds further complications, as migrants become members (in many cases, citizens) of the receiving state while simultaneously remaining citizens of the sending state. For instance, many immigrants from the so called “Muslim world,” such as Middle Easterners and South Asians, become citizens in Western countries, the very societies that had once colonized them and that still share less than friendly foreign relations with their homelands.

The following section unpacks this dialectic tension between “transnational Islam” (Bowen 2004; Grillo 2004) and the territorial constraints presented by state borders. Rather than diminishing the role of Islam as a unifying force for Muslims or underestimating the state’s ability to control this transnational phenomenon, the aim of the following discussion is to highlight the many ways in which both these dialectical forces shape immigrants’ actions, identities, and networks with co-religionists located *beyond* the homeland and hostland.

Muslims Interconnected: Transnationalism and Territorialization

Transnational Islam refers to the movements and ties of Muslims across borders and the worldwide diffusion of Islamic knowledge and ideas through various forms of media (Leichtman 2010). Analytically, it includes three dimensions: “demographic movements, transnational religious institutions, and the field of Islamic reference and debate” (Bowen 2004: 880). These tangible and

virtual connections expand beyond the borders of one country, engaging Muslims from different corners of the world. For example, the Salman Rushdie affair, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the genocide of Bosnian Muslims, the Israel-Palestine conflict, the torture of Muslim inmates in Guantanamo Bay by the C.I.As and U.S. military personnel, and more recently, the Syrian refugee crisis are but a handful of issues that have engaged the attention of Muslims from around the world. Even within the borders of a country, sociopolitical contexts concerning Muslims are shaped by events rooted “elsewhere.” On one hand, many Muslims view their hostland to identify them in relation to “elsewhere” conflicts. For example, in the United States, the government’s Middle East policies and the media’s representation of Islam have prompted many Muslim Americans to evaluate their collective status in the U.S. society as they interpret these as indicators of America’s negative attitude towards all Muslims (Cainkar 2009). On the other hand, many Muslims themselves identify with co-religionists located in “elsewhere” places. For instance, the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), the largest institutional coalition of Muslims in America and Canada, regularly sends funds to Muslim countries throughout the world.

However, such transnational or global connections are not *post*-national (Grillo 2004; Leonard 2009; Yilmaz 2010; Eickelman and Piscatori 1996; Waldinger and Fitzgerald 2004; Mandaville 2011; Zubaida 2004). Although issues of human rights, religious debates, identity-formation, immigrant incorporation, and claims-making may take transnational forms (Koenig 2005; Soysal 1994), they do little to diminish the importance of the state. All claims-making based on human rights, for example, takes place within the legal and political jurisdiction of the state and is thus subject to its control. Indeed, borders continue to have a lasting importance in shaping the very nature and practice of religion and religious identities. For example, Islam in some Western countries is strongly cosmopolitan based on the nature of those societies (van der Veer 2002a; van der Veer 2002b; Leonard 2009). Similarly, the French *laïcité* laws impose the state’s structural power

in controlling if and how one can practice their religion depending on whether one is located in a public or private space within the state (Joppke and Torpey 2013; Mas 2010; Killian 2006). And, more recently, travel restrictions, such as the “Muslim ban” enacted by President Donald Trump, can control if one—regardless of religiosity—can even enter another country based on the demographic makeup of the sending country. Even after migrants are successful in crossing the border, how migrants are received in the host state has far-reaching consequences on their religious identity and adaptation to the host society. For example, negative contexts of reception in the receiving state have been associated with higher religiosity among Muslim immigrants as a form of reactive identity (Connor 2010). Moreover, societal tensions of the sending state continue to define immigrants’ collective identities as immigrants map many aspects of their homeland society on to the hostland (Shams 2017a; Waldinger 2015).

Muslim immigrants are thus legally, politically, and socially bound by the borders and circumstances of at least two states—the one from which they come and the one in which they live (Grillo 2004; Salih 2003; Leichtman 2010). And yet, despite these formidable constraints, Muslims continue to maintain ties across societal and state borders. Moreover, just because immigrants have come from societies “there” and settled down “here” does not mean these two places are the only ones that are relevant to their sense of selves. For example, international migration is an inherent component of Islam as it constitutes one of its five pillars—the Hajj or pilgrimage. Believers who are physically and financially able are obligated to perform Hajj to Mecca at least once in their lifetime. In 2012, almost four million Muslims went to perform Hajj, with more than half coming from abroad (Al Arabiya 2012). The number of pilgrims in 2016 was relatively modest—1.8 million—but nonetheless comprised of almost 1.7 million non-Saudi pilgrims (Al Arabiya 2016). Again, transnational Islamic organizations and NGOs, such as the International Islamic Relief Organization and the British Islamic Relief, are important actors in the humanitarian and

development aid sectors worldwide. And, using various sites on the Internet (such as, Islamicity.com), Muslims from anywhere in the world engage in theological debates with a global Muslim community, participate in virtual lectures, and ask questions directly to eminent Islamic scholars from various countries about performing everyday religious practices. Through these sites, Muslims also share Halal recipes, learn the Arabic language and Islamic history, find the daily prayer schedule, donate Zakat or the annual alms to the poor, and even issue and learn about fatwas or Islamic rulings (Bunt 2009). The blogosphere and social media have become particularly instrumental for organizing social movements and gaining a transnational audience, with some recent examples being the Arab Spring in 2011 and Israel's attack on the Gaza Strip in 2014 (Eltantawy and Wiest 2011; Wilson and Dunn 2011; Chebib and Sohail 2011).

But how and to what extent these ties can be maintained is controlled by the politics of state borders. The Saudi government, for example, enforces Hajj quotas, which it uses as leverage in its geopolitical relations with various countries (Wynbrandt 2004; Kinfer 1987). The governments of other predominantly Muslim countries, like Egypt, Turkey, Pakistan, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Malaysia also play key roles in regulating the annual pilgrimage. In fact, every prominent Muslim state has a Hajj policy and a powerful bureaucratic body to manipulate the Hajj for political and economic gains (Bianchi 2008). Consequently, not every believer who is willing and able can perform Hajj; rather, that ability depends to a considerable extent on the inter-state relations at the global level. Moreover, transnational Muslim organizations are often viewed as political actors or "front organizations for global militant networks" in contentious places like Palestine, Sudan, and Afghanistan (Petersen 2012: 128), and as such, are subjected to suspicion, scrutiny, and control based on anti-terrorism policies. The US Department of Justice, for example, has shut down many Muslim organizations based on allegations of funding terrorist activities abroad (Cainkar 2009; Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2009). Even the seemingly borderless ties on the Internet are constrained

by territorialization. For example, through policies such as the Patriot Act, governments can wiretap and monitor the Internet. Since 9/11, US sources have monitored websites that are linked to Islamist groups and that contain elements of cyberplanning. The FBI also investigates Islamic militant activities online to locate the command centers and fundraising infrastructures (Whine 2007).

Thus, rather being deterritorialized, Muslim immigrants are *reterritorialized* in a space that is dialectically both global and transnational on one hand and constrained by state borders on the other. Although devoted to studying the complexities that produce and arise from the flow of people across borders, the scholarship of international migration has largely undertheorized this dialectical tension between the interconnectedness of societies and state boundaries. The conceptual scope of the foundational frameworks in the field—assimilation, transnationalism, and diaspora—have either largely focused on the homeland or hostland, or they have been limited to studying the dyadic ties between the sending and receiving societies. None of these frameworks, thus, situates immigrants' identity-making processes at the global geopolitical level where *various* places—not just the sending and receiving countries—interact with each other.

The State of the Field: Immigrant Identities in the International Migration Scholarship

The Assimilation Perspective

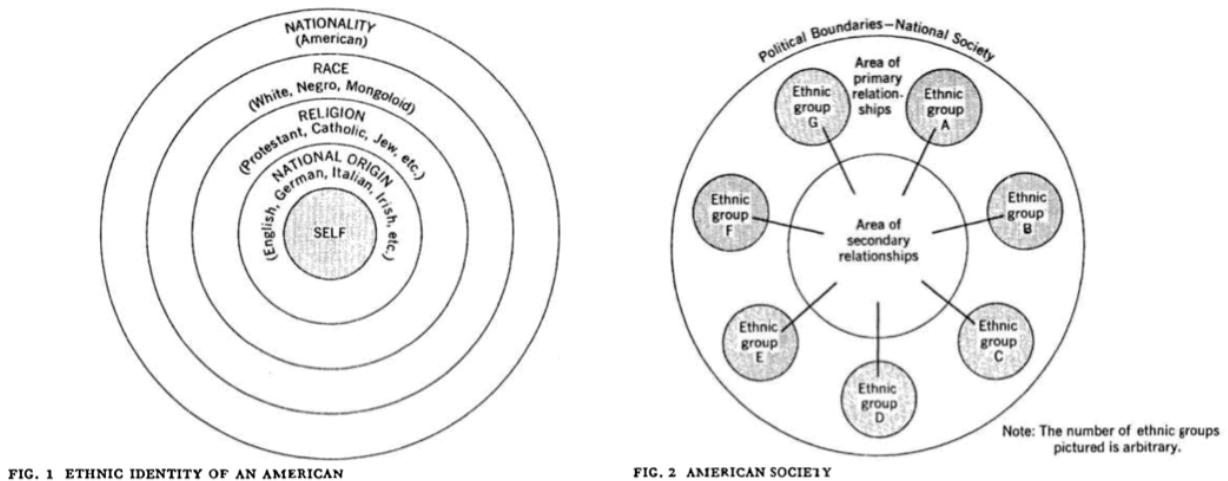
The standard approach of the assimilation scholarship has been to study how hostland contexts shape immigrants homeland identities over time as immigrants become in many ways similar to the hostland's native populations over generations. Based on this approach, assimilation scholars have largely focused on the opportunities and obstacles that emerge for immigrants' integration into the host society as they interact with various other immigrant and native-born groups in the hostland. Some scholars have argued that through these interactions, immigrants' ethnic differences from the hostland's mainstream society "blur" or lose significance over time,

changing the identities of and creating economic opportunities for both immigrants and the larger host society in the process (Alba and Nee 2003; Alba and Nee 1997; Alba, Kasinitz and Waters 2011). Others have highlighted the segmentation of the American society to argue that the racialized context of reception in the hostland produces obstacles for non-white immigrants to assimilate into the mainstream (Telles and Ortiz 2008). Instead, they argue that many contemporary immigrant groups assimilate into a “rainbow underclass,” which is comprised of different non-white ethnicities (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Portes and Rumbaut 2006; Portes and Zhou 1993; Haller, Portes, and Lynch 2011). Yet others have studied how ethnic communities themselves can act as reservoirs of social capital through which children of immigrants can achieve higher education attainment and upward mobility over time (Zhou and Bankston 1998).

These different, and at times contradictory, perspectives on the hostland context of reception have led to different theorizations of immigrant identity formation. But generally, immigrants’ identity formation has been viewed to have two co-existing pathways. In the first, the host society imposes a group identity on immigrants regardless of the immigrants’ own narratives. In the second, the immigrants themselves construct identity categories that reflect how they view their position in the host society (Junn and Masuoka 2008). In the first case, immigrants are exposed to narratives, which were previously irrelevant to them in their homeland but which now highlight certain features of the immigrants that fit them into categories pre-existing in the host society. In the second case, as immigrants incorporate into a racially stratified American society, they construct new identities for themselves or attach new meanings to an existing identity both at the individual and group levels (Itzigsohn 2009). These new or reconstructed ethnic identities can be reactions to real or perceived hostility towards immigrants in the hostland, such as nativism and racism from some segments of the host society (Portes and Rumbaut 2001, 2006; Aleinikoff and Rumbaut 1998).

However, these models of assimilation focus exclusively on how contexts *within* the receiving country shape immigrants' identities. More specifically, the assimilation scholarship has largely trained its focus on how contexts of reception inside the host state have led to variations in the immigrants' development outcomes, or in other words, how these contexts have shaped the success or failure of different ethnic groups to assimilate into a predominantly white, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant American society. In this aspect, the field of assimilation studies has progressed little since its earlier days as the focus of even the more contemporary assimilation models continue to remain largely hostland-centric. For instance, as Figure 1.2 shows, the classical theory of assimilation, as posited by Gordon (1964), conceptualized both the immigrants' ethnic identities and the larger host society as bound within the United States. In this conceptualization, the American society and the immigrants themselves appear to be insulated from any effect induced by globalization or factors beyond the hostland's borders.

Figure 1.2: The Classical Assimilation Theory (Gordon 1964)



Although the new theories of assimilation discussed above have reworked this classical view to better fit the contemporary waves of immigrants and the more pluralist racial dynamics in America, what the scholarship of assimilation still overlooks is the fact that because of globalization

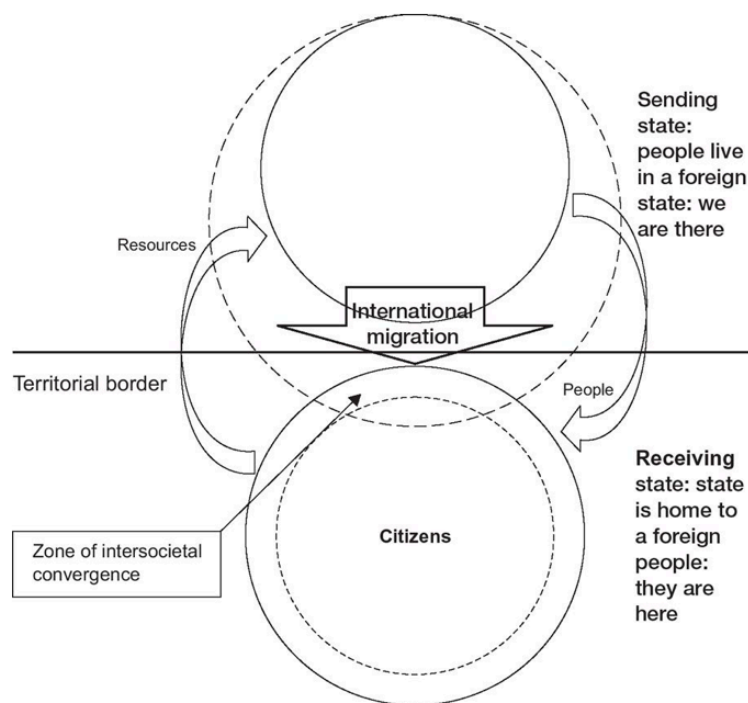
or the interconnectedness of societies, contexts of the receiving society do not always remain neatly bound within the hostland's territory. Rather, because of global political dynamics, contexts within the hostland are often exposed to *exogenous shocks*, i.e., events which occur *outside* the receiving state's territory, but which are nonetheless relevant to its sociopolitics and geopolitical interests. As such, how exogenous shocks emanating from places beyond the hostland's borders produce impact on the host society, and in turn shape the immigrants' sense of selves—both in terms of self-identification and identification by others—remain overlooked. Moreover, exogenous shocks that disrupt the global political order affect the dynamics of also the homeland society, the effects of which in turn can influence the host society's attitude towards immigrants from those countries. Furthermore, events in the homeland can also generate exogenous shocks that can affect the immigrants' reception in the hostland. However, assimilation theories largely tend to ignore the immigrants' continuing homeland ties and their relevance. Contributing to these research gaps in the assimilation literature, this dissertation shows how exogenous shocks (a concept I explicate in detail in Chapter 2) produce impact on the hostland's sociopolitical dynamics that in turn shape immigrants' identification processes.

The Transnationalism Perspective

Transnationalism expands the analytical focus of the international migration scholarship beyond the hostland by capturing how immigrants maintain ties with their homeland over time and thereby create cross-state communities, which span both the sending and receiving societies (Portes, Guarino, and Landolt 1999; Glick-Schiller, Basch, and Szanton-Blanc 1995); Glick-Schiller, Basch, and Szanton-Blanc 1992a). But outside the field of international migration, the term “transnationalism” is often conflated and used interchangeably with “globalization.” As a result, transnationalism remains conceptually vague with little theoretical and practical leverage. Transnationalism is more clearly demarcated within the field of international migration, allowing

researchers to explicitly identify its conceptual scope and push its boundaries for extension. Setting itself apart from any other forms of interconnectedness between societies encompassed under the umbrella term “globalization,” transnationalism examines the social connections between specifically the sending and receiving countries through immigrants (Waldinger 2015). It is defined as “the processes by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and country of settlement” (Glick-Schiller, Basch, Blanc-Szanton 1992b: 1; Glick-Schiller, Basch, Blanc-Szanton 1995).

Figure 1.3: The Transnationalism Framework (Waldinger 2015)



Extending the assimilation perspective, transnationalism recognizes that immigrants bring with them the societal contexts of their homeland as they settle in the receiving country. In so doing, immigrants pull the contexts of their sending society and map them onto the territory of the hostland, thus creating a “zone of intersocietal convergence” or linking “here” and “there” through language, symbols, cultural practices, institutions, and various forms of resources (Waldinger 2015:

6). In other words, even as immigrants live within the territory of the host country, the ways in which they live their lives, build communities, raise children, and distribute resources are shaped by both the societies in which they live and the one which they have left behind. Moreover, these homeland connections merge with the ongoing contexts of the host society to shape immigrants' collective identity-making, as exemplified by how ongoing religious-political conflicts in the homeland can sometimes be mirrored within the immigrant group's community-building in the hostland (Shams 2017a).

However, by focusing on the dyadic ties between the sending and receiving societies, the transnationalism perspective overlooks the myriad ties that immigrants have with places *other* than the homeland and hostland. Moreover, the dyadic transnationalism framework fails to capture the ongoing political contexts at the global level that involve not just the sending and receiving countries but also other places of salience for the immigrants' sense of selves. Furthermore, although scholars of transnationalism have taken up the task to empirically trace immigrants' cross border connections in today's interconnected or "global village" (such as through remittances), and have offered various theorizations on how homeland-hostland ties shape immigrants' identities (Itzigsohn and Giorguli-Saucedo 2005; Itzigsohn and Giorguli-Saucedo 2002), the scholarship has largely overlooked how *ongoing* homeland dynamics shape immigrants' identities. As immigrants settle down in the host society, contexts in the homeland continue to change. And, similar to the host society, homeland societies are also susceptible to and are affected by exogenous shocks. With advanced telecommunication technologies, immigrants keep up-to-date on what is happening in their homeland that may be important to their identification by others in the receiving society, especially if contexts in the homeland generate global political attention.

Immigrants neither live in two worlds where nation-state borders do not seem to matter, nor do they cut off their connections with their homeland; rather, immigrants are located "between here

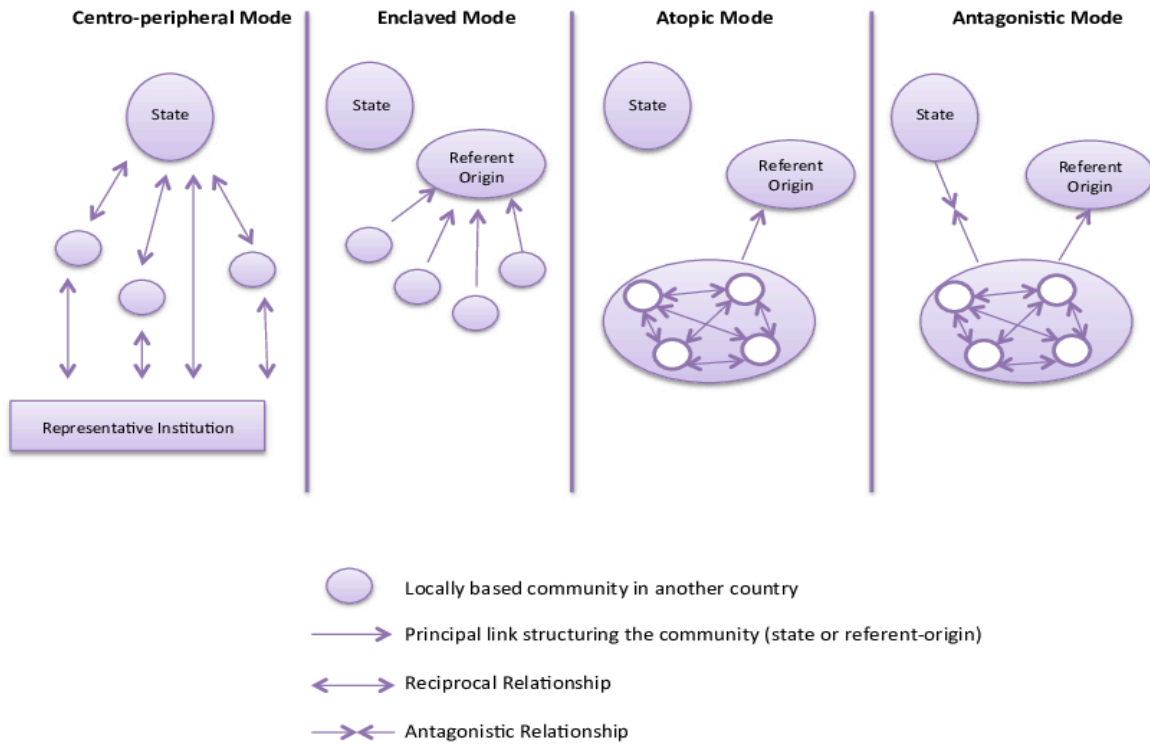
and there, keeping in touch with and trying to remain true to the people and places that they have left behind while simultaneously shifting loyalties and allegiances to the people and places where they have settled” (Waldinger 2015: 10). This dissertation takes the transnationalism framework a step further by considering the dialectic between global politics, which transcends borders, and the territorial forces of the receiving state that circumscribes immigrants’ identities. It shows that immigrants’ sense of selves is pulled towards and is shaped by a third place—the “elsewhere”—which is neither the immigrants’ place or origin or settlement. The immigrants may not think of these places as their “homes.” Nonetheless, they forge and maintain connections with these places based on a sense of membership and solidarity, or find that their allegiances and loyalties to their hostland are questioned because of being associated *with* those places by others *regardless* of their self-identification. This dissertation, particularly Chapters 4 and 5, will focus on the tensions between how immigrants identify with and are identified by others in relation to various “elsewhere” places.

The Diaspora Framework

A diaspora is an ethnic migrant group, the members of which are dispersed across multiple host societies and who maintain strong emotional and material links to their country of origin (Dufoix 2008). The diaspora framework expands the analytical focus a step further than transnationalism in capturing immigrants’ myriad ties. Whereas transnationalism examines the links forged by immigrants between the homeland and a hostland, diaspora looks at the diverse links members of an immigrant group share towards a common homeland and to each other while being settled in *multiple* hostlands. Indeed, scholars of transnationalism have emphasized the importance of the diaspora framework, arguing that a group’s immigrant experience is not comprised of just one homeland and one hostland, but that it is the product of all the places in which members of that diaspora live. The different kinds of relationships (such as, antagonistic or reciprocal), which

members of a dispersed community share with their homeland or “referent origin” (Dufoix 2008) while being located in multiple countries define the group’s collective experience abroad.

Figure 1.4: Different Types of Diasporic Communities (Dufoix 2008)



However, the diaspora framework is still bound within a dyadic homeland-hostland paradigm in which an ethnic migrant group originating from a common homeland is settled in multiple host countries. In so doing, it overlooks the various ways in which immigrants could be connected to a place that is neither their center of dispersion nor a place they perceive as being part of their diasporic community. Moreover, when using a diaspora framework to analyze a group’s immigrant experience, there is an implicit assumption that members of that group will have material and emotional links to diverse places based on a diasporic sense of affinity with co-ethnics living there. However, immigrants may be tied to different places for other reasons, such as global political dynamics and exogenous shocks. Immigrants who do not identify with a diaspora community can nonetheless be affected by the dynamics of a foreign place because of global geopolitics, which links

that place to contexts in the hostland, that in turn shapes how he/she is identified by others in the host society at large. In other words, immigrants may not identify *with* any particular state outside of the hostland, but may still be identified *by* events going on in that very place, thus making that foreign place salient to their sense of selves regardless of the presence of co-ethnics in that state.

Instead of focusing on just one “center” or referent origin, this dissertation seeks to understand immigrant identity formation by examining the impact of *multiple* centers in shaping immigrants’ collective experiences. Although I borrow the term “center” from the diaspora framework, I do not use it to refer to only the sending society or the point of dispersion. Instead, I refer to “centers” as places of salience for identity categories rather than for a seemingly bounded group. Immigrants, like all social actors, have multiple and various strands of identity. Each of these identities has multiple dimensions. And, each of these dimensions has places—real or imagined—that are important in sustaining and shaping particular experiences as members of that identity category. As such, rather than immigrants having one center based on their ethnicity, they have multiple centers based various intersecting identities, such as religion, gender, sexuality, political affiliation, etc., that are also important for their sense of selves.

For example, as will be shown in later chapters, Bangladesh is be the center of the collective *national* identity for Bangladeshi immigrants in America. And yet, Bangladeshis are also predominantly Muslim and are members of the *Ummah*. The Middle East, as the birthplace of Prophet Muhammad and the home of Islam’s holiest sites, is the arguably the center of the Muslim world. As members of this *religious* community, Bangladeshi immigrants subscribe to contexts in the Middle East that sustain their “Muslim” identity—not because of their co-ethnics living there, but based on a sense of religious spiritual attachment. At the same time, an exogenous shock such as the ISIS attacks in Paris suddenly makes France an “elsewhere” center for Bangladeshis, again not because of other Bangladeshis living there, but based on the political dimension of their “Muslim”

identity that leads others to associate them and also leads them to associate themselves with that event. As such, rather than their collective experience being shaped by just one center—Bangladesh, which is their point of dispersion—their sense of selves is shaped by multiple centers because of their intersecting identities and global geopolitics. How multiple centers interact with one another at the global level and how those interactions shape immigrants’ sense of selves—both in terms of self-identification and identification by others—is the main question posed in this dissertation.

Case Study and Methods

South Asian Muslim Americans

Based on their collective positionality, Muslim immigrants from South Asia to the United States provide a theoretically strategic case for analyzing how foreign places beyond the homeland-hostland paradigm can also shape identification processes. South Asians comprise the largest immigrant Muslim group in America (Pew Research Center 2017b). Pakistan and Bangladesh are the top two sending states of Muslim immigrants in the United States (Pew Research Center Religion and Public Life 2011). In fact, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh have the second, third, and fourth largest Muslim populations in the world (Pew Research Center Religion and Public Life 2015). Both Pakistan and Bangladesh have predominantly Muslim populations. The percentages of Muslims in the overall populations of Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India are 90.4%, 96.4%, and 14.6% respectively (Pew Research Forum on Religion and Public Life 2011). According to the 2010 U.S. Census, immigration from these countries to the United States has shown a steady increase in recent years. For instance, in 2011 the populations of Bangladeshi, Indian, and Pakistani descents in the United States were 184,000, 1,857,000, and 304,000 respectively. But in 2014, the number of immigrants in the United States rose to 210,000 for Bangladeshis, 2,206,000 for Indians, and 371,000 for Pakistanis (Zong and Batalova 2016).

Although not located in the contentious Middle East, the South Asian homelands also directly experienced conflicts with Western societies when the British colonized the Indian sub-continent for two centuries. This past led to several religious-political conflicts, wars, and partitions in the Indian sub-continent, most prominently the 1947 Partition of Bengal between Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Pakistan. The partition caused a refugee crisis, mass resettlement, and killings on both sides of the border. Then again in 1971, despite their religious commonality, the two wings of Pakistan located on the East and West of India broke into war, with East Pakistan gaining independence as Bangladesh. These historic conflicts, which are just some remnants of South Asia's colonized past, still inform the "Bangladeshi," "Pakistani," and "Indian" national identities and color the relationship among these countries.

Even in the postcolonial period, relationships between the South Asian homelands and the West have not been smooth. The United States' relationship with Pakistan, for instance, has been particularly turbulent in recent years because of Pakistan's proximity to Afghanistan and the connections between its security apparatus with Islamic terrorist organizations, such as Al Qaeda. Even more recently, in 2018, tensions between Pakistan and the United States escalated with President Trump calling Pakistan a "safe haven" for terrorists in Afghanistan and freezing almost \$1.2 billion of America's security aid to the country (Landler and Harris 2018). The effects of the rocky but strategically important relationship between these two "frenemy" countries at the global stage can also be felt on the ground—immigrants from Pakistan, regardless of their religiosity or sect, are often stereotyped as terrorists in the United States (Rana 2011). As chapter 3 will show, many of my Pakistani American participants spoke of interactions in which they felt these terrorist stereotypes were implicit. Thus, the case of South Asian Muslim Americans provides three specific points of focus for studying immigrant identity formation that extend the dyadic homeland-hostland

framework: 1) the South Asian sending countries; 2) the U.S. host society; and 3) “elsewhere” places in the Middle East and Europe.

Methodological Approach and Types of Data

The methodological approach of this dissertation is informed by the extended case method of theory building (Burawoy 1998; Mitchell 1983) and relational ethnography (Desmond 2014). I began from a deductive analysis of existing findings on immigrant identity formation with the goal to build on and extend our general theoretical knowledge about the process. My goal was to address the conceptual and methodological restrictions implicit in the concept of immigrant itself. An immigrant, as defined in the dictionary, is a person who comes to a country to take up permanent residence. Yet, just because an immigrant has come from “there” to “here” does not mean that those two societies are the only ones that are relevant to his/her identification processes. Like all social actors, immigrants have multiple strands of identities, such as those based on gender, religion, and sexuality that intersect with their ethnic/national identities, placing them on a web of interconnecting sociopolitical contexts that transcend homeland-hostland borders. Focusing on one bounded place, such as the immigrants’ homeland or the hostland, restricts analysis of how these other but nonetheless relevant contexts shape their intersectional identities.

To overcome this limitation, the key object of analysis in this study is the “Muslim” identity category, with its multiple dimensions and negotiated boundaries, its connections to the different places, peoples, histories, and conflicts that sustain it, as well as the ways in which it is used to organize relationships between members and others. Thus, I focus on a relational social “field” rather than on a fixed “place” (Desmond 2014: 548). Particularly, I focus on two distinct but often overlapping dimensions of the “Muslim” identity category—the spiritual (by which I mean beliefs and practices based on faith) and the political (by which I mean power struggles involving people and institutions).

Based on the extended case study approach, I strategically selected the case of South Asian Muslim Americans for the reasons discussed in the previous section. I selected Los Angeles, and by extension, California because it has one of the highest concentrations of South Asians living in the United States. The data comes mainly from two sources: in-depth interviews of 60 South Asian Muslims across California, and participant observation in various fieldsites in Los Angeles. On one hand, interviewing the participants allowed me insight into the cognitive dimensions and discursive frames of their identity making boundary-work—in other words, how they viewed and talked about themselves in relation to the larger sociopolitical contexts. On the other hand, participant observation enabled me to observe the interactive aspects of identity-work, such as how they present themselves to different groups in different spaces, and how larger global, hostland, and homeland sociopolitical aspects produce impact on their day-to-day actions.

With these goals in mind, I began participating in their community life through various South Asian student organizations on college campuses and other cultural hubs, such as language schools, ethnic restaurants, and homeland-oriented charity organizations in different parts of Los Angeles. I viewed these places as meeting hubs of South Asians coming from different parts of Los Angeles, and used these sites to branch out to different South Asian Muslim communities across California and recruit interviewees through snowballing. My Bangladeshi Muslim background and fluency in Bangla, Hindi, and Urdu eased my access into the community as an insider. On most occasions, I formally interviewed the participants before spending time with them in more unstructured settings. I used these sessions not only to introduce myself as a researcher and derive responses but also to create rapport with the participants that later enabled me to ask them for referrals. I attended cultural events, organizational meetings, and study groups, volunteering whenever possible as a cultural organizer, language teacher, and peer mentor. Over time, I was invited to join intimate gatherings of friends and families at some of the participants' homes. I also

spent time with several participants in dorm rooms, restaurants, cafés, shopping malls, and movie theatres where they hung out with friends. I triangulated my observations from these instances with the interview data that in turn shaped my ongoing fieldwork and vice versa. With regard to the interviewees who lived outside of Los Angeles or beyond my driving distance, I interviewed them over Skype and FaceTime. I made an effort to meet with them in person when they visited Los Angeles for their personal reasons. Otherwise, I kept in touch with them through texting and social media, mainly Facebook where I observed the content of their posts, shares, comments, and likes.

During the interview sessions, which usually took place in a location of the participants' choosing, I used semi-structured questions and guided conversations to ask the participants about a range of topics geared towards understanding if, when, and how their "Muslim" identity became salient in their everyday lives. In so doing, I hoped to gain a broad yet detailed view of their daily lives while avoiding taking their "Muslim-ness" as a continuously salient form of self-identification for granted—a "trap," which Brubaker calls "methodological Islamism" (Brubaker 2013: 6). By doing so, my goal was to focus on the contexts and processes through which social actors struggle to achieve "group-ness," rather than take the bounded-ness of their group for granted (Brubaker 2004). Topics explored in the interviews included: their friends, families, and colleagues; everyday routines; workplaces and other regularly visited spaces; their favorite TV shows; the news; hobbies; parents' concerns about raising children; food and clothing preferences; families back in the homeland; opinions on politics; religious practices; thoughts about spirituality, gender, and sexuality; future aspirations etc. In their responses, I explored how and what categories the participants used to describe themselves and others, in what contexts they talked about their various identities, when their "Muslim" identity seemed to shape their day-to-day lives, as well as when it has less salience compared to other identities, such as those based on race/ethnicity, nationality, and sexuality. During participant observation, I noted how they presented themselves in various contexts as they

interacted with different groups of people, who the participants included in their private and public social lives, and in what contexts their different strands of identity gained salience.

Whereas my initial interviews and visits to the fieldsites were more exploratory and geared towards generating hypotheses, my observations developed sequentially as time progressed and I strategically recruited interviewees and visited sites to increase variation within my sample. For example, as most of my participants belonged to the dominant Sunni sect of Islam, I actively looked for participants who were Shia. Again, as homosexuality is considered taboo within the Muslim and South Asian communities, and so could shape one's sense of belonging to the "Muslim" and "South Asian" identity categories, I strategically sought to interview individuals who identified as members of the LGBTQ community.

The 60 interviewees included 33 Bangladeshis, 22 Pakistanis, and 5 Indians, 40 of whom were female and 20 male. The educational and professional profile of the participants resembled that of the overall South Asian American population, which is mostly foreign born, speaks English "well" or "very well" (Camarota 2012), and is highly educated (Pew Research Forum 2017a). Most of my participants were college students, recent graduates, young professionals, engineers, and business owners, and some were stay-at-home mothers and restaurant/gas station workers. While some of my informants lived in the South Asian ethnic enclaves, such as Little Bangladesh, most were spread across Los Angeles and California at large, in mostly white suburban neighborhoods.

The gender composition of my informants reflects to some extent the obstacles I encountered during fieldwork because of my positionality as an unmarried young woman. I often found South Asian Muslim spaces, even those organized for public or community gatherings, to be gender segregated, sometimes at the cost of the excluding women overall. This meant that I had relatively easier access to South Asian women than men. Sometimes, I did not have access to predominantly male spaces at all. For instance, when I began fieldwork, I heard from word-of-

mouth that every Friday, Bangladeshi Muslims congregate in a prayer room in Little Bangladeshi to offer *Jummah* or Friday afternoon prayers. When I asked the owner of an ethnic grocery store in the Bangladeshi enclave about the time and location of the prayers, he told me that women are not allowed. Surprised, I asked him why because although gender segregated, mosques typically allow women to pray in the premises. He replied that it is because the space is “too small.” Even in more private gatherings or *dawats* of family and friends at people’s homes, men and women were also segregated, usually sitting at a distance in the same room or sometimes in different rooms altogether. As such, I was often in the company of women. Once, at a Bangladeshi *dawat* when I went to join the men in their conversation about politics, a male acquaintance politely but firmly instructed me to go “sit with the women.” Although the gender dynamics was much more relaxed among the younger generation, I found that unless I specifically requested my female informants to refer me to their male friends, they often hesitated to do so. When I was able to interview male participants, I sometimes found their initial demeanor to be guarded, especially if they were unmarried and near my age group. In a few other instances, I asked the wives or close female relations to be present during the interviews to put the male informants at ease. Although most of the male respondents’ demeanor eased over time, I was able to establish deeper and more relaxed relationships with my female informants.

In terms of religiosity, the participants reflect the heterogeneity of the Muslim population and challenge the idea of a Muslim monolith. While some regularly maintain the five mandatory daily prayers and observe dietary and clothing regulations as well as gender norms, their political views could be described as liberal progressive in that they espouse feminist ideals and support LGBTQ rights. Others are “symbolic faithfuls”—meaning they use “religious symbols to express feelings of religiosity and identification...while hardly ever participating in religious rituals or thinking a great deal about religious teachings or values” (Levitt 2007: 104)—and yet, have strict

views against homosexuality based on religious beliefs. Again, some participants pray everyday but consume alcohol and engage in premarital sex, both of which are strictly forbidden by Islamic scriptures. Many women wear liberal Western clothing but eat only *halal* food. Some wear the *hijab* but do not pray regularly, whereas some do not wear the headscarf but pray five times a day and wear clothing that cover their arms and legs. A few self-identify as gay or bisexual but still pray and read the Quran regularly. However, all participants, even those who do not practice Islam in their everyday lives and the one participant who identifies himself as agnostic, claimed to be “culturally” and/or “politically” Muslim, meaning they want social justice for all Muslims, even if they no longer spiritually identify with the religion or do not directly engage in the cause through organizational activities.

I conducted fieldwork from 2015 through 2016, when the overall sociopolitical climate in the United States was explicitly polarized on issues regarding immigrants and Muslims. The U.S. Presidential election season was in full swing and several Republican politicians had launched their campaigns based on inflammatory anti-Muslim platforms. Several ISIS terrorist attacks had taken place both at home and abroad. And perhaps most prominently establishing Muslims at the center of national politics, Donald Trump had called for a ban on all Muslims entering the United States (Healy and Barbaro 2015). Of course, not everyone in the United States condoned Islamophobic narratives, but the general discourse about Muslims during this time was who, if at all, could be considered “good Muslims” as opposed to “bad Muslims,” meaning terrorists (Mamdani 2002, 2004). The level of Islamophobia in America increased throughout the 2016 U.S. Presidential election cycle, with the number of anti-Muslim assaults reaching 9/11-era level in 2015 alone (The Bridge Initiative 2016).

These national discourses about Muslims resonated among all my participants and reinforced their perception of the West being generally prejudiced against Muslims. However, the participants

reacted to the hyperpoliticized social climate in different ways based on their immigrant generational status. Whereas the older South Asian participants grew cautious of their “Muslim” identity, as evidenced by their reluctance to talk about Muslim-related issues during recorded interviews, the younger, second-generation participants were vocal about their opinions as Muslims *and* Americans or “Muslim Americans.” Many in the latter group saw asserting one’s “Muslim-ness”—whether through organizational participation or social media activities—as resisting the anti-Muslim discourses in the U.S. society.

Although I conducted the bulk of the interviews during 2015-2016, I remained in touch with my informants through 2017, the first year of Trump’s presidency, when political polarization, nativism, and anti-Muslim sentiments were still elevated among many segments of the U.S. population. During this time, I drew on relevant events that have occurred, such as the ISIS-inspired low-tech bomb explosion in the New York City subway station by the Bangladeshi immigrant Akayed Ullah. I observed the participants’ reactions to such events in their casual conversations, text messages, and social media activities.

Although the case study method allows in-depth observation and insight into a particular case that in turn extends the knowledge about relevant sociopolitical contexts and processes, it introduced several methodological questions pertaining to the generalizability of those observations. For example, how could I know that what I was observing was not particular to a specific location or fieldsite? Moreover, how could I know to what extent my observations were being influenced by interviewer effects or that the participants were not just responding to my presence in the fieldsite?

To overcome these drawbacks of the case study method and researcher effects, I complemented the interview and participant observation data with content analysis of various sources at the community- and national-levels, namely: 1) Muslim American community newsletters; 2) Muslim American organizational documents; 3) the participants’ Facebook activities; 4) coverage

of Muslim-related news events by major national news outlets, such as The New York Times, The Washington Post, CNN, and MSNBC; and 5) some alternative news outlets to which many of the participants subscribed, such as Al Jazeera and BBC. These sources were analytically useful for triangulating with my interview data and ethnographic observations because of two reasons. First, these sources were removed from interviewer effects as the participants, the Muslim American community, and the larger hostland society were acting on their own, without me as an interviewer somehow motivating them to react in certain ways to respond to my research questions. Second, they provided me insight into the relevant sociopolitical contexts across the United States and into the identity-making processes of Muslim Americans from various ethnic backgrounds.

For instance, the organizational documents I analyzed were published by the largest Muslim organization in the United States and Canada—the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA). The documents included annual reports released at ISNA conventions as well as the organization’s flagship bi-monthly magazine, *Islamic Horizons*, which had a readership of over two hundred thousand in 2006, making it the most widely distributed Muslim periodical in English. As organizations have been found to manage and sustain group identities through carefully groomed platforms (Yildiz and Verkuyten 2013), the ISNA documents provided insight into Muslim Americans’ collective use of visibility strategies. Furthermore, they allowed me to observe if similar visibility strategies were used by Muslim Americans across ethnicities and geographical locations as opposed to being unique to the South Asian Muslim community in California. The time frame I used to select the sample of organizational documents was from 2001 (when 9/11 occurred) to 2016 (when I completed my fieldwork for this study). Because of its bi-monthly schedule, the number of *Islamic Horizons* issues was considerably large for qualitative analysis. To make the scope much more manageable and still serve the study’s purpose, I selected 10 magazine issues based on the content of the issues’ front covers, which indicated their main concerns. The topics explored were:

the legacy of African American Muslims; the role of faith communities/ organizations against anti-Muslim bigotry; NYPD Spying on Muslim Americans; the role of Muslim community leaders in responding to Muslim American needs; how to talk about Sharia Law to non-Muslims in the context of rising Islamophobia; the role of Muslims in the U.S. presidential election; embracing diversity and transcending differences within the Muslim community; the role of Islamic schools in developing Muslim American identity; the Syrian refugee crisis; and hate crime law in the context of the three Chapel Hill Muslim murders. I specifically selected these issues because they appeared to focus on the Muslim American community's identity concerns across different spheres, from national politics to interpersonal communication.

Roadmap of the Dissertation

Chapter 2 explicates fully the multicentered relational framework, its different facets, and parameters, relevant concepts, and explains how the model can be analytically used to trace the different ways in which immigrants are tied to multiple, various places beyond their homeland and hostland. With that goal, the chapter also unpacks the concepts of “elsewhere” and “exogenous shocks.” I discuss how “elsewhere” is not anywhere or everywhere. Rather, I show how a place becomes an “elsewhere” through exogenous shocks, and how it comes to affect immigrants’ identity-making in the hostland. I then show how there could be different kinds of “elsewhere” as well as variations in their level of salience on immigrants’ identities based on geographical location and global power dynamics. The chapter also traces the three main facets of the multicentered relational framework based on ongoing geopolitical dynamics: homeland-hostland, hostland-“elsewhere,” and “elsewhere”-homeland. Finally, I highlight how the multicentered relational framework differs from and extends the assimilation, transnationalism, and diaspora models in the field of international migration.

After explaining the facets of the multicentered relational framework in chapter 2, I apply the model in Chapter 3 to analyze the religious-political dynamics within and between the South Asian sending countries on the one hand, and those between the South Asian homelands and “elsewhere” places in the Middle East on the other. I show how nationalism along religious lines is high in all three homeland societies with the “Pakistani,” “Indian,” and “Bangladeshi” identities being still under construction. These struggles of nation-building, however, are not insulated within just the homeland societies. Rather, I show how they continue to be shaped by places beyond their nation-state borders. The struggles of constructing a sense of nationhood are mirrored even among the immigrant communities in the United States. Various historic and ongoing homeland cleavages orient the immigrants towards making sense of their new environment based on religious-political divisions, such as Muslim and non-Muslim, Sunni-Shia, Hindu-Muslim, Pakistani-Indian, Bangladeshi-Pakistani, and Bangladeshi-Indian. As such, even some secular forms of identity, such as sexuality, are navigated in the hostland based on homeland politics and religious beliefs. However, once within the hostland, these heterogeneous immigrants confront a similar hostile environment as members of a stigmatized “Muslim” monolith. In this new context, the salience of some boundaries erodes, while others continue to shape the worldviews of the immigrants and their offspring. In the process, some homeland-oriented boundaries gain global dimensions in the hostland based on Muslim-related politics stemming from “elsewhere.” Moreover, variations in the immigrants’ religious-political experiences in their homelands, as is the case between Shia and Sunni Pakistanis, can lead to different “elsewhere” places in the immigrants’ self-identification as “Muslims.” Yet, common contexts and experiences of the immigrants in the hostland also allows for the emergence of panethnic identity platforms, such as “Desi.” But, here too “elsewhere” plays a role as contexts in foreign places come to have a more immediate impact on hostland contexts—and in effect on the immigrants than religious-politics from homelands far away. As such, many immigrants, especially

the second generation, brush away some of the homeland-oriented boundaries to instead coalesce around “elsewhere” issues that are more salient for their everyday life. Conversely, in some cases, “elsewhere”-rooted Muslim conflicts reinforce the divide within South Asian communities, such as between Muslims and Hindus, suppressing opportunities for panethnicity.

Chapter 4 shifts the analytical focus from the homeland to the hostland where South Asians become categorized as members of a hypervisible “Muslim” monolith. It traces the effects of Muslim-related global politics and discourses in how the participants construct “moderate,” “*hijabi*,” and “Muslim American” identities through everyday self-policing. At both individual and organizational levels, the participants strategically render some aspects of themselves visible and invisible to the public in efforts to resist negative stereotypes imposed upon them. At the individual level, many Muslim Americans try to distance themselves from their “Muslim-ness” in public relegating religion to the private sphere. However, if the need to publicly address their religion does come up, such as in the event of an Islamist terrorist attack, they do not forsake their “Muslim” identity altogether, but qualify themselves as “moderate” Muslims. Making oneself visible as “moderate,” in turn, involves self-policing on an everyday basis that includes avoiding political conversations and highlighting apolitical similarities with other Americans. Some of these strategies are not applicable for *hijabis* who are automatically marked as “outsiders” and thus exposed to the stigma attached to their “Muslim” identity. However, in presenting themselves, they too strive to highlight attributes that render them similar to their non-Muslim fellow Americans, such as freedom, empowerment, and peacefulness. However, these identity-making strategies have a double-edge. Appearing as apolitical, peace-loving “moderates”—although useful in distancing from terrorist attackers in moments of crises and getting by with peers and co-workers in daily life—serves to politically silence Muslims in the long run. At the organizational level, Muslim leaders also deploy visibility strategies to appear “moderate,” but with the goal inserting Muslims into mainstream U.S.

politics as active participants so that they could advocate for their co-religionists both at home and abroad. Chapter 4 shows how they strive to do so by constructing a “Muslim American” identity that would supposedly highlight the compatibility of Islam with American values. Specifically, Muslim American leaders advocate for “Islamizing” components of mainstream American culture on the one hand, and “Americanizing” certain tenets of Islamic belief on the other so that one’s “Muslim-ness” and “American-ness,” rather than being at odds, complement each other.

Chapter 5 continues the story by locating “Muslim Americans” on a global level. It traces how the participants are politically oriented towards particular places in the “elsewhere” Middle East, and how they engage in Muslim-related politics in those places through American politics. Many of the participants interpret their collective position as a hypervisible group in America using examples of “elsewhere” places where Muslims are also a stigmatized minority. These “elsewhere” examples combined with their homeland’s historic conflict with the West during colonization, the post-9/11 U.S. context, and ongoing tensions with the Middle East reinforce these immigrants’ worldview that “the West” is generally biased against “the Muslim world.” They use this lens to interpret both global and American politics. In their worldview, the Israel-Palestine issue stands as a potent example of the West’s continuing bias against Muslims at the global level. As such, many participants from both first and second generations evaluate mainstream U.S. politicians based on the politicians’ attitude towards Palestine, among other issues. Even in more local-level politics, such as college communities, participants are oriented towards this and other “elsewhere”-based issues, such as the Armenian genocide. Some even engage with these issues by inserting themselves in campus politics. This orientation towards “elsewhere” places in the Middle East, such as Palestine and Turkey, reveals a form of cross-border political tie that goes beyond the existing homeland-hostland framework. Although the participants voice an *Ummatic* sense of solidarity as the reason for their support, I show that the story is not as simple. Because while the immigrants engage in

Muslim-related issues in the Middle East, they overlook similar conflicts concerning Muslims in their own homelands. This chapter unpacks this puzzle to show that South Asian Muslim Americans engage with the Middle East not just based on a sense of Muslim solidarity based on their religious and national identities, but also because Muslim-related conflicts in the Middle East are more influential in how they are identified in the United States than homeland events. Moreover, coalescing around common causes that are rooted far away and removed from homeland tensions allow the participants to build cross-ethnic relationships with other immigrant and native groups in the hostland.

However, based on an analysis of reactions and experiences in the aftermath of six ISIS attacks that happened during fieldwork—two in Europe (Paris and Brussels), two in the Middle East (Beirut and Turkey), and two in the United States (San Bernardino and Orlando)—chapter 6 shows that when it comes to the participants being identified as “Muslims” by their larger host society, it is the exogenous shocks in “elsewhere” Europe that are more salient than those in the Middle East. The ISIS attacks in Europe, particularly the 2015 Paris massacre, generated global and national outpouring of support for the victims on the one hand, and spikes in Islamophobic sentiments in the United States on the other. In response to the ensuing anti-Muslim backlash, the participants condemned the attacks on social media and took anticipatory precautions against Islamophobic encounters. Many in U.S. society, including several participants, even drew parallels between the “elsewhere” Paris attacks and 9/11. In sharp contrast, the ISIS attacks in the Middle East, despite being of similar magnitude, went largely unnoticed by the U.S. society. Even the participants who were usually vocal about Muslim-related issues on social media remained largely silent although they were cognizant about the Middle East attacks as well as the lack of response from the U.S. society and media towards those events. This contrast in the participants’ reactions posed a puzzle—despite the Middle East being so salient as a religious-political center for the participants’ self-identification,

why were the participants silent about the ISIS attacks in the Middle East when they were vocal about those that occurred in Europe? This chapter shows that the answer to this question is intricately tied with the prevailing public imaginary of “the West” and “the Muslim world,” the sociopolitical contexts surrounding Muslims in the United States, and the unequal distribution of power among different regions at the global level. In that process, the chapter shows that there are variations in the levels of salience between different places for the immigrants’ identification by others. These variations run not just between the “elsewhere” centers Europe and the Middle East, but also between different places within Europe and the hostland. Chapter 7 then concludes the dissertation by discussing the limitations, generalizability, and future directions of the multicentered relational framework.

With Muslims and immigrants put on the center-stage of national and global politics, this dissertation’s findings not only reflect the contemporary urgency of this study, but also drive home the larger theoretical point that, contrary to dyadic explanations, how these immigrants identify and are identified by others are both tied to places beyond the homeland and hostland—places I call “elsewhere.” However, all places are not “elsewhere” nor do all “elsewhere” places have the same level of salience. Where a place is located, the geopolitical relationship of that place with the hostland, and relevant homeland orientations together determine the level of salience of that “elsewhere” place in the immigrants’ identity formation. The multicentered relational framework introduced in this dissertation allows us to trace the different ways in which geopolitics in and between these multiple, various places come to shape immigrants’ day-to-day lives and worldviews.

CHAPTER TWO: THE MULTICENTERED RELATIONAL FRAMEWORK

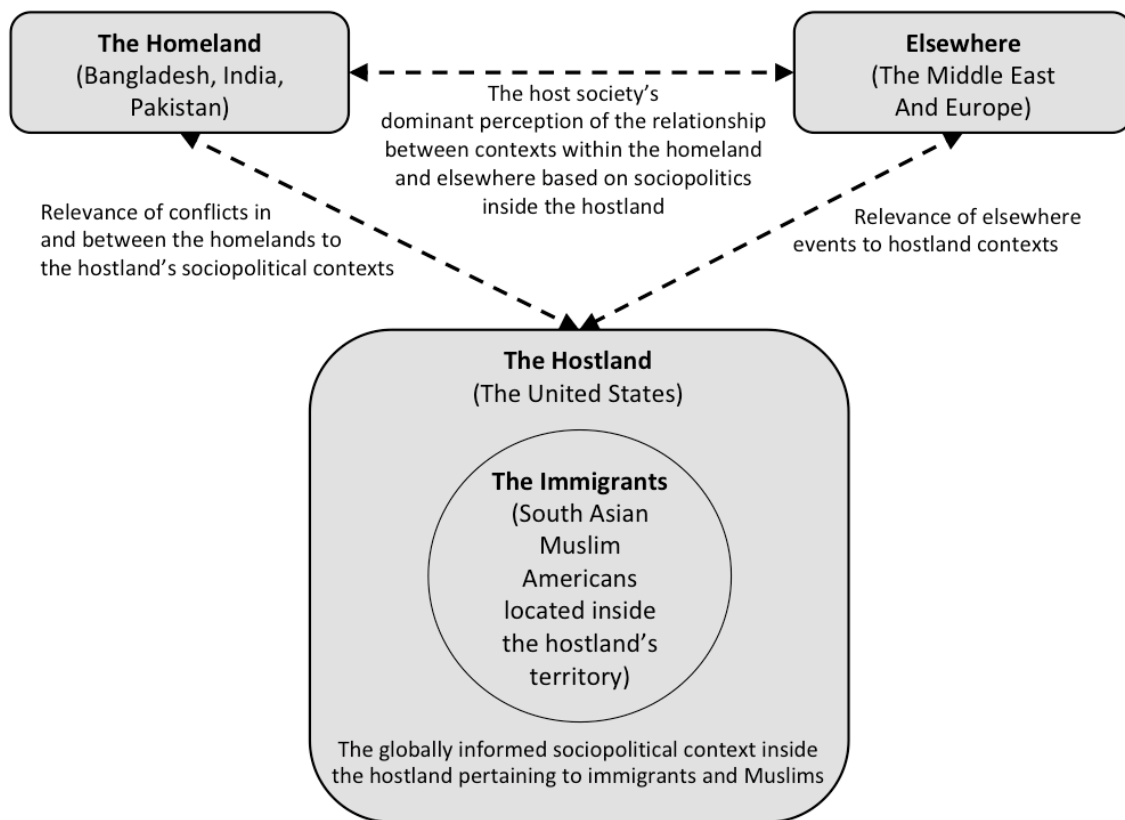
The multicentered relational framework allows one to trace how different dimensions of an identity category can connect individuals who self-identify or are seen to identify as a member of that category to multiple and varied places. A place, as conceptualized in this framework, can have distinct territorial borders, such as the United States. Alternatively, it can be an imagined, abstract idea of a region that defies geographical borders, such as “the West” which also includes countries like New Zealand or Australia that clearly lie in the Eastern hemisphere. “The Muslim world” denoting a sphere similarly abstracted from geographic space, is a concept generally used to distinguish Muslim societies from non-Muslim ones. Yet the boundaries of the “Muslim world” are becoming increasingly complicated as an ever larger proportion of Muslims lives and practices Islam in the predominantly Christian societies of the West.

Expanding the homeland-hostland dyad, this framework encompasses three main variations of a place: 1) the sending country; 2) the receiving country; and 3) places that are neither but (a) are of geopolitical importance to the hostland, and (b) are salient in the immigrants’ worldview and identification processes. I call this third place “elsewhere,” which is composed of three facets. They are: 1) the ongoing political events *within* the “elsewhere” territory that are of geopolitical interest to the hostland; 2) the international relations *between* the “elsewhere” place and the host state; and 3) the hostland’s international relations with the homeland in relation to the geopolitical events ongoing “elsewhere.” The immigrants and their identity categories are located at the intersection of these homeland, hostland, and “elsewhere” places.

In the case of South Asian Muslim Americans, the three centers intersect because of the immigrants’ crosscutting memberships in homeland-oriented national collectivities, the U.S. host society, and a global religious community. On one hand, the immigrants are identified by others in the hostland based on their perceived or real connections to “elsewhere” events. On the other hand,

the immigrants themselves identify with people, places, and contexts “elsewhere.” As such, their sense of belonging and their identification by others often do not remain neatly bound within the territories of either a sending state or a receiving state, but rather are pulled towards different centers because of interconnecting sociopolitical contexts. When immigrants identify or are identified by others as members of the “Muslim” identity category, they are exposed to the effects of the relevant relationship dynamics among the three centers.

Figure 2.1: The Multicentered Relational Framework



Thus, this framework locates immigrants’ identity categories on a global scale rather than on a “single social field” composed of “two societies,” the sending and receiving countries (Glick-Schiller, Basch, and Szanton-Blanc 1992: 1). By doing so, the framework seeks to capture if, how, and when the relationships between which centers become salient for the immigrants’ worldview and interactions. In some cases, the relationship between the homeland and “elsewhere” could

become salient to the immigrants' cognitive and interactional identification. At other times, the links between the hostland and "elsewhere" could be more salient. In many situations, "elsewhere" may not be relevant to the immigrants' sense of self at all. But overall, by providing the analytical space to theorize if and how identity categories are shaped by different places, the multicentered relational framework recognizes that because of the cross-cutting nature of global political contexts and the trans-national characteristic of international migrants themselves, what goes on in foreign lands at the other side of the world can still affect what goes on "here" in the hostland.

Anywhere and Elsewhere

But could *anywhere* in the world be "elsewhere"? Elsewhere does not imply just anywhere or even everywhere. By itself, a place located beyond the homeland and hostland does not carry salience for the immigrants' identity formation in the multicentered relational framework. However, these foreign places could potentially become relevant to the immigrants' sense of selves based on global political dynamics, its geographical location or sociopolitical contexts ongoing within its borders. I call these foreign—but potentially "elsewhere" places—"anywhere." But then, when—and how—does "anywhere" gain salience for immigrants' identities? I argue that "anywhere" can become "elsewhere" in the event of an exogenous shock, which links the contexts of that anywhere place to the immigrants' worldview and day-to-day interactions in the hostland. In other words, it is only when "anywhere" becomes salient to the homeland society, the hostland society, or the relationship between the two centers that it becomes an "elsewhere" for immigrants. Consequently, "elsewhere" is a site that is meaningful for not only immigrants but also for the people around them, which is why the "elsewhere" place affects how immigrants understand their location in both global and hostland social hierarchies. Are the contexts in the "anywhere" place related to the immigrants' sense of membership or belonging to an identity category? Do those contexts shape how others

might perceive immigrants in their everyday lives? If the answer is yes to any of these two questions, then that “anywhere” place is an “elsewhere.”

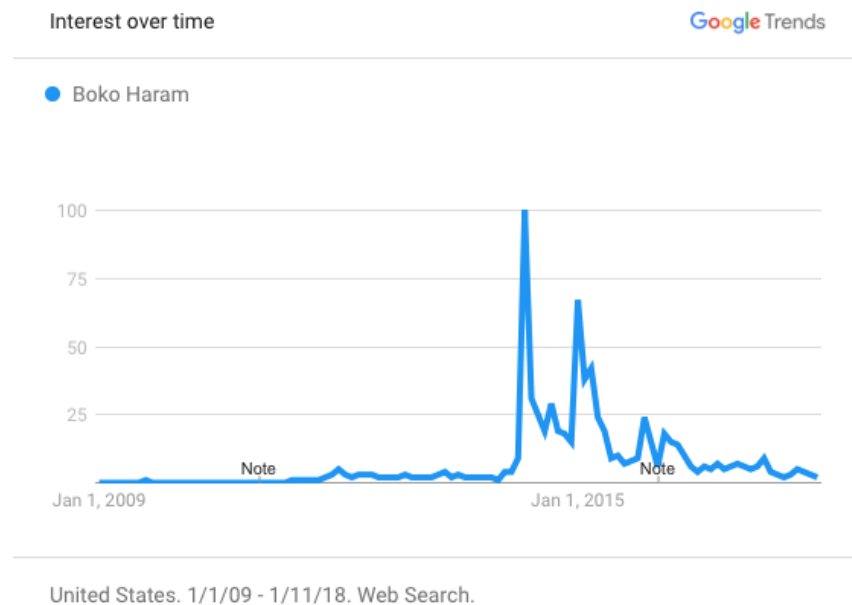
Exogenous Shocks: Types and Effects on Immigrant Identity Formation

In economics, the term exogenous shock generally refers to an unpredictable event that has originated from outside an economic model. And although this event cannot be explained by that model, it nonetheless affects the economic system either in a positive or negative manner. An exogenous shock, as conceptualized in the multicentered relational framework, follows a similar principle. The concept refers to an unexpected event that has originated from a foreign place *outside* the receiving state’s borders, and yet has come to produce an impact on the society *within* those borders by disrupting the larger international order. In terms of anywhere and elsewhere, when an exogenous shock takes place “anywhere,” it initiates a domino effect through which it also affects the host society, thus transforming that foreign land where the shock originated into an “elsewhere.”

Some examples will illustrate the criteria for determining whether and how a place can be considered an “elsewhere.” West Africa is a region with a sizeable Muslim population, in some countries comprising the dominant majority, in others a significant minority. Muslims comprise roughly half of the population of Nigeria, the region’s largest state. Yet Nigeria, and even more so, the other West African states, are countries about which the participants in my study neither knew nor cared much: for the most part, these distant places were “anywhere,” i.e., simply irrelevant to how the participants went about their daily lives. Most were unaware of the relationship between Nigeria and their homeland or with the United States. However, Nigeria became relevant to the participants’ sense of selves when attention was drawn to the Islamist terrorist group, Boko Haram, its actions within Nigerian territory and, even more so, its connections to globalized terror networks via its affiliation with ISIS. Although active since 2002, reports of Boko Haram first surfaced in the American press (such as *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*) in 2009. Yet, Boko

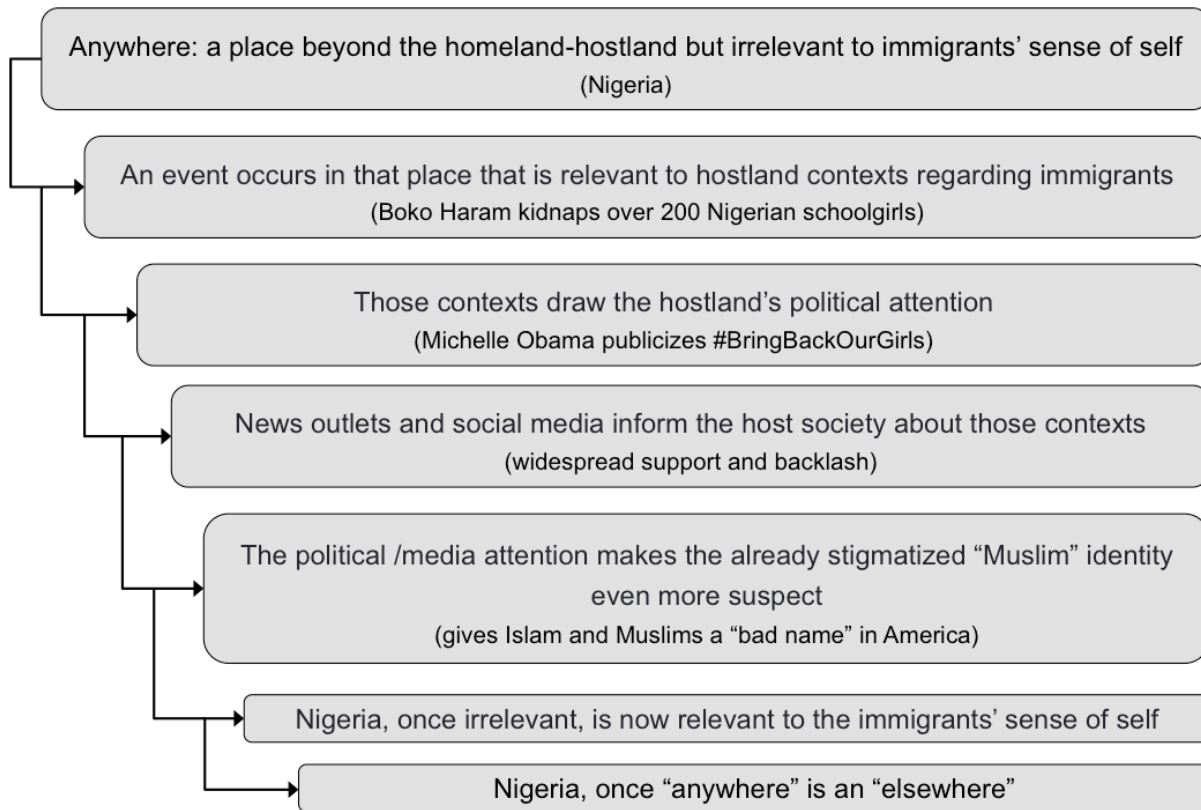
Haram then had not gained public or much political attention. To most Americans, Boko Haram was still largely unknown, and Nigeria was just another foreign place of little relevance to the U.S. society's immediate concerns. However, in 2014, when Boko Haram kidnapped 276 Nigerian schoolgirls, the story along with Boko Haram's Islamist ideology and connections with ISIS attracted the hostland's political attention. This was in large part due to the then U.S. First Lady Michelle Obama's publicization of a campaign to bring back the schoolgirls (Google Trends 2018a; McCoy 2014). Still, the story had yet to grasp the American public's attention. For instance, the hashtag campaign on social media, #BringBackOurGirls, which Michelle Obama later publicized, was then already launched by Obiageli Ezekwesili, the former Federal Minister of Education of Nigeria (Bring Back Our Girls 2018). It was, however, after Michelle Obama posted a picture of herself holding a sign reading #BringBackOurGirls on Twitter, that the story as well as news of increasing Islamist terrorism in Nigeria caught the attention of both the U.S. media and public. The hashtag became viral, sparking not just support for Mrs. Obama's efforts but also criticism of the Obama administration not showing the same concern for social justice regarding U.S. drone strikes in many parts of the Muslim world (McCoy 2014). Mrs. Obama's involvement and the controversy surrounding the campaign also received a lot of publicity from mainstream American press, informing an even larger audience beyond social media users. This turning point is reflected by the Google Trend in Figure 2.2, which depicts the surge of public interest peaking in May 2014 when Michelle Obama became involved with the campaign. Overall, these reactions reflect how contexts in Nigeria, a foreign land previously of little relevance, gained widespread salience in relation to America's national political dynamics and other foreign policy concerns at the time.

Figure 2.2: Public Interest in the U.S. on Boko Haram (Google Trends 2017)



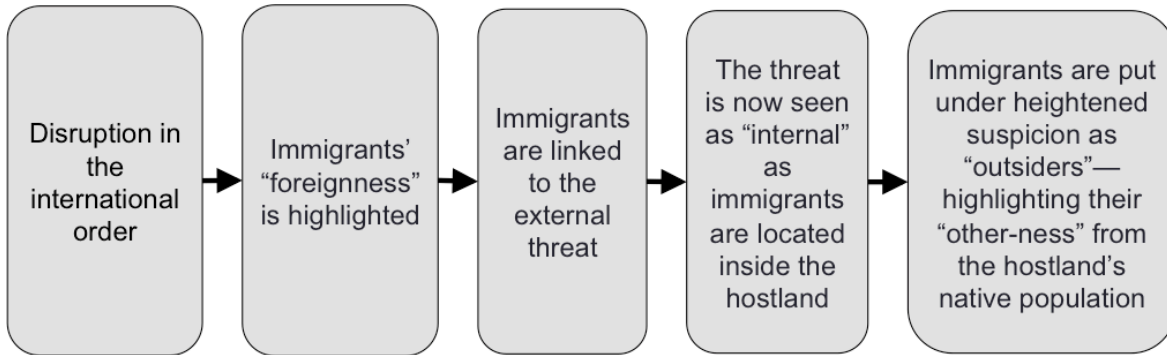
However, for this study, this chain of events is only relevant in how it affected South Asian Muslim’s identity-making processes. Based on the multicentered relational framework, Boko Haram’s kidnapping is considered an exogenous shock only in relation to its impact on the overall U.S. society and the Muslim immigrants’ sense of self within it. To several of the participants, such as Zinat, a *hijab*-wearing, Bangladeshi Muslim woman, Boko Haram gave Islam and Muslims “a bad name,” thereby shaping how Muslims as a whole are perceived in America. Zinat did not know the specifics of Nigeria’s location in the world, its shape on the map, the name of its capital city, or its demographic profile. However, based on what she had learned from American news headlines and social media trends, she knew that Boko Haram is located inside that country and understood that what Boko Haram is doing in Nigeria may affect her “here” in America. Thus, as in this Nigerian example, an irrelevant, “anywhere” case can become relevant as an “elsewhere” if events in that place draw the hostland’s political and media attention in ways that make the participants’ already stigmatized Muslim identity even more suspect.

Figure 2.3: How “Anywhere” Becomes “Elsewhere”



Analytically, exogenous shocks can become relevant to the hostland in various overlapping ways. They could become relevant based on the nature of their impact on the global political order, which encompasses the receiving state. They could also be relevant if the shock had occurred in a place that was already of geopolitical interest to the receiving state. Again, and more related to our interest, the shocks could become relevant to the hostland based on the presence of immigrants from those external places who now live inside the receiving state’s territory. From this third viewpoint, these disruptions in the international order highlight the immigrants’ “foreign-ness” as they are linked to an external threat. But now, given that the immigrants are located inside the hostland’s territory, those external threats are seen as internal. As such, the immigrants are put under heightened suspicion as “outsiders,” highlighting their “otherness” or difference from the hostland’s native population.

Figure 2.4: Effects of Exogenous Shocks on the Boundary between Immigrants and Natives



Types of Exogenous Shocks

Variations Based on the Nature of the Event

There could be different types of exogenous shocks based on the nature of the event (such as, religious-political) and the nature of impact the shock produces (i.e., positive or negative).

Although the examples thus far have focused on exogenous shocks that were religious-political in nature (such as Islamist terrorist attacks), that may not always be the case. For example, exogenous shocks could also come in the form of global epidemics, such as the recent outbreaks of Zika and Ebola viruses, which have originated in South American and African countries. These epidemics have produced shockwaves in the international order, such as by constraining cross-border travel between the United States and the places of risk where these events originated. For instance, in reaction to the Zika epidemic, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) strongly advised travellers, especially pregnant women, not to travel to a long list of countries (which includes Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan). These shockwaves have also penetrated the United States' territorial borders, affecting the society within them. A reflection of that impact can be observed in not just the Zika and Ebola outbreaks in various parts of the United States, but also in the general public's reaction to the events. Broadly, the U.S. public's reaction to the epidemics has been one of xenophobia and nativist backlash against immigrants, viewed to be the virus carriers endangering the

American society. For instance, given that the recent 2014 Zika epidemic originated in South America, its outbreak in the United States has been blamed on Latino communities, regardless of which particularly South American country they are from. Similarly, the recent Ebola scare triggered backlash against Latino and African immigrant groups (Bernstein 2014; Santana 2014).

Such reactions to the epidemics can be found in various spheres of the American society (such as politics, news, and popular media), highlighting the boundary between natives and immigrants on the one hand, and that between conservative and liberal political ideologies on the other. Immigration particularly has been a battlefield in American politics. Those leaning on the left advocate for immigrants' rights by highlighting what America gains because of immigration. Conversely, conservatives advocate for stricter borders in fear of national security threats and job losses of native workers to immigrants. Exogenous shocks such as global epidemics add more fuel to the fire as right-wing politicians and commentators use those events as further evidence of the dangers of including foreigners into the country. For instance, in an op-ed piece in the *Washington Times*, a conservative news outlet, Tammy Bruce, who herself is a conservative radio host, author, and political commentator, draws a parallel between Islamist terrorism, crime, and global epidemics, attributing all three to the influx of immigrants and refugees into the United States. She writes:

When facing the massive problems associated with an open border, deluges of illegal immigration, and now even government sponsored surges of so-called "refugees," we naturally must discuss our concern about terrorism and violent crime. That, however, is only part of the threat. The uncontrolled and chaotic violation this nation brought to us by President Obama's immigration and refugee schemes pose a number of threats to the homeland as insidious and deadly as the Islamic jihadi. Viruses we had finally eliminated from our lives are returning, and others we should never have to face are now crawling through our nation, targeting our children and families. In addition to the word "jihad" we now must re-introduce into our lexicon the words measles, polio, diphtheria, tuberculosis, malaria, scabies, dengue, and now "Zika" (Bruce 2016).

This depiction of immigrants as foreigners transporting external health threats inside the U.S. border is prevalent even at the national political level. For example, in a letter to the CDC in

2014, the then Georgia Congressman Phil Gingrey, who by professional training is a medical specialist in obstetrics and gynecology, wrote:

Reports of illegal immigrants carrying deadly diseases such as swine flu, dengue fever, Ebola virus and tuberculosis are particularly concerning. Many of the children who are coming across the border also lack basic vaccinations such as those to prevent chicken pox or measles (Bouie 2014).

In fact, the United States has a long historical precedent in immigrant scaremongering in the face of global epidemics. Time and again, immigrants as “foreigners” in America were associated with diseases, perceived to threaten and contaminate the health of the nation. In the 1800s, the Irish immigrants were blamed for bringing cholera to the United States, the Italians for polio, and the Jews for tuberculosis. In the 1900s, a similar lashing was allotted to the Chinese for spreading bubonic plague in San Francisco (Kraut 2004). Stereotypes about different immigrant groups were given a health dimension, in which each group was perceived as carriers of specific diseases. In the early 1900s, Asians were depicted as “feeble and infested with hookworm,” Mexicans as “lousy,” and Eastern European Jews as predisposed to trachoma, tuberculosis, and “poor physique” (Merkel and Stern 2002: 766). Then again in the 1980s, when the influx of Haitian refugees coincided with the AIDS epidemic, Haitians and Africans were blamed for the disease along with “deviant sexuality” groups, minorities, and intravenous drug abusers (Markel and Stern 2002: 778). In 1983, Haitians as a group were added as “recognized vectors” of the HIV virus by the CDC, and later in 1990, were categorically banned to donate blood in the United States (Bouie 2014). In contemporary times, it is undocumented immigrants who are facing particular backlash as the perceived carriers of a wide range of diseases, such as swine flu, dengue fever, Ebola, Zika, and tuberculosis (Bouie 2014). This dissertation, however, will focus on exogenous shocks that are religious-political in nature.

Variations Based on Positive or Negative Impact

Exogenous shocks could have both positive and negative impact on immigrants’ identities and the larger host society. A negative effect highlights of the boundary separating “immigrants”

from “natives” in a way that paints immigrants as suspicious outsiders in the receiving society. By contrast, a positive effect points to the similarities between the immigrants and natives, allowing immigrants to position themselves in the host society in a way that they find empowering or relatively more advantageous than their current status. Whereas global epidemics and terrorist attacks are examples of exogenous shocks producing a negative impact, the case of Malala Yousafzai illustrates the relatively more positive effects on how immigrants view themselves to be perceived in the host society. In terms of exogenous shock and the nature of its effects, Malala’s story and the public and media discourses surrounding it highlight the ways in which the Muslim immigrants are similar to the hostland’s native population, in that they shared the same secular values of education, equality, and empowerment. Conversely, at the same time, Muslims evaluate their collective position in the West in light of how they interpret Malala’s depiction in the Western media. As the following examples will show, their interpretations echo age-old contestations between “the West” and its former Orientalized colonies.

Malala Yousafzai caught the world’s attention in 2012 when, at the age of just 15, she was shot in the head and neck by the Taliban for advocating girls’ education in her hometown in Swat Valley, an area in Pakistan that was largely under Taliban control at the time. She had been writing blogs for the BBC using the pen name Gul Makai when she was just 11 years old, captivating the world with her descriptions of life under the Taliban as it banned girls’ education, destroyed schools, and held public executions of anyone who spoke against its extremist ideology. Later, Malala began advocating for girls’ education openly in Pakistan, an act that directly challenged the Taliban’s regime. This issued a death threat from the Taliban. And in 2012, as Malala was going home from school, a Taliban gunman shot her inside a school bus. Severely injured, Malala was transferred to England for treatment and survived. She then settled in England with her family in 2013 and continued her education, eventually entering the University of Oxford in 2017. In 2013, Malala had

founded the Malala Fund, which works for girls' education across the world. That same year, the United Nations Secretary-General at the time, Ban Ki-Moon, declared July 12th, Malala's birthday, as Malala Day. A year later, in 2014, she became the youngest ever person to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. Then in 2017, she has been appointed as a U.N. Messenger of Peace to promote girls education by the current U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

Malala's story—from her activism, recovery, and global campaign—has been closely tracked by the world's media. However, despite her receiving global admiration, her story has been interpreted in many contradictory ways, even from members of her own ethnic, national, and religious background. On the one hand, she has been depicted as an innocent child being victimized by the Taliban, and as an example of the transformative power of education in women empowerment. On the other hand, some have argued that her story has been depicted as that of “a native girl being saved by the white man” (Baig 2013), as a “brand” or “marketable western commodity” (Grayson 2013), and a replication of “the western narrative of orientalist oppression” (Al Janabi 2014). Many South Asian Muslim Americans—including many of my participants who are Bangladeshi and Indian Muslims for whom Pakistan is an “elsewhere”—shared these news stories and op-eds on Malala through Facebook. Their shared posts in turn received likes from other South Asians, including some I interviewed for this study. Below are some excerpts from posts found on my interviewees' Facebook pages. Although these posts do not quote the informants themselves, they reflect their views on Malala as the participants had spontaneously shared these links on their own.

This is a story of a native girl being saved by the white man...Malala's message is true, it is profound, it is something the world needs to take note of, education is a right of every child, but Malala has been used as a tool by the West. (Baig 2013)

Malala has become a very marketable Western commodity. My issue is not with Malala, I support and respect her wish of education for all, however...I doubt she fully realizes the extent to which she is being exploited by her new 'mentors' in the UK...There is Malala the Dissertation, Malala the Film, Malala the award nominee,

Malala the portrait, with the schoolgirl being skillfully marketed by Edelman, the world's biggest PR company. (Grayson 2013)

How come we (meaning the West) always recognize the “devils” of the East, the torments children like Malala had to and have to go through (in her case, with the Taliban), but always fail to recognize our own participation in creating those “devils”? How come we never talk about the things our governments are doing to the children of Pakistan, or Syria, or Iraq, or Palestine, or Yemen?...But, since Malala's story fits into the western narrative of the oriental oppression (in which the context underlying the creation of the oppression is left out), we all know Malala's name. (Al-Janabi 2014)

There has also been some pushback from the Muslim American community against these critical interpretations of Malala's story in the media. For example, a Muslim American college student with whom some of my participants were friends but I was not acquainted wrote an article for a student-run Muslim newsmagazine in response to Baig's critique of Western media and its depiction of Malala:

This type of discourse and rhetoric highlights a larger issue in the overall western Muslim community. There lies an innate anti-white, leftist-victim-mentality, and inferiority complex amongst Muslims when they continually blame the West, as if the West is wholly responsible for every single tragedy around the world. They speak as if the West is a single, monolithic entity with united fronts and opinions. They fail to understand 'the West' including its media, society, and government, is comprised of a multitude of groups that are often at odds with one another. As a result, instead of identifying specific individuals or groups operating in 'the West,' Muslims end up blaming the entire 'West.'... While it is true there are hundreds of other Malalas who have been killed and silenced by the U.S. through its drone program, why are we not unable to view Malala Yousafzai as the representative of these silenced and forgotten voices? She herself in a recent meeting with Obama has stated how she '...expressed [her] concerns that drone attacks are fueling terrorism. Innocent victims are killed in these acts, and they lead to resentment among the Pakistani people.' If not for the platforms and voice given to her by certain Western outlets, how else would she or any other Malala be able to voice such opinions worldwide? (Imtiyaz 2013)

These narratives reflect how Malala as a symbol became mired in the identity politics surrounding “Muslims” in “the West.” However, of these depictions, a facet that has had a salient impact on the participants' identification as Muslim Americans is that Malala's story has arguably cast a positive light on the “Muslim” identity category. Her story is a rare example in which a Muslim has generated widespread positive response not just in the West but also across the world.

This is particularly notable in the American context based on the media's general portrayal of Islam as being directly opposed to Western, Christian ideologies (Powell 2011; Silva 2017). Although this kind of depiction existed even prior to 9/11, since then, it has served as a "key force" in creating a cultural change in the United States where anti-Muslim fringe organizations, despite being fewer in number, have been overrepresented and as such have a rising influence on media discourses than mainstream pro-Muslim civil rights organizations (Bail 2012: 857; Bail 2015). As such, anti-Muslim messages from these previously obscure groups have now become mainstream discourses that shape popular understandings of Islam. However, even mainstream news organizations such as The New York Times, Washington Post, LA Times, and USA Today cover Islam and Muslim-related news stories in ways that closely associate Muslims with fear, radicalization, and international terrorism (Altheide 2006; Powell 2011; Silva 2017).

In sharp contrast to this general discourse where Muslims are largely depicted as "anti-American" and are associated with Islamist terrorism, the case of Malala highlights the similarities between "Muslims" and "Americans." By standing up to the Taliban despite being a Muslim herself, Malala's story symbolizes that not all Muslims are "bad" (i.e., prone to extremist ideology), but rather that there are also "good" Muslims who share the same secular values of education and women empowerment as many do in the United States and the West at large. This could explain why although the participants usually tend to distance themselves from situations that can highlight their potentially stigmatizing "Muslim-ness" in public (Shams 2017b), Malala is one of the few examples with which the participants almost always associated themselves in social settings. Participants, for instance, share posts about Malala on Facebook whenever she appears on the news or in talk shows, and they do so with a sense of pride and admiration as fellow Muslims. For example, when the documentary about her life, *He Name Me Malala* (Guggenheim 2015) came out in 2015, several South Asian Muslims I have come to know during fieldwork shared posts on

Facebook after watching the movie. One such post by a Bangladeshi American read: “I’ve watched ‘He Named Me Malala’ at least 5 times and the more I watch it, the prouder I become to being a Muslim female and even more grateful for the right to my education.” In another instance, Asma, a Bangladeshi Muslim American, posted her college graduation photo on Facebook with a quote from Malala about education being the most powerful weapon. Asma’s post received almost a hundred Facebook “likes” from her South Asian, Muslim, and non-Desi friends alike.

However, while Malala’s story does highlight some common values shared between Muslims and non-Muslims, it does not mean that the salience of the boundary between “Muslims” and “Americans” is somehow eliminated or diminished. Rather, her story intersects with the tensions surrounding Muslims’ identification in the United States. The participants associate Malala with their own identity-struggles as Muslim Americans, as reflected in how they engage with the politics surrounding her story in the media. While Malala herself is a positive symbol of Muslim and women empowerment, how her story has been reported in the press reveals larger tensions on how the participants view the media to depict Muslims negatively in general.

For example, in late 2015, headlines emerged online about an interview of Malala by the celebrated British actress and human rights advocate Emma Watson in which Malala expressed her initial qualms about labeling herself as a feminist, calling “feminism” “a tricky word”—arguably alluding to the heated debate regarding the label’s usage in Western societies (The Guardian 2015). However, Malala then reportedly said that Watson’s speech at the United Nations inspired her to embrace the term. This story, or more specifically, the media’s portrayal of it, received pushback from the South Asian and Muslim online community of the West’s seeming appropriation of Malala and the West’s “white savior complex.” Receiving a particularly heated backlash was the phrasing of the news headlines, such as “Malala Yousafzai tells Emma Watson: I’m a Feminist Thanks to You” (The Guardian 2015) and “Emma Watson Helped Malala Embrace Feminism” (Bui 2015). Many of

the female college-going participants followed this news story and reacted negatively to the headlines through social media posts, shares, likes, and comments. In their view, Malala was a feminist long before she arrived in the West; moreover, it was her feminism that made her a target for the Taliban's attack in Pakistan. They argued that Watson's speech helped Malala unpack the apparent "tricky"-ness of feminism as a label and thereby identify herself with it. In their view, the assertion that Watson, a white, upper class woman from the West, has "helped" Malala become a feminist takes away Malala's agency as a Muslim woman standing up to Islamist extremism. Responding to the news headlines, one of my participants' Facebook friends who herself is an Indian American Muslim woman wrote:

There has been a lot of publicity around the recent meeting Malala Yousafzai and Emma Watson had. Every article I have seen shared, from the Guardian or NPR or HuffPost is titled "Malala tells Emma, 'I'm a feminist thanks to you'" or something along those lines.

It's really important to note that Malala was talking about the English word 'feminism' and identifying as and embracing the term 'feminist.' Emma did not politicize Malala with her speech into believing in feminism and ACTING upon it. No one turned Malala into a feminist by a single speech overnight. The fact that she is noble prize winner who fights for women's rights and education in Afghanistan, builds schools for Syrian refugees, tells world's leaders that drone strikes are fueling terrorism, and has quiet literally fought for equality in the face of violence, AFTER surviving an assassination attempt by the Taliban at the age of 15 is what makes her a feminist.

Let's not get all white savior-y about Emma making her a feminist. Despite that not being what happened, how journalism frames these incidents is important and headlines mean everything."

These articles could have been framed a thousand different ways when you watch the interview and hear Emma being blown away by Malala's sacrifices, bravery and intersectional understanding of feminism, but hey "white girl turns brown girl into a feminist" is always more catchy...

This post received over two hundred likes, most of which came from South Asian and Muslim Facebook users, including several of the participants. This post along with the conversations surrounding this news story reflect many of the participants' view that the American and Western media tends to portray women as largely oppressed, devoid of agency, and forced to be clad in black covering. It talks about this theme in detail, showing how the media's depiction of Muslim women

shapes how many of the women participants, especially those who choose to wear the *hijab*, perceive the American society to view them.

Different Kinds of Elsewhere

Variations Based Dimensions of an Identity Category

There can be different kinds of elsewhere based on which dimension of an identity category that the elsewhere place affects. Using the “Muslim” identity category, this dissertation will discuss two variations of elsewhere places—that which is salient to the spiritual dimension of the “Muslim” identity, and that which is salient because of how it impacts that politics surrounding the “Muslim” identity category, regardless of one’s religiosity. Using the examples of Saudi Arabia and Palestine, this dissertation shows how different “elsewhere” places become salient to the South Asian Muslim Americans’ self-identification in different ways. Whereas Saudi Arabia is salient to the participants’ religious identification, Palestine is important for their political views as “Muslims.” To better understand the context in which these places in the Middle East become salient, I begin with a brief overview of the concept of the *Ummah* and its implications in shaping Muslims’ religious and political identification processes.

The *Ummah*: Identifying to Global People, Places, and Contexts

The term “*Ummah*” has multiple meanings in the Quran, ranging from “followers of a prophet; a divine plan of salvation; a religious group; a small group within a larger community of believers; misguided people; and an order of being” (Hassan 2006: 312). Colloquially, the *Ummah* is understood as an imagined global community of Muslims. Based on this idea, the *Ummah*’s instrumental use lies in its ability to subsume and override various forms of differences, such as those based on ethnicity. From a sociological perspective, the notion of *Ummah* has been successful in transforming Arab tribes to an Arab community (Hassan 2006). Over time as Islam spread to other parts of the globe, the idea of the *Ummah* also succeeded in generating a sense of unity and

membership among believers throughout the Muslim world. However, this “Muslim world” is comprised of not only the followers of Islam but also the places, histories, and contexts that are important for the believers’ religious membership. It is this aspect of interconnectedness that makes the concept of *Ummah* pertinent to this study. Because, by subscribing to the idea of a global religious community, the South Asian Muslim immigrants become connected to fellow Muslims and Muslim-related contexts, both in the past and present, that are rooted “elsewhere.”

Yet, this *Ummatic* sense of community is meaningful only in relation to “outsiders” or non-Muslims. In other words, if everyone in the world were Muslim, there would not have been any need for a community exclusively for those who follow Islam. As such, on the one hand, the idea of the *Ummah* has a unifying effect in that it can unite Muslims from diverse backgrounds and walks of life under a shared banner. On the other hand, it differentiates between insiders/believers and outsiders/non-believers. Although narratives of “God’s chosen people” and “us as opposed to them” are not unique to Islam but are also attributes of many other world religions (such as Catholicism and Judaism), the fluidity and vagueness of the *Ummah*’s meaning allow religious and political ideologues to manipulate the term for conducting and justifying state affairs against a religious-political “other.”

For example, organizations such as *Jamaat-i-Islami* and the Muslim Brotherhood propagate that “the West” has historically undermined “the *Ummah*,” thereby “the Muslim World,” through military invasions in the Middle East (Hassan 2006). In this politicized use of the term *Ummah*, the Middle East, a region where the countries tend to be predominantly Islamic, represents the larger “Muslim world”—an imagined mass of peoples and places from all over the world that is perceived to be internally homogenous because of their religious association to Islam. “The West,” then, is its opposing counterpart or the “other”—an imagined homogenous mass of non-believers and non-Islamic states. Religion and politics are thus intertwined, so much so that these conflated meanings

have become widely accepted and are seldom questioned in everyday life both in “the Muslim world” and “the West,” allowing leaders on both sides to use these narratives to further their geopolitical interests. This view of “the West” versus “the Muslim world” has become particularly entrenched over years of conflicts between the Middle East and European colonial powers and, more recently, the United States. It gained further momentum based on clash of civilizations discourses, the rise of Islamic radicalism and terrorism, as well as the protracted U.S.-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. As such, the *Ummah*—both as an imagined global community based on Islamic faith and as a trans-border political entity comprised of organizations, networks and institutions—has a common religious and geopolitical center, the Middle East.

Although South Asian Muslim Americans seldom use the term “*Ummah*” in their everyday lives, the idea of a global religious membership is latent in the ways in which they feel connected to Muslims and Muslim-related contexts in different parts of the world. As will be shown, many of these immigrants use the dichotomy of “the West” against “the Middle East” as an interpretative lens to make sense of the world and explain various conditions of their lives. For them, just as the Middle East stands as a proxy for “the Muslim world,” the United States often represents “the West.”

The Middle East as “Elsewhere”

To some extent, the centrality of the Middle East is entrenched in the religion of Islam itself. The Middle East is the home of the three holiest sites in Islam—Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem. As such, the histories, politics, and conflicts relevant to these holy sites make this region particularly important for those who subscribe to the Muslim identity category. Mecca and Medina are located in Saudi Arabia, the birthplace of Islam and Prophet Muhammad. The kingdom is also the location of the holy house of *Ka’aba*. Five times from dawn till after sunset, Muslims around the world are obligated to turn towards the *Ka’aba* and offer *salat* (prayers) to Allah. Moreover, one of Islam’s five

pillars mandate all able-bodied Muslims to travel to Mecca and Medina to perform *Hajj* (pilgrimage) at least once in their lifetime. With regard to Jerusalem, the simple question of where it is located on the world map remains at the core of one of the world's most enduring geopolitical conflicts, that between Israel and Palestine. Contestations about territorial control of this holy site not only reflect the political instability within the region but also create spillover effects across borders that influence hostland politics. For instance, during his presidential election campaign, President Trump had declared that he is in favor of moving the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, thereby recognizing the city as Israeli territory—in contradiction to the United Nation's position that it be the capital of both Israel and Palestine.

Saudi Arabia

On the ground, Saudi Arabia's authority over the Muslim world translates to a religious hierarchy, which ranks believers based on their nationality. Many South Asian Muslim immigrants in America perceive Arabs, specifically those from Saudi Arabia, to be the most knowledgeable about Islam among the different Muslim nationals they encounter after migration (Shams 2017a). In contrast, South Asian Muslims perceive Islam in their homelands to have become diluted by local cultural elements, with only Arabs having preserved the authenticity of Islamic practices. As such, Saudis are ranked at the top of this hierarchy. For instance, if dates for *Eid* (the main Islamic festival whose date is set according to new moon sighting) varied between the homelands and the United States, the South Asian Muslim participants celebrated the day that Arabs observed it, viewing the Saudi lunar calendar as the most Islamically "authentic." Native Arabic speakers are particularly held in high regard within the Muslim community because they are believed to know the Quran, which is written in Arabic, most accurately. Based on that belief, many Pakistanis and Bangladeshis go to their Arab Muslim friends with questions about Islam rather than to each other despite both groups coming from Islamic homelands.

This hierarchy is again manifested in how South Asian Muslims present themselves in their religious community spaces. Instead of pronouncing Islamic terms and phrases as is typically done in their homeland tongue, they adopt an Arabic accent to invoke their knowledge in Islam. For instance, the Urdu and Bangla words for the Islamic ablution rituals are “*waḥu*” and “*oju*”. However, despite being fluent in their homeland language, many young Pakistani and Bangladeshi Muslim-Americans say “*wudu*”, as pronounced by their Arab peers. Similarly, the holy month of fasting, typically pronounced “*ramḡan*” and “*romjan*” in Urdu and Bangla, is pronounced as “*ramadan*”; the noon prayer, “*ḡubr*” (Urdu) or “*jobor*” (Bangla) as “*dubr*” (Arabic); the call to prayer, “*aḡaan*” (Urdu) or “*aajaan*” (Bangla) as “*adhan*” (Arabic). When I asked a young Pakistani Muslim woman whom I had heard speaking Urdu fluently why she pronounced the name of the afternoon prayer with an Arabic inflection (“A’sr” instead of “Aasr”), she replied, “Because that’s the *proper* way to say it.” When within the South Asian Muslim community, these “proper” pronunciations imply an authoritative knowledge over Islam that in turn brings respect and social status from Muslim co-ethnics. In settings with diverse Muslim nationals including Arabs, such pronunciations give the speakers the image of a well-versed Muslim on an equal footing with their Arab-speaking co-religionists.

At the same time, however, there is a kind of dis-identification from Saudi Arabia among the participants based on the country’s role in global politics. While Saudi Arabia enjoys a sense of reverence from Muslims because of its centrality in Islamic faith, some of the participants have nonetheless criticized the Saudi leadership for its failure to bring peace to the Muslim world as its self-labeled custodians. For instance, Daliah, at the time of my fieldwork was a college senior on her way to becoming an engineer after graduation. As the daughter of Bangladeshi immigrant parents, she identifies herself as a “Bangali Muslim woman” and a “woman of color,” often doing so vocally in the many Desi, Muslim, and Bangladeshi cultural organizations she actively participated in during

college. She was also an active member of the Palestinian rights student organization where she often proudly represented “Bangalis” in support of Palestine. A self-proclaimed feminist with progressive liberal views, Daliah was a vocal supporter of Bernie Sanders during the 2016 Democratic primaries. She shares her political views and concern for various social justice causes she is engaged in through frequent posts on Facebook. Although she does not wear the *hijab*, Daliah wears modest clothing, prays regularly, reads the Quran, and keeps up-to-date with the news concerning Muslims both in the U.S. and abroad. As a second generation Bangladeshi, she speaks Bangla with a heavy American accent. However, a conversation with her is usually peppered with Arabic words, which she is careful to pronounce with proper Arabic inflections. I had come to know Daliah through a Bangali cultural organization on her college campus. One day, Daliah and I were driving to a Bangladeshi family’s home to interview the family about their experiences during the 1971 Bangladeshi War of Independence as part of the organization’s community outreach project. She was driving and as I was still in the beginning stages of my fieldwork, I took the opportunity of the long drive to get some insight into the Bangladeshi community in the area. Although she labels herself as a proud Bangali Muslim, she nonetheless viewed the community to be “inward-looking” and often “closed-minded.” I listened to her talk about how she thinks there should be a campaign to eradicate anti-blackness from the South Asian Muslim community, as how Muslims need to get involved in social justice causes rather than just focus on Muslim-related issues. At one point, she asked what I made of the Bangali community thus far. I told her that I found in my previous research that many Bangladeshis despite identifying as Muslims tend to think of themselves as not having the same level of Islamic knowledge and prestige as Arabs, especially Saudis. She then responded:

Oh I don’t think that. I hate Saudi Arabia. Their treatment of women and the Shia minority is terrible. And look what they are doing for Palestinians. Nothing. I don’t think they are better Muslims or that they are the leaders of the Muslim world. All they care about is oil and money.

Palestine

As will be discussed at length in chapter 5, in many of the participants' worldviews, the Israel-Palestine conflict arguably stands as the most potent symbol of the West's continuing anti-Muslim attitude at the global level. To the first generation immigrants, Palestine is a reminder of the consequences of Western intervention in various parts of the Muslim world, including their homelands where they had been under British colonization for over two centuries. Many in the second generation, on the other hand, feel obligated to support, and in some cases, participate in Palestinian rights organizations based on a sense of *Ummatic* solidarity. Many of these young college-going South Asian Muslims draw parallels between their experiences as members of a stigmatized religious minority with those of Palestinians in Israel. Moreover, the Palestine issue provides them with a cause around which they can build cross-ethnic coalitions and friendships. Even in mainstream U.S. politics, participants of both immigrant generations evaluate politicians based on their stance towards Palestine, among other issues. For instance, during the 2016 Democratic presidential nomination, most participants favored Bernie Sanders over Hillary Clinton because they viewed Sanders as being more open and sympathetic towards Palestine rather than Clinton whose Middle East policy they saw to be too pro-Israeli and thus biased against Muslims' interests.

Variations of Elsewhere Based on Geographic Location and Level of Salience

Where a particular exogenous shock has originated determines to a large extent the level of salience of that event on the immigrants' sense of self as "Muslims" as well as the larger host society' identification of those immigrants as members of that category. As chapters 5 and 6 will show, the level of salience of an exogenous shock depends, to some extent, on the level of salience of that particular "elsewhere" place for the hostland and for the immigrants' sense of self in it. This dissertation will focus on four ISIS attacks that took place in Europe and the Middle East—in other words, in neither the home- nor hostland—and how they have produced different levels of impact

on the South Asian Muslim community and the U.S. society at large. As will be discussed in Chapter 6, the ISIS attacks in Europe had a higher level of salience than those in the Middle East. In contrast to the European attacks, which produced intense and widespread reactions in the U.S. society, those in the Middle East were largely overlooked, despite being of similar scales and conducted by the same terrorist organization. Whereas the attacks in the West were largely seen in America as being close to home, those in the Middle East were viewed as “Muslims killing Muslims” in a far away foreign land. This contrast suggests that how much salience an “elsewhere” place has may to some extent depend on its geographic position on the world map as well as its location in the prevailing public imaginary. Moreover, the varying levels of salience of different “elsewhere” places also reflect the hierarchy in the global distribution of power and the geopolitical dynamics between different countries. Whereas the world tends to stay tuned to what goes on in the developed core countries, such as the United States and the countries in Europe, far less attention is given to the internal dynamics of the developing countries in the periphery. Domestic or regional conflicts in far away periphery countries seldom generate public and media interest in Western societies. The conflicts that do generate interest tend to be viewed as having an impact on the West or on the global geopolitical order.

The Multicentered Relational Framework: The Different Relationships Between Its Centers
Homeland-Elsewhere Relations and Their Effects on Immigrant Identities in the Hostland

The analytical positioning of identity categories at the intersection of homeland, hostland, and “elsewhere” does not imply that all actions of immigrants are somehow *always* connected to global geopolitics. The everyday lives of my immigrant participants are preoccupied with mundane concerns, such as worrying about classes or work, getting good grades or promotions, making and maintaining relationships, raising children, and balancing the monthly budget. Historic or ongoing global issues are not at the forefront of their minds as they go about their busy daily routines.

Nonetheless, with advanced technology and social media, such as 24/7 news channels, real-time notifications of events on smartphone apps, and online search trends, these individuals can attend to national and global news on issues they find interesting. At a mere push of a button, global and national political discourses are filtered down to the everyday level, informing not only the immigrants but also other members of the society. Furthermore, many of the participants gauge public reaction to these news articles by reading through the comments section. These filtered news sources and public opinions may come to shape (and reinforce) people's interpretations of the world around them.

Sometimes, the “elsewhere” is not salient to the participants' self-identification at all. Rather, participants may be more concerned with internal homeland conflicts, such as the clash between Awami League, the Bangladeshi political party founded on a secular national identity, and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, which tends to lean towards Islamism, a topic which often surfaced during the *dawats* or informal gatherings at Bangladeshi homes I attended. Alternatively, conflicts *between* homelands may gain salience, as when tension rises over the 70 year dispute between India and Pakistan regarding the status of divided Kashmir, and South Asian student groups engage in publicity events to demonstrate a sort of pan-national unity, thereby unintentionally also highlighting the ways in which homeland developments can cause cleavages among groups that hostland realities bring together.

However, in the U.S. context, South Asians' intra-group differences tend to be conflated with other “Muslim-looking” groups, such as Arabs and Middle Easterners. As such, the “normal” homeland divides that go unnoticed by the American population get replaced by conflicts that are associated with the Middle East and therefore gain a notoriety that other homeland conflicts, even if generating violence, do not receive. For example, when ISIS-inspired domestic terrorists killed mostly foreigners at a bakery in Bangladesh's capital in 2016—a story extensively covered in

mainstream U.S. news outlets—several Bangladeshi participants, especially those who were first generation and strongly identified with their homeland, paid close attention to how Bangladesh was being portrayed in the news coverage. In addition to concerns for their homeland and loved ones left behind, they were concerned that, because of the nature of the terrorist attack and subsequent depiction of Bangladesh in the U.S. media, the “Bangladeshi” national identity would become closely associated with “Muslim,” thus exposing them to suspicion as “terrorists” in the eyes of the American public. Indeed, political commentators interpreted the event as indicative of ISIS now expanding its influence to Muslim-majority countries beyond the Middle East (Manik, Anand and Barry 2016), giving the impression that Bangladesh, too, is a dangerous Muslim country like those in that “elsewhere” place, the Middle East. In short, although global politics may not always be salient in how the immigrants see themselves, the immigrants nonetheless stand exposed to the hostland’s overall sociopolitical context, which can associate them to “elsewhere” conflicts and thus shape how they are identified by others in the hostland.

Homeland Cleavages in the Hostland in Relation to Elsewhere

As Chapter 3 will discuss in more detail, while the South Asian Muslim participants appear to feel a sense of membership in the global community of Muslims, their *Ummatic* sense of belonging can sometimes be in tension with their particularistic homeland-oriented identities of “Bangladeshi,” “Pakistani,” and “Indian.” The boundaries differentiating these national identities have gained salience over the years because of the history of the Partition of Bengal, the subsequent war between East and West Pakistan through which Bangladesh gained independence, and the conflicts still ongoing among the three homelands. Each of these nationalistic identities is deeply intertwined with religion, which has historically been the source of conflict both *between* Muslims and non-Muslims (such as, the rivalry between Muslim-majority Pakistan and predominantly Hindu India, or the tensions between Hindu nationalists and the Muslim minority inside India) and *within* the Muslim

community (such as, the war between Bangladesh and Pakistan, or the ideological conflict between secularists and Islamists inside Bangladesh).

These religious-political cleavages, however, do not remain contained within the borders of the homeland, but travel to the host society either through flow of information or via the immigrants themselves as they come and build their communities in the hostland. For the South Asian Muslim Americans, some of these homeland cleavages make their “Muslim” identity salient (such as when Indian Muslims hear about Hindu nationalists persecuting the Muslim minority back home) while others highlight their national identities (such as when tensions rose between India and Pakistan over the Kashmir border).

Yet, homeland cleavages have less relevance in the hostland where these have little impact on the immigrants’ everyday lives. Rather, the sociopolitical environment inside the hostland has a more immediate impact. In the case of South Asian Muslims, whose homelands are not in direct geopolitical conflict with the hostland but who are still often conflated with other immigrant groups from supposedly hostile countries, banding together against a common adverse situation on a united platform is more constructive than reiterating homeland cleavages. This hostland context allows for new, diasporic ethnic identities, which are both pan-national and pan-religious, such as “Desi.”

For example, most of the second-generation participants often refer to themselves and their peers as “Desi,” which means “of *Des*” or “from the homeland.” Here, *Des* or the homeland is thought of as a homogenous, common place of origin which is comprised of all three South Asian countries, is located far away on the other side of the world, is culturally different from an American lifestyle, and yet which has an enduring but somewhat symbolic presence that differentiates all “Desis” from other groups in the hostland. When used, the “Desi” label conflates the historic homeland cleavages and intra-ethnic differences based on national origins. I saw this with particular force when attending Pakistani cultural events where Bangladeshi students danced on stage to

Bollywood music while waving a Pakistani flag gleefully cheering “*Pakistan Zindabad*” (Long Live Pakistan).

While the first generation participants find sweeping aside a long history of homeland conflicts difficult and rarely have friends outside their national group, they nonetheless want their children to make “Desi” friends and encourage them to partake in pan-national cultural events. Indeed, I found that South Asian cultural events are important avenues for the South Asian youth to make “Desi” friends with whom they keep contact even after graduation. However, marriage across national lines is still considered taboo within the “Desi” community (particularly between Bangladeshis and Pakistanis, and Hindu Indians with Muslim Bangladeshis and Pakistanis), thus reflecting, at times, an enduring presence of homeland-oriented divides in the hostland.

Overall, the “Desi” identity tends to overlook the participants’ “Muslim-ness” by ignoring the religious-political divides within and between the three immigrant groups for the sake of achieving a sense of unity among all South Asians. In this relationship, the “elsewhere” is largely irrelevant as the hostland context and the immigrants’ homeland commonalities appear most salient. Yet, in other instances, homeland-oriented identities accentuate the participants’ religious differences as cleavages from back home spill over state borders and gain global dimensions based on hostland contexts, thus making “elsewhere” places salient in how South Asian Americans both identify and are identified by others in the host society.

For example, Hindu nationalists, currently the political party in power in India, perceive the country’s Muslim minority as loyal to Pakistan but which has been coddled thus far under the opposition party’s rule. The relationship between Muslims and Sikhs in India is also fraught based on a history of Sikh persecution by Muslim Mughal emperors. Terrorist attacks in India, Kashmir, Pakistan, the United States, and other places by Muslims have compounded Hindus’ and Sikhs’ anti-Muslim orientation. For Indian Muslim Americans, the persecuted status of Muslims back home

makes the “Muslim” identity category particularly salient for their sense of self, as evidenced by the Indian participants having more Pakistani and Muslim friends than Hindu Indians. Whereas these participants often feel excluded by their Hindu co-nationals based on religious identity, they feel welcomed among Muslims and Pakistanis because of it. Some Indian Muslims I encountered have even married Pakistanis based on their common religious and ethnic identities.

In the hostland, South Asian immigrants’ pre-migration biases stemming from these religious-political cleavages also influence their orientations to U.S. political divides. For example, although more than half of the Indian diaspora in the United States support the Democratic Party (Desilver 2014), Indian American Hindu nationalists have embraced the right-wing anti-Muslim platforms in American politics (Peters 2016). During the 2016 U.S. Presidential election, American Hindu nationalists both in India and the U.S. supported Donald Trump because they viewed his anti-Muslim platform and his win to be advantageous for their nationalist politics against both the Muslim minority in India and their regional rival, Pakistan (Bennett 2017). They rallied support for Trump by using imageries of ISIS to stoke Islamophobic fears among Hindu Indians (Paul and Choksi 2016). Moreover, “Hindus for Trump,” a group comprised of both Hindu nationalists in India and their counterparts in America, have ardently supported Trump’s proposals for a “Muslim ban” and a “Mexican wall” because these echoed similar intentions of their own—Hindu nationalists have long accused Pakistan of sponsoring Islamic terrorism and also want to build a wall along the Indian-Bangladeshi border to keep out Muslims from entering India (Bennett 2017; Leidig 2016). In the words of Kushal Pal, an engineering consultant and Hindu nationalist supporter, to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation: “Many Muslim countries engage in acts of terrorism which is harmful for India...India is suffering from terrorism and Trump is against the [sic] terrorism therefore he is favourable [sic] for India” (Bennett 2017).

However, Hindus and Sikhs are often mistaken for “Muslims” inside the United States (Mishra 2016). And, these misidentifications carry the risk of having dire consequences, as illustrated in the examples of Srinivas Kuchibhotla and Alok Madasani, the two Hindu Indian immigrants shot in Kansas for being misidentified as “Iranians.” As mentioned earlier in chapter 1, this attack had taken place just three week’s after President Trump’s “Muslim ban,” which included people coming into the United States from Iran. In this example, how Srinivas and Alok had self-identified—whether based on religion, nationality, ethnicity, or politics—bore little effect as contexts stemming from “elsewhere” Middle East determined how they were identified by others in America. Thus, Muslim-related conflicts in the “elsewhere” Middle East can not only become salient for Muslims, but also “Muslim-looking” non-Muslims in the United States.

These hostland contexts and events deepen the intra-national religious divides in the diaspora further, as Hindu Indian Americans employ various distancing strategies from their Muslim co-ethnics by over-emphasizing their non-Muslim identity using anti-Muslim platforms (Kurien 2010). Hindu nationalists’ support for Trump and his anti-Muslim platforms, for instance, highlights Hindus’ difference from their Muslim counterparts. In turn, their support for right-wing, anti-Muslim agenda reinforce the Indian Muslim participants’ “outsider” status in their own homelands, highlighting instead the similarities they share with Muslims from other nationalities in America.

Hostland-Elsewhere Interactions and Their Effects on Immigrants’ Homeland Identities

The case of Pakistani Muslim Americans illustrates how the nature of relations between the immigrants’ hostland—the United States—and “elsewhere”—the Middle East—can shape their homeland-oriented identity, in this case “Pakistani.” Despite contentions and hostilities over the years, Pakistan has been a key strategic ally for the United States in its War on Terror in the Middle East. As such, Pakistan and the “Pakistani” national identity are closely associated with Islam and Muslim-related conflicts in that region. Moreover, that Pakistan is an Islamic country riddled with

sectarian conflicts, news of which often appear in the American news, and that Osama bin Laden was found to have been hiding in one of its most fortified cities, have entrenched Pakistan's global national image as a dangerous terrorist-friendly country in the United States. As recently as August 2017, President Trump himself has accused Pakistan for providing "safe havens for terrorist organizations, the Taliban, and other groups that pose a threat to the region and beyond" (Harris 2017).

In this context, the "Pakistani" identity category has the same connotations as "Arab," "Middle Eastern," and "ISIS," shaping how the Pakistani American participants, like Sifat and Naser, are viewed by some segments of the U.S. society. For example, Sifat is a second generation Pakistani Muslim American who is currently a dental student. At college she was a part of both Pakistani Muslim student organizations. She strongly identifies as liberal-minded and a feminist. Like many other female participants, she does not wear the *hijab* but tends to wear modest clothing. However, she is one of very few people that I have encountered during fieldwork who had dated a white Christian man. She had planned on converting him for marriage, but the relationship eventually did not work out. At the time of the interview, she was single and looking for a life partner. While she did not much care about her partner's ethnicity, she prioritized marrying a Muslim man. In her words:

In the past, my dad, when he was still a student, [in a college in the U.S.] was considered an Arab and sort of be given that form of discrimination or racism. True to this day as well, a lot of people don't really know what "Pakistani" is. They will ask you are you Arab? Are you Middle Eastern? Wait, are you Indian? Are you Asian? They don't know. Still, back then it wasn't too much. People would say Pakistani and they would be like oh where is that? They wouldn't really know much about it. The label Pakistani in the recent times have [sic] come to be associated with the Middle East, Muslim, and terrorist. Nowadays people have the little bit of knowledge and education that they have received about this particular part of the world is through the news, the American media...So I recently visited Pakistan a couple of months ago and some of my friends were, 'Oh were you safe?' 'You were able to walk around?' 'There were no gun shootings, no bombings?' And I was like, 'Oh there is nothing like that going on over there. I walked the streets normally in my jeans and my shirt. I didn't have to cover up. I don't know what you guys think happen there.'

And those friends were like ‘We always see in the media that there are always bombings over there, schools are being blown up, people are being blown up, they are taking foreigners and kidnap them.’ And I was like ‘No—that is just what the media is feeding you. When you go to Pakistan, the major cities, you will see that they are pretty modern. Their sense of fashion, the technology there, education. We have some of the best schools in Pakistan.’ So here you can see that the little bit of education that they do have about this small country is from the media and that’s sort of how nowadays how you would experience being seen as Pakistani.

Sifat’s narration of her interactions in the United States shows how hostland-elsewhere relations can give new meaning to the immigrants’ homeland identities. By itself, Pakistan as a place appears to mean little to the larger American society, with few people knowing even where on the global map it is located. It is seen largely as a foreign place far away from the United States. Similarly, “Pakistani” simply refers to a category that is different from “American.” However, Pakistan appears to have meaning when placed in relation to the Middle East and its contentious relationship with the United States, particularly in the context of Islamist terrorism and violence. In that vein, “Pakistani”—by itself an ambiguous label—comes to have new meaning and relevance when placed in relation with other identity categories that are more familiar and salient for the United States, such as “Arab” and “Middle Eastern.”

Many other Pakistani participants have also shared how the conflation of the “Pakistani,” “Arab,” “terrorist,” and “ISIS” categories has shaped their day-to-day interactions. For example, Naser is the only Pakistani I interviewed who actually came to the United States from the Middle East. Although born in the United States to Pakistani parents, Naser lived in Saudi Arabia till he was 18 years old. He first moved to Dubai when he was three because of his parents’ work. When he was six, Naser and his family moved to Saudi Arabia where his father works as a high-ranking finance officer in a steel conglomerate and his mother as a professor at a well-known university. He went to an American co-ed school in Saudi Arabia and visited the U.S. three or four times over the years to visit his relatives in the East Coast and Texas. After graduating high school, like his older brother, Naser applied and got accepted to an American college where he was majoring in business

economics with a minor in accounting at the time of the interview. Although he has moved around a lot and grew up outside of Pakistan, he speaks Urdu fluently along with Arabic. He is a practicing Muslim, praying five times a day, and eating only halal food. In his interview, he talked about his first interaction upon arrival in the United States, at the airport. In the excerpts below, Naser reflects on how his association with Saudi Arabia, intertwined with his “Pakistani” ancestry and identity, has colored his interactions at different moments since his arrival in America.

[On his first interaction upon arrival in the U.S.] “When I landed in LAX the expected, you know, racial profiling, please step aside and this and that. They asked ridiculous questions. The last visit I made [to the U.S.] was in 2010 right? And that’s all it said on my passport. I landed. They looked at my passport and they were like ‘What were you doing for 3 years?’ ‘Where are you going?’ ‘Why did you come here?’ I was like ‘I don’t live here. I am just here to study. I was in Saudi Arabia.’ They asked ‘Why were you in Saudi Arabia? What were you there for?’ This and that, you know. Stuff like that. They asked me for an address [in the U.S.]. I didn’t have any address with me.”

[On engaging in student organizations on campus] “When I came here, my parents told me to stay away from politics. Also, I heard a lot of stories about how becoming political is not really the best thing to do. Especially as a college student, especially if you get stopped at the airport all the time. If you are, you know, if you come from Saudi Arabia or from Pakistan.”

[On his life outside of campus] “So there was this white guy I lived with after coming here. He is studying political science. He has known me for 7 months, right? And then one day, and he is dead serious when he asks me, ‘Hey you wouldn’t join ISIS would you?’ I was like I don’t know what to say to someone like this.”

What Is New?

The multicentered relational framework is different from the assimilation perspective in that it shows how exogenous shocks emanating from beyond the hostland society can shape immigrants’ identification. Because of globalization and the interconnectedness of societies, it is not so illogical to argue that there will generally always be some kind of exogenous shock producing impact on the hostland society, such as through religious-political conflicts and global epidemics. Whereas the assimilation perspective highlights the processes, resources and obstacles through which immigrants become similar to the hostland’s native population over time, the multicentered relational framework shows how ongoing conflicts in places that the immigrants are not from or to which they

have never been come to highlight the immigrants' differences or "otherness" from the mainstream host society.

Moreover, the multicentered relational framework allows us to dissect how exogenous shocks can also shape intra-group relations among immigrants. For example, whereas religious-political conflicts in "elsewhere" Middle East have highlighted the boundary between "Muslims" and "non-Muslims" in the United States, they have also come to create distance between different ethnic/national groups within the "Muslim" identity category, such as South Asians and Middle Easterners. Conversely, contexts in "elsewhere" places can also provide South Asian Muslim Americans with avenues for building panethnic coalitions. For example, some Bangladeshi homeland-oriented organizations remain strictly secular and distance themselves from activities that can categorize them as "Muslim" (Shams 2017b). Additionally, parents, many of whom are members of these homeland organizations, instruct their college-going children not to engage in social justice causes with connections to the Middle East, a region closely associated with Islam, fearing that doing so would negatively draw attention to their "Muslim" identities. On the other hand, various ethnic/national Muslim groups—including South Asians and Middle Easterners—coalesce around anti-colonial and human rights platforms focused on places in the Middle East, such as Palestine and Turkey. In both cases, global political contexts stemming from "elsewhere" Middle East has led to South Asians either distancing themselves from their Middle Eastern counterparts or to forging panethnic coalitions with them.

With regard to transnationalism, the multicentered relational framework shows the convergence of not two, but three types of societies through immigrants—the homeland, the hostland, and contexts in "elsewhere" societies. Moreover, it shows how "elsewhere" contexts can both bring migrants and stay-at-homes together, and also separate and divide them. Thus, my framework extends the dyadic homeland-hostland paradigm in transnationalism.

Finally, with regard to diaspora, there are two main conceptual distinctions between the diasporic and multicentered relational frameworks. First, immigrants may not identify *with* any particular state outside of the hostland, but may still be identified *by* events going on in that very place. In the Nigerian example at the beginning of this chapter, Zinat does not consider Nigeria to be important because of her co-ethnics living in that country, but rather because of its Muslim-related conflicts, which are geopolitically salient to the United States.

Second, diasporic frameworks are still bound within a dyadic homeland-hostland paradigm in which an ethnic migrant group originating from a common homeland—“there”—is settled in multiple host societies or “here” (Dufoix 2008). In contrast, a multicentered relational framework argues that Muslim immigrants have various, multidimensional identity categories, each of which could be influenced by events ongoing “elsewhere.” Immigrants may not always be connected to peoples and places based on a sense of diasporic affinity with co-ethnics or based on allegiance to a common homeland. Rather, as the dissertation will show, immigrants are connected to multiple and various places based on global geopolitics and hostland dynamics.

However, using the multicentered relational framework does not imply that the capacity of homeland ties in bringing immigrants together is somehow diminished. Rather, by adding an “elsewhere” component, it reveals the complex ways in which dynamics in the sending country interact with global and hostland contexts in shaping immigrants’ homeland identities. The following chapter delves into exploring these complexities.

CHAPTER THREE: RELIGION AND POLITICS IN THE SOUTH ASIAN HOMELANDS

Geographically located on the banks of the Indian Ocean, with China and Russia in the north and Afghanistan and Iran on the northwest, the South Asian homelands occupy a geopolitically strategic position in global politics. While it has its unique, autonomous dynamics, South Asia is also part of the larger geopolitical multiverse in which it is located, including the Middle East, and North, Central and East Asia. Its security and stability are directly linked with that of its surrounding regional giants, namely China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Russia. As such, global powers frequently jostle for influence in the sociopolitics of the countries in this region.

This chapter will show how, like the hostland, the immigrants' homeland is also affected by global political dynamics and exogenous shocks, and how their impact on the homeland's sociopolitics travels across borders to the receiving country and shape immigrants' lives. This dynamism of the homeland's sociopolitical landscape is often overlooked as international migration scholars largely tend to trace the immigrants' footsteps in analyzing how immigrants traverse boundaries to get to a new society, change their surroundings, and are also themselves changed in the process. The homeland seems to matter only if the immigrants themselves are present in it. Indeed, much scholarly attention has been given to how resources that immigrants send or bring back from the receiving country transform the sending community (Levitt 2001; Massey et al. 1987). However, from this analytical purview, it is as if, without the immigrants' presence, the homeland remains largely isolated and static, neatly bound and limited within its nation-state borders. It is, of course, not the case. As immigrants make return visits to their homelands, they find that as they themselves have changed while living abroad (Waldinger and Fitzgerald 2004; Waldinger 2015), so too have the people, places, and societies they had left behind (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992; Duval 2004; Tannenbaum 2007). Moreover, the homelands are not cut off from the rest of the world once the

immigrants have left. They continue to have numerous interconnections with various countries as a result of being part of the global geopolitical tapestry. For example, the South Asian homelands and their ties with the United States are not located in a geopolitical vacuum. Instead, these sending countries continue to maintain relationships with various other countries, many of which are or could become “elsewhere” for the immigrants in the hostland.

This analytical blind spot, which renders homelands as cohesive, neatly bound, and unchanged, limits scholars from observing the trans-border processes that link the contexts of one society with those of others. Instead of being contained within the boundaries of a nation-state, social contexts and processes often spill over, affecting the dynamics of other societies (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002). Indeed, scholars of transnationalism have shown the many ways in which immigrants transcend various limitations imposed by nation-state borders, connecting societies “here” and “there” (Glick-Schiller, Basch, and Szanton-Blanc 1992, 1995; Levitt 2001; Portes, Guarnizo, and Landolt 1999; Waldinger 2015).

This chapter adds a crucial, yet overlooked, “elsewhere” component to the picture by examining how historical and ongoing political dynamics within and among the South Asian homelands travel to the hostland where they are recreated or are given new dimensions by the immigrants based on global geopolitical contexts. The multicentered relational framework allows us to see that the contexts within and the relationships between the homelands are dynamic, and that they are part of the global geopolitical order. Together, these interactions of the homeland at the global level—within and between the homelands, between the homelands and “elsewhere,” and that between the homelands and hostland—come to shape the immigrants’ day-to-day interactions in the host society regardless of the immigrants’ attachment to the sending country or their presence in it.

I pay particular attention to religious-political conflicts because in all three South Asian homelands, various social actors, such as politicians, Islamist groups, and the military, have used

religion for political gains. These religious-political cleavages have led to partitions, wars, and international conflicts that still today color the collective consciousness of the people in these societies. The immigrants bring these homeland orientations with them to their adopted country. However, once within the hostland, the immigrants are faced with an environment that is new, and yet, in some ways, familiar. As immigrants grapple with the unfamiliarity of their new setting, although some homeland boundaries—such as the Sunni-Shia sectarian divide, or the national rivalry between Indians and Pakistanis, and Pakistanis and Bangladeshis—diminish in their potency, they do not entirely disappear. Depending on the social situation, the salience of these boundaries in the immigrants' identity-work fluctuates. For instance, South Asian Muslim Americans often have common hostland experiences in the U.S. society based on their similar ethnic background, physical features, and racial profile. Rather than their homeland-centric differences, cleavages with the native host population based on “elsewhere” places, which are of more immediate concern in the hostland, gain priority. In response to these common hostland experiences, homeland-oriented boundaries sometimes allow for new identity labels and post-immigration forms of solidarity, such as “South Asian” and “Desi.”

Some homeland cleavages nonetheless remain, showing some variations in salience based on the participants' age, exposure to the larger hostland society, and immigrant generation. For example, whereas the young, second generation immigrants tend to identify under the panethnic “Desi” and “South Asian” labels, the first generation immigrants tend to hold on to their particularistic national identities. As such, whereas for most first generation Bangladeshi immigrants, the boundary between Bangladeshis and Pakistanis based on the 1971 war is still very much salient, it is less so—but not entirely erased—for the young Bangladeshi Americans. However, the same cannot be said about the Sunni-Shia sectarian divide. Despite an overarching sense of Pakistani Muslim American solidarity in the face of Islamophobia in the U.S., the Shia Muslim participants

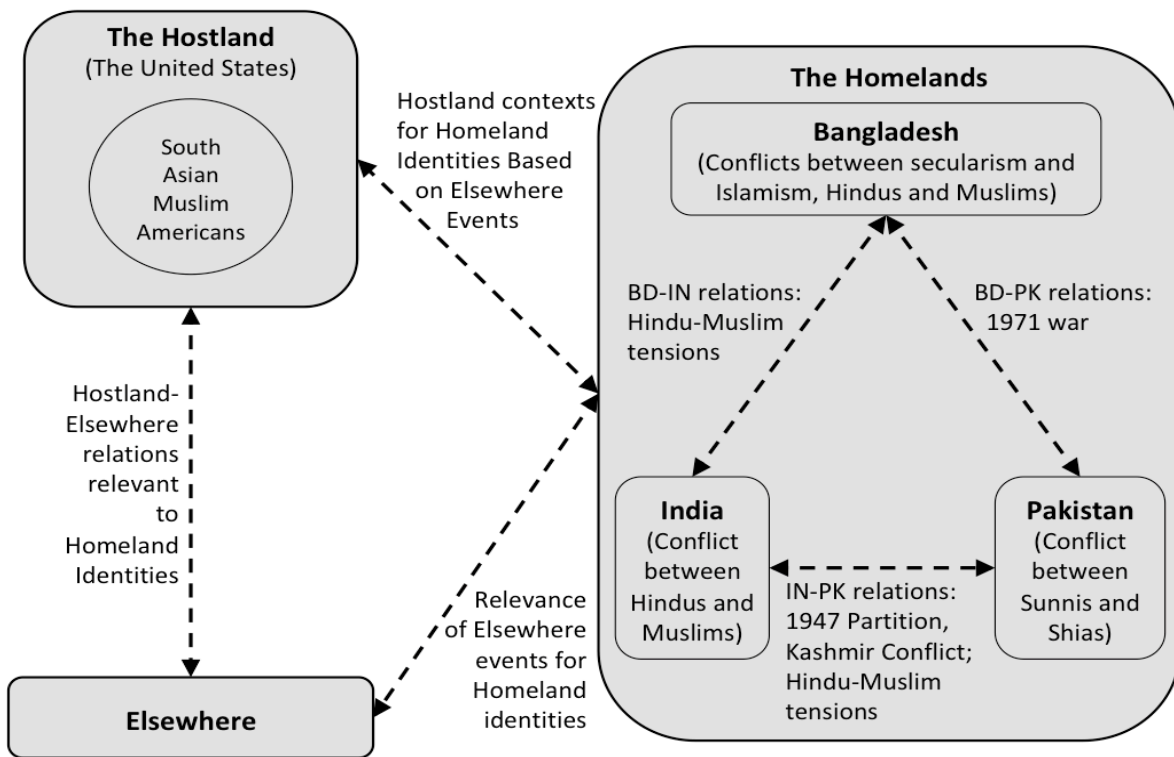
strongly prefer to marry within their own sect. Although they have many, close Sunni friends, they nonetheless feel resentment and grievance towards the Sunni majority for overlooking, and at times perpetuating, the persecution of the Shia minority in Pakistan.

Again, in some cases, immigrants not only reiterate the religious-political boundaries from home but also add global, “elsewhere” dimensions to these conflicts using resources, images, and language from the hostland environment. As will be shown, both Hindu and Muslim immigrants bring their communal conflicts with them to the United States. However, in the United States, Muslims and “Muslim looking” groups—including Hindus—are generally conflated into one racialized “outsider” monolith as a result of the post-9/11 Islamophobic atmosphere, which has heightened more recently because of ISIS attacks both in the U.S. and abroad. As such, the Hindu-Muslim conflicts, which were previously contained within the homeland, gain global dimensions based on contexts in the hostland and those with roots “elsewhere.” For example, Hindu nationalists’ support for Donald Trump during the 2016 presidential election contributes to the pre-existing Hindu-Muslim divide within the larger South Asian community, where Hindus and Muslims tend to keep to their own religious communities despite sharing the same nationality.

The new hostland environment also allows for the expression of some secular forms of identities, which, previously in the homeland, had to remain largely repressed. For example, a few of the participants identify as gay or bisexual. As homosexuality is criminalized in the South Asian homelands, these participants had to hide their Queer identities. However, in the United States, these participants have used the freedom of being physically away from their homelands to come out to their close friends and family. Although stigmatized, homosexuality is not criminalized in the United States. Nonetheless, these immigrants have to remain discreet in the larger South Asian American community where homosexuality is still considered taboo—especially among Muslims, most of who believe Islam to forbid it. Moreover, as Islam is a key component in the construction

of the “Pakistani” and “Bangladeshi” national identities, being gay or bisexual is often taken to be the anti-thesis of what these national identity labels mean. Some of these participants, for instance, had to experience fights, heartbreak, and even disownment from their families to whom “Pakistani/Muslim” and “gay/bisexual” are mutually exclusive categories, in that one cannot be a member of both. As such, the ways in which these identities are experienced and managed by the LGBTQ individuals are colored by the values, understandings, and attitudes that the immigrants bring from their homeland.

Figure 3.1: Immigrants’ Homeland Identities in the Multicentered Relational Framework



To provide some context before delving into unpacking these arguments, the following sections will provide an overview of how religion—particularly Islam—and politics have shaped the sociopolitical contours of the Indian subcontinent. Then, the chapter shifts the focus onto the religious-political divisions within each of the three sending countries and how they come to shape the boundary-work of the immigrant communities in the hostland in relation to “elsewhere”

contexts. While the following overview is by no means comprehensive or exhaustive, it provides some context to understand the salience of religion in South Asian Muslims' boundary-work.

Brief Historical Overview of Religion and Politics in the Indian Subcontinent

Muslims have been present in the Indian subcontinent since the first century of Islam when Arab invaders entered the Sind in 711 and traders sailed with their goods across the Indian Ocean (Mohammad-Arif 2002). Islam rose to prominence and glory under the Mughal emperors from the 16th to 18th centuries. These Muslim rulers traditionally implemented a policy of religious tolerance until the reign of the last great Mughal emperor, Aurangzeb, who enforced the Sharia Law. Although during his tenure, the Mughal Empire reached the height of its military prowess, Aurangzeb's rule was unstable, with many Hindu kingdoms rebelling against his religious intolerance and taxation laws. In the 1700s, the Sikhs rose in rebellion that in turn unleashed severe persecution and massacres against them by the Mughals—this violence against Sikh civilians and revered gurus at the hands of Muslim rulers set the tone for future Sikh-Muslim relations, which is present even among the immigrant community in America (a topic I will revisit later in the chapter). The royal treasury and the military were considerably depleted in quelling the rebellions and wars that cropped up from different kingdoms against Aurangzeb's intolerant rule. The British East India Company supported these rebellions against the Mughals in favor of their economic and colonial interests, using the opportunity to tighten their grip on the subcontinent. The power of the Mughals dwindled after the death of Aurangzeb. The emperors following Aurangzeb's reign, especially since 1757, were effectively proxies of the East India Company, which ruled vast areas of land using private armies. The Mughal Empire eventually collapsed in 1857 when the East India Company deposed the last Mughal ruler. The subcontinent now lay open for the British Crown who assumed direct control of the Indian subcontinent after dissolving the East India Company through the Government of India Act 1858. After supplanting Muslim political dominance, the British government under Queen

Victoria built a huge colonial empire—the British Raj. Muslims made up 20 to 24 percent of the colonized population (Mohammad-Arif 2002). The British would not relinquish their direct control of the Indian subcontinent until 1947.

During their colonization, British administrators categorized their subjects based on religious affiliation—a system that differed from pre-colonial classifications (Uddin 2006; Tunzelmann 2007). They viewed Muslims and Hindus as “two separate communities with distinct political interests” and strategically developed different education, electorate, and civil service policies for each group (Uddin 2006: 48). These Divide and Rule policies added political salience to the religious differences between Hindus and Muslims (Khan 2008). Religion became a fundamental factor in constructing each group’s nationalist ideas even as the entire subcontinent fought for independence from the British. Hindu-Muslim tensions heightened, imploding in the 1947 Partition of Bengal along religious lines as carved by the withdrawing British forces. On one hand, India was predominantly Hindu. On the other, West Pakistan and East Pakistan (which is now Bangladesh) comprised one Muslim state although they were geographically separated, being located on either side of India. The partition pitted these newly formed states against each other, instigating large-scale massacres and forced migrations of both Hindus and Muslims as Hindus fled from Pakistan to India, and Muslims from India to Pakistan. Memories of these atrocities fuelled by religion remain in Indian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi national consciousness to this day (Ashraf 2017; Ahmed 2017; The New York Times 2017).

Even after they have left their homelands, South Asian immigrants sometimes pull from this collective consciousness to categorize their relationships in the host country. Their post-colonial sentiments are reflected in casual conversations amongst themselves. For example, “*gore/ gori*” (white) and “*mem*” (white lady) were used in the colonial times to refer to the British officers’ female relations. Although the words are now colloquially used to refer to white people who do not

necessarily have to be British, they seemed to still carry negative connotations within the South Asian American community. For instance, a few times when some of my male Indian and Pakistani American interviewees publicly dated white women, Desi Aunties—a term young participants often used for older South Asian women who they viewed to be the purveyors of community gossip—reproachfully referred to their white girlfriends as “*gori mem.*” As interracial marriages were still mostly seen as deviant to the norm in my participants’ communities, the words carried negative subtexts. Another example shows how the past also comes up in casual conversations with the children of South Asian immigrants. I was conversing with Alisha, a Pakistani American about our favorite T.V. shows. I learned that she was “obsessed” with the B.B.C. period drama, *Downton Abbey*. “Why do you like it so much?” I asked. “It makes me reminisce about the good old days when everything was so quaint and proper haha!” she replied. As I laughed, Alisha continued, “This is so insidious though. It [the show] gives this wonderful impression about the British Empire—even *I* am reminiscing about the good old days and my ancestors were being oppressed and colonized [by the British] at the time!”

After the partition, despite common religious affiliation, East and West Pakistan considered themselves culturally, economically, politically, and ethnically different from one another. Culturally, East Pakistan aligned more with neighboring India than with West Pakistan, which is located over 2000 kilometers away. For instance, people in East Pakistan and the West Bengal region of India spoke predominantly in Bangla and shared similar patterns with regard to food, fashion, literature, and music. However, the balance of power between East and West Pakistan was in favor of the latter, leading East Pakistan to claim economic and political emancipation. War ensued where West Pakistan launched a systematic genocide of their East Pakistani counterparts. Almost 3 million Bangladeshis lost their lives in the war—although, reflecting some of the ongoing politics surrounding the war, this number varies as Pakistani authorities claim the number of casualties to be

lower (Bangladesh Genocide Archive 2018). Ironically, West Pakistan justified the genocide of East Pakistanis on religious grounds as they claimed to be saving the country's Islamic ideals from the neighboring India's Hindu influence (Riaz 2010). In 1971, after nine months of war in which India provided considerable military, political, and humanitarian assistance to East Pakistan, East Pakistanis gained their independence. Bangladesh was created, proclaiming to be an independent state based on democratic, secular ideals.

Figure 3.2: Political Map of Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan (University of Texas Libraries 2008)



In more recent years, despite having a common legacy of British colonization, religion continues to be a defining element in Indian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi politics. In India, the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (B.J.P.) led by Narendra Modi won a landslide victory in 2014. Back in 2002, Modi had been implicated in the Gujrat riots—one of the largest anti-Muslim riots in India (The New York Times 2015). Modi along with his close associates were accused of inciting

those riots on minority Muslims by Hindu extremists. In 2005, the United States had banned Modi, who was then chief minister of Gujarat, from entering its borders on grounds of the religious freedom law. The ban, however, was repelled later in 2016 when Modi, as the Prime Minister of India, officially visited the United States (Gowen 2016). In Pakistan, too, religion has a firm grip on sociopolitical life. The country has been struggling with sectarian conflicts, Islamist militancy, and corruption at the highest level of government. In 2017, Nawaz Sharif, who had been the Prime Minister since 2013 was forced to step down when the Pakistani Supreme Court, backed by the country's powerful military, disqualified him from the position based on allegations of corruption (Masood 2017). Since then, Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, a staunch ally of Nawaz Sharif has been serving as the interim prime minister until the June 2018 general election (Masood and Goldman 2017). In Bangladesh, Awami League, arguably the more secular of the two major political parties in the country, is in control under the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina since 2009. However, the regime is essentially a one-party dictatorship with most of the opposition leaders put in jail (The Economist 2016a). Here, too, Islamism, specifically home grown extremist groups in connection with global terrorist networks, is steadily gaining hold over the Bangladeshi public (Barry and Manik 2017).

The inter-state relations among the three countries have seen significant bumps since the Partition despite some attempts on all sides for improvement. In terms of religious-political dynamics, India and Pakistan are locked in a bitter military, political, and cultural rivalry. Both these nuclear powers have clashed repeatedly over the control of Kashmir. In fact, as recently as September 2016, militants in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir killed 20 Indian soldiers, once again triggering hostility and strikes from both sides. The impact of this latest spate of conflict was felt in the larger socio-cultural scenario as evidenced by Indian movies being banned in Pakistan on one side, and Pakistani performers being banned from Bollywood on the (Safi 2016). The large-scale

Mumbai 2008 attacks by Pakistani militants, the memories of which are still present in Indian national consciousness (as indicated by the many Bollywood movies on the event that have been made since then), served to amplify the historic hostility between the two nations. The seemingly polar opposite religious-political foundations of the ruling parties in India and Pakistan also do not help to improve public opinions in each country towards the other. For instance, only 14 percent of Pakistanis view India in a positive light, whereas, only 14 percent of Indians view Pakistan favorably (Pew Research Center Global Attitudes and Trends 2011).

The birth of Bangladesh in 1971 is also a bitter moment in India-Pakistan relations. India strongly supported Bangladesh's liberation war for its geopolitical interest in breaking up Pakistan. The borders imposed by the 1947 partition had meant that India was trapped on both sides by Pakistan's West and East wings (see Figure 3.2). The secession of Bangladesh from Pakistan meant not only a significant blow to India's historic regional rival but also that India would no longer have to be concerned about Pakistan's presence on both sides of its border. During the war, India provided military assistance to Bangladeshi liberation forces, and opened its Eastern border for an inflow of Bangladeshi refugees.

However, since the war ended, Bangladesh and India have often clashed over various issues, such as undocumented Bangladeshi immigrants in India, and the distribution of water resources that run through both countries. Being a riverine country, Bangladesh is highly dependent on its rivers for its agriculture and economy. However, the Farakka Barrage erected by India in 1975 diverts the flow of the Ganges river system from Bangladesh causing severe droughts, contaminating fisheries, inhibiting agricultural production, and hindering navigation. These issues, coupled with religious sentiments between predominantly Muslim Bangladesh and Hindu India, have produced anti-Indian sentiments among many sections of the Bangladeshi population.

With regard to Pakistan, only 13 percent of Bangladeshis view Pakistan favorably (Pew Research Center Global Attitudes and Trends 2011). Conversely, Pakistan has not forgotten the bitter episode of Bangladesh's secession as evidenced by the ongoing controversy of returning the Biharis or "stranded Pakistanis" in Bangladesh to Pakistan. Biharis are originally refugees from the 1947 Partition who had escaped India to the then East Pakistan. During the 1971 Liberation War, Biharis supported Pakistan for which they are still facing discrimination by the larger Bangladeshi society. Adding further tensions is the fact that Bangladesh and Pakistan differ widely on the number of Bangladeshi deaths in the 1971 war. Whereas, Bangladesh argues that 3 million people were killed in the hands of the Pakistani army, Pakistan chalks down the number from 50,000 to 100,000. In more recent years, roughly 40 years after the 1971 atrocities had taken place, the Awami League-led government of Bangladesh was able to bring to trial those who had collaborated with Pakistan. Although the prosecution and hanging of the Pakistani collaborators brought closure to a painful past for many segments of the Bangladeshi population, they did not ease Bangladesh-Pakistan tensions. Viewed largely as traitors in Bangladesh, Pakistanis conversely view these individuals as pious Muslims who worked to keep the Islamic state of Pakistan intact.

Thus far, I discussed how religion has come to shape the geopolitics of South Asia and the relationships among the immigrants' homelands. But how has "elsewhere" complicated the homeland's religious-politics landscapes? The following section will give some examples of how Muslim life in South Asia has been influenced by the region's long history of numerous interactions with the "elsewhere" Middle East.

Religion and Politics in the South Asian Homelands: Homeland-Elsewhere Connections

Cross-border connections between South Asia and the "elsewhere" Middle East go back for centuries (Aydin 2017), with the exchange of ideas and resources, and the back and forth travel of tradesmen, conquerors, scholars, artisans, and, in more recent times, migrant laborers. These various

forms of exchange over the years have transformed both regions. For example, a sizeable portion of the Middle East’s migrant labor comes from South Asia. In 2002, there was an estimated 3 million Indian, 1.8 million Bangladeshi, and 1 million Pakistani workers in the Middle East (Castles and Miller 2009). In South Asia, effects of its interconnections with the Middle East penetrate not just the region’s economy, but also many other areas of life, such as religion. For example, Bangladesh has sent almost half of its stock of 7.7 million migrant workers to the Middle East—which is 13 to 14 percent of the total migrant population in the GCC countries (Doherty et al. 2014; United Nations 2013). In 2012 alone, formal remittances sent by this huge migrant labor force accounted for 12 percent of Bangladesh’s GDP, amounting to over \$14 billion (World Bank 2014). Moreover, upon their return, these migrants bring with them a diversified body of religious knowledge, which they then transfuse into their social surroundings through interactions with families, friends, and neighbors. Nazli Kibria (2011), for instance, finds that many Bangladeshi migrant laborers returning from Saudi Arabia view themselves as “agents of religious change, working to bring Islamic practice in their home community in line” (135) with their observations while abroad in “the land of Allah” (136). These changes entail conducting Islamic practices in a “correct” or “authentic” way, and reinforcing *purdah* (gender segregation across all spheres of social life).

Resources and influence coming in from Arab countries have also in many ways shaped South Asia’s Islamic infrastructure. Although traditionally Islam in South Asia has been distinct from Islam in the Middle East, it arguably began to change with the rising influence of Wahhabism—a fundamentalist interpretation of Islam that is prevalent in Saudi Arabia—and the huge influx of Saudi money into South Asia’s mosques and *madrassas* (Islamic schools) (Pillalamarri 2014; Rashid 2012; Shane 2016). For example, traditional South Asian versions of Islam are based on Sufism or Islamic mysticism, and combine elements from local cultures and native religions (Jaffrelot and Louër 2017). Although historically the Indian subcontinent has had many Muslim rulers—most

notably the Mughals—they were often isolated from the rest of the Muslim world and had to wage wars with other Muslim sultans in the region (Keay 2004). Moreover, because the number of Muslims in the subcontinent came second to that of Hindus, the Muslim sultans were reliant on the loyalty of a vast body of non-Muslim subjects. Among the general population, there was a lot of cultural mixing between Hindus and Muslims, with Hindus often visiting the graves of Sufi masters, and Muslims leaving offerings at Hindu temples (Dalrymple 2015). In this context, the Muslim rulers mostly maintained religious tolerance over the region’s multi-religious population while also cultivating a new form of religious culture based on Arab and Persian traditions (Metcalf 2009). As such, the Islam that evolved in the region syncretized elements from Hinduism and local cultural beliefs, such as visiting shrines and graves of holy men, incorporating music in worship, and meditative practices influenced by yoga (Metcalf 2009; Dalrymple 2015). These traditions, many of them practiced by Sufis, were not sanctioned in the more mainstream interpretations of Islam.

However, with Saudi Arabia’s global export of Wahhabism, influence of this puritanical strand of Islam began to grow over Islam in South Asia, particularly through vast donations made by the Saudi government, individuals, charities, and organizations to the region’s mosques and *madrassas* (Rashid 2012; Shane 2016; Jaffrelot and Louër 2017). Just last year, for instance, Saudi Arabia reportedly agreed to donate almost \$1 billion to Bangladesh for the construction of 560 mosques—one in every town—and a permanent campus for Islami Arabic University (*Dawn* 2017; Abedin 2017). These numbers are important as Wahhabi-funded mosques and *madrassas* teach a fundamentalist version of Islam and are allegedly used for financing jihadi networks in South Asia (Choksy and Choksy 2015; Georgy 2011). In 2009, in a classified cable communication made public by WikiLeaks, the then U.S. Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton called Saudi Arabia and its neighboring countries the chief financial supporters of many extremist activities (Lichtblau and Schmitt 2010). A group that has been influenced by Wahhabism in South Asia is the indigenous

Deobandi sect, which can be found in Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh (Mallet 2015; Syed et al., 2016). The Deobandi subscribes to the puritanical Wahhabi interpretations and rejects the traditional South Asian practices of Islam, such as visiting shrines. The group that emerged in resistance to the Deobandi militancy is the Barelvi, which advocates for the traditional South Asian practices.

These changes have been especially consequential for Pakistan, which is struggling with an increasingly challenging problem of Islamist militancy. The interconnections between Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and other Gulf monarchies helped Islamist networks expand in the region since the first Afghan war when the Saudis and other Gulf countries supported the Mujahedeen against the “infidel” soviets (Jaffrelot and Louër 2017). Indeed, among the three South Asian homelands, Pakistan has had particularly close ties with Saudi Arabia based on both their common geopolitical goals and religious ideologies (Cafiero and Wagner 2015; Tharoor 2010). On one hand, Saudi Arabia claims to be the custodians of Islam and its holiest sites. On the other, Pakistan was created as a state for Muslims (unlike Bangladesh, which, although a predominantly Muslim country, had been founded upon secular ideals). In fact, the Faisal Mosque, which is the biggest in Pakistan, had been named after the late Saudi King who had funded it. Geopolitically, Saudi Arabia has vested interests in Pakistan, which shares borders with Iran, Saudi Arabia’s long time nemesis in both religious and political affairs. Saudi Arabia sees Sunni-majority Pakistan as a key ally in countering Iran’s growing influence in the region. Even as recently as February 2018, for instance, Saudi Arabia asked—and received—military assistance from Pakistan to stem the influence of Shia Iran in the Yemen conflict, which many analysts view as a proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia (Reuters 2018). Over the years, Saudi Arabia has created inroads through Pakistan’s universities, mosques and *madrassas* to exert its influence over the country (Jaffrelot and Louër 2017). These Saudi-sponsored Deobandi and Wahhabi *madrassas* have produced individuals who went on to join Islamist militant groups like Al Qaeda, the Taliban, and Lashkar-e-Taiba. In domestic politics, Saudi Arabia supported Pakistan’s

turn towards Islamization. And, perhaps most notably, Saudi Arabia financed Pakistan's nuclear weapons, making it the only Muslim country to possess them.

In the case of Bangladesh, individuals inculcated in Wahhabi-sponsored mosques and *madrassas* organized into the powerful fundamentalist organization, Hefazat-e-Islam. Like their Deobandi counterparts in India and Pakistan, they too reject more interpretive readings of Islam, advocating instead for a literal interpretation of the Quran. Comprised of *madrasa* teachers and students and based at more than 25,000 *madrassas* in Bangladesh, Hefazat-e-Islam acts as an Islamist pressure group in Bangladeshi politics (Mustafa 2013). In 2013, gathering almost half a million supporters, they launched violent marches and rallies on the streets of Dhaka, the country's capital, demanding the government to enact a 13-point charter, which included an "anti-blasphemy law." Other points included: banning men and women mixing in public, erecting sculptures in public places, and candlelit vigils; cancelling the country's women development policy; ending "shameless behavior and dresses"; sentencing exemplary punishment to all bloggers and others who "insult Islam"; and declaring those of the Ahmadiya sect of Islam as "non-Muslims" (Mustafa 2013). The government, wishing not to butt heads with this formidable pressure group, chose to have peaceful negotiations with Hefazat leaders. Eventually, some of the Hefazat's demands did come to fruition. For instance, in 2017, Bangladeshi authorities acquiesced to Islamist pressures and removed a statue of a woman personifying justice from Bangladesh's Supreme Court building (Manik and Barry 2017). That same year, in an effort to accommodate the demands of Islamist hard-liners, Bangladesh's Ministry of Education removed stories and poems from textbooks that Hefazat-e-Islam deemed "atheist," such as those by Hindu writers (Barry and Manik 2017). Many secular Bangladeshis see the Islamization of textbooks to mark a shift in society and politics in Bangladesh, and view the country to be slowly leaning towards Islamism.

Although none of the participants in this study adhere to any of these fundamentalist groups or ideologies, they nonetheless come from homelands that have been deeply shaped by religion, which itself has been influenced by South Asia's interactions with "elsewhere," in this case, the Middle East. These homeland-based orientations towards the "elsewhere" Middle East comes to shape how the immigrants locate themselves both in hostland and global politics—a process I will discuss at length in the next chapter. Overall, however, these homeland interactions with the Middle East come to matter to the South Asian Muslim Americans when they arrive in post-9/11 America. Already "strangers in a strange land," these immigrants come under further suspicion from the hostland society when exogenous shocks bring to light of their homeland's Middle East connections. The following sections discuss the religious-political dynamics within each of the homelands, and how, through their interactions with the "elsewhere" Middle East, they come to affect the participants' identification in the hostland.

Pakistan: Religion and Politics in a State for Muslims

Pakistan was created in 1947 as a state for Muslims. Its name translates to "the land of the pure." True to its ideological foundation as an Islamic state, Islam is the country's official state religion with 96.4 percent of the country's total population being Muslim (Central Intelligence Agency 2016). As such, Islam is a main component of the "Pakistani" national identity, society, and everyday life. And it has undoubtedly shaped Pakistan's political landscape and foreign relations. In domestic politics, key actors, namely Pakistan's powerful military, Islamist groups, and the national democratic parties have all jostled for power since the 1970s, leading to coups, sectarian conflicts, and proxy wars. On one hand, the military, which enjoys high levels of confidence in the general Pakistani society (Fair, Ramsay, and Kull 2008), argued that only they could bring development to Pakistan by establishing a secular environment in which technocrats, free from the influence of politicians, could run state affairs. The Islamists, on the other hand, also claimed to hold the solution

for attaining development, but in ways directly opposite to the Pakistani military. According to the Islamists' view, only state implementation of Islamic ideology, not secularism, could solve the sociopolitical problems inhibiting development. Mainstream Islamist groups in Pakistan, such as Jamaat-e-Islami, effectively organized social movements to attain an ideal Islamic state. Their goal resonated among significant portions of the public, as the creation of an Islamic state was the foundation upon which the country was created.

However, the Islamists and the Pakistani military were able to reach an alliance in the late 1970s under the pro-Islamist President, General Zia-ul-Haq who had taken hold of power by ousting Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in a coup. The centerpiece of General Zia's regime was the Islamization of Pakistan (Lieven 2011). In a significant turn away from Pakistan's largely secular laws, President Zia established Islamic laws and public policies. For example, he established what later became the Federal Sharia Court to judge legal cases based on the Quran and *Sunna* (teachings of Prophet Muhammad), and replaced parts of the Pakistan Penal Code with the Haddood Ordinance, which criminalized adultery and all forms of fornication outside of a legally valid marriage, and introduced punishments of whipping, amputation, and death by stoning to Pakistani law (Lau 2007). Moreover, Zia bolstered the influence of the *Ulema* (Islamic clergy) and Islamic parties in national politics (Lieven 2011). In return, the Islamists gave the military's rule religious and public legitimacy, which the military then used to suppress democratic parties (Nasr 2008). General Zia also used mainstream Islamist activism to coordinate the Afghan *Mujahedeen* against the Soviets during the Afghan War.

After the Zia regime, Pakistani politics became mired in conflicts between the military and civilians on one hand, and Islamists and secular political institutions on the other. The 1990s saw the political power oscillating between different democratic forces backed by the Islamists and the military. In the late 90s, the military lost its direct control of Pakistan's mainstream Islamism to the

ruling democratic party, Pakistan Muslim League led by Nawaz Sharif. However, in 1999, the military staged a coup under the leadership of the secular-leaning general, Pervez Musharraf. The coup overthrew Nawaz Sharif, ushering a new era of political relations among the military, Islamists, and civilians. For instance, although Musharraf used Islamism strategically, he removed Islam from its ideological position in Pakistan's domestic and foreign military strategies, and reduced its influence in the public sphere. Instead, he envisioned a secular military dictatorship, which will be based on the support of a modern middle class and liberal-minded Muslims.

However, 9/11 was an exogenous shock to the Pakistani political scenario. Not only was Pakistan an ally to the United States and dependent on its foreign aid for development, it was also located in a crucial geopolitical location as it shared its northwestern borders with Afghanistan. The Pakistani military supported the United States in its War on Terror, and fought the Taliban and Al Qaeda in the Afghanistan-Pakistan corridor (Nasr 2008). This opposition to Al Qaeda meant that the Pakistani military could no longer use militant *jibadi* groups as strategic assets to manage Afghanistan or use them in the conflict with India over Kashmir. With the military in open conflict with the Islamist political power base in Pakistan, Pakistan's alliance with the United States—one that is still ongoing despite many ups and downs over the years—came at a hefty price for the country's own domestic and regional geopolitical interests. However, Pakistan's role in the War on Terror is not as straightforward and is the subject of much debate among political analysts. Whereas, Pakistan facilitated the U.S.-led intervention into Afghanistan, it has also been accused of providing a safe haven to radical Islamist groups that target India and the Afghan Taliban.

In 2008, Musharraf resigned amidst calls for his impeachment from his opponents and the public. The end of his military dictatorship opened a new era for Pakistan's democratic parties, and since then power has shifted from one party to another through general elections. However, as recently as 2017, Nawaz Sharif who had been re-elected as Prime Minister back in 2013 was forced

to resign after being disqualified by the Pakistani Supreme Court over corruption allegations. Since then, Shahid Abbasi has been named the interim Prime Minister until the June 2018 general election. Islam and Islamism, however, continue to be at the crux of Pakistan's domestic and international politics, with the country facing an increasingly challenging problem of suppressing sectarian conflicts and Islamist militancy. As discussed in the earlier section, Pakistan's Islamist militant groups are increasingly becoming difficult to control with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries providing them support. And, Al Qaeda, despite suffering heavy blows since 2001, is still entrenched in Afghanistan and Pakistan where it has worked closely with the Taliban and unified Pakistan's myriad militant groups under a "global *Jihad*" (McNally and Weinbaum 2016). These links between Pakistan's internal dynamics and "elsewhere"-rooted politics have affected Pakistan's global national image, and, in so doing, the lives of its emigrants abroad. These dynamics are discussed as follows.

Pakistan's Global National Image and Homeland-Hostland Relations

Pakistan's global national image is intricately tied to its history of Islamist politics and militancy, its internal ethnic and sectarian conflicts, and its role in global geopolitics, particularly that with the United States in the context of the War on Terror (Rana 2011). The relationship between Pakistan and the United States could be best described as that between "frenemies." Although key allies in global geopolitics, both nations nonetheless view each other with reservation and suspicion. To name just a few issues in the two country's long and rocky relationship, the U.S. conducting raids and dropping drones on Pakistani territory to combat the insurgency in Afghanistan and Pakistan's borderlands have created feelings of frustration and resentment in Pakistan towards the United States. Moreover, many Pakistanis feel that the U.S. has left Pakistan on its own to deal with the aftermath of the Afghan War and, later, the War on Terror. Conversely, on the U.S. side, in spite of America's restraints, Pakistan, with the help of Saudi Arabia, became the first Muslim nuclear power in 1998 after a nuclear arms race with its geopolitical rival, India. While this was a cause for

jubilation in Pakistan and the larger the Muslim world, it was a nightmare scenario for the West because “an Islamic bomb” had finally become a reality (Ahmed 2001: 128). Even as recently as January 2018, President Trump called Pakistan a “safe haven” for terrorists and froze U.S. foreign aid going into the country (Landler and Harris 2018). The freeze includes military equipment as well as almost \$1.1 billion of funding that the Pentagon provides to defray the costs of counterterrorism operations in Pakistan (Ibid).

The relationship between the Pakistan and the United States had reached a particularly low point in 2011 when Osama bin Laden, the leader of Al Qaeda who had claimed responsibility for the 9/11 terrorist attacks, was found living in Abbottabad, one of the most fortified cities in Pakistan. In a highly covert C.I.A. operation, a team of U.S. Navy SEALs entered into Pakistani territory and killed bin Laden under the orders of President Barack Obama. This event not only made world news but also led the two countries to point fingers of blame at each other. Whereas the United States accused Pakistan to have known about bin Laden’s presence and intentionally hide information from them, Pakistan denied these accusations, instead blaming the U.S. for violating Pakistan’s sovereignty.

Distrust between the two states also permeated into public opinion. According to a Pew Research poll, 63 percent of Pakistanis disapproved of the U.S. raid that killed Osama bin Laden, with only 18 percent believing that the Pakistani government knew about bin Laden’s hideout in Abbottabad (Pew Research Center Global Attitudes Project 2011). Another poll showed that 74 percent of Pakistanis view the United States as an enemy, with the public increasingly becoming less willing to work with the United States in efforts to combat extremist groups (Pew Research Center Global Attitudes Project 2012). Conversely in the U.S., public opinion towards Pakistan is also low, with just 10 percent of Americans believing that the United States can generally trust Pakistan (Pew Research Center 2012).

These views are also prevalent among Pakistani immigrants in the United States as the immigrants bring their homeland's contexts with them to the hostland. Although the participants were all glad that Osama bin Laden had been finally captured, many resented America's disregard of their homeland's sovereignty. This is illustrated in Atif's interview excerpt below. Atif is a first generation Pakistani immigrant, and, at the time of the interview, was a college student. I had asked Atif to pick the place to conduct the interview. As he was meeting me between his classes, he had chosen to meet at a coffee shop on his college campus. We talked about a number of things, from his family background to his initial culture shocks upon arrival in America. At one point, we started talking about the news when the conversation flowed into politics. He talked about his views on U.S. depictions of Islam and American interventions in Muslim countries, which also included his homeland, Pakistan. As he was talking, though, I noticed that he was hesitant to mention Osama bin Laden's name. Whenever, bin Laden came up, he would nod suggestively and refer to him as "the guy" or "that person." Given that the coffee shop was busy, with the tables and chairs located quite close to each other, I gathered that he did not want to draw people's attention to himself or the topic of our conversation. Moreover, in contrast to other cases where Atif, like my other informants, referred to the U.S. as "we," he used "they" when referring to the United States and its foreign policies in Pakistan and other Muslim countries. He said:

"I don't agree with the U.S. breaching another country's sovereignty. I am gonna take Pakistan as example. Like, bringing drones without our [Pakistanis'] permission and killing people in the tribal areas. They [the U.S.] don't know if there are actual terrorists or not. I don't agree with their invasion of Iraq or Afghanistan. Destroying two countries in search for one guy [Osama bin Laden]? I don't support that part of their foreign policy, especially towards Muslim countries...I don't agree with them breaching other country's sovereignty, especially with the killing of that person [Osama bin Laden]. They could have coordinated it with the government of Pakistan to do that. They didn't necessarily have to breach into a city 30 miles away from the capital of the country. That's sort of an act of war if you think about it."

Again, most of the Pakistani participants, regardless of their immigrant generation or level of interest in homeland politics, appeared to share a common view of U.S.-Pakistan relations, which is

that United States used Pakistan as its regional proxy to fight its wars both before and after 9/11, but has left the country to deal with the messy aftermath on its own. These views were particularly evident at an event organized by the Pakistani student association at a college campus. The event featured a guest speaker who was a young lawyer and activist from Pakistan. He was invited to present an overview of the current political situation in Pakistan. The event was widely publicized by all the South Asian student organizations and everyone who was anyone in the Desi community on campus seemed to be going. The event was scheduled to take place late evening at an auditorium, which also served as a classroom during the day. I had arrived about thirty minutes late, but people were still trickling in. As I was about to enter the room, I noticed two Bangladeshi girls entering with me. The presentation had already started. As I made my way towards the back of the room, which was almost full, I noticed many familiar faces, mostly Pakistani students but also a few Indians and Bangladeshis. There were also older men and women in the audience who came from off-campus. Several of them had worn traditional *salwar kamiz* and *kurta*. The speaker, also wearing a *kurta*, was standing near the podium while the moderator, Bushra, a second generation Pakistani Muslim I knew from fieldwork, was sitting on a chair further towards wall. She too had worn traditional clothes, a green *salwar kamiz*.

The energy of the room was charged, with the audience listening with rapt attention to the presentation. Many nodded vigorously in agreement with what the speaker was saying. The speaker himself was speaking passionately about outbreaks of sectarian violence in Pakistan, often referring to pictures projected on a large screen behind him. After his presentation, the moderator opened the floor for audience questions. Several hands shot up. Most of what the audience had to say, however, were not questions but their own take on the direction of Pakistani politics. Several audience members, both young and old, expressed deep unhappiness and anger towards their homeland's political leadership. The talk appeared to give the Pakistani American attendees an opportunity to

vent their frustration about their homelands' turbulent domestic politics in a setting with other co-ethnics. Some commented how the War on Terror was a global event that took place on Pakistani soil but that it had added to just Pakistan's already long list of domestic obstacles towards development. A young Pakistani girl commented that the war against Al Qaeda allowed the United States to "interfere" with Pakistani politics. A young man then followed up by saying that this has always been the case, such as when "the Americans left us to deal with the drug problem after the Afghan war." In response, the speaker gave an overview of some of the ways in which the Pakistani leadership has both benefitted and suffered in their dealings with the United States.

However, despite a sense of collective resentment that many Pakistani Americans appear to have towards the United States, particularly in the context of its foreign policy towards their homeland, their views of the United States are not as negative as that of their co-nationals back home in Pakistan. When immigrants arrive in the receiving society, they evaluate their new environment for themselves, and as they do, they find that many of the preconceived notions they have brought about the hostland from back home are not always accurate. For example, Alam, a college freshman, grew up in a political family in Pakistan. As such, he has been brought up in close contact with the country's political elites, giving him an insider's insight into both "the corruption" and "sincere attempts to bring development" to Pakistan. His family is conservative and Alam himself is very religious-minded. He prays five times a day, recites *surahs* or verses from the Quran during the day, and considers Islam to be his "moral compass." Furthermore, he finds Islam to be "a complete guide" for leading a pious life. He is, in his own words, "very strong in [his] belief." Alam's religious views have clashed multiple times with his uncle's political ambitions and activities. According to him, while he loves his uncle back in Pakistan, he cannot condone his falsehoods and wrongdoings.

A proud Pakistani, Alam came to America as an adult with the view that it is “anti-Islamic” and that “Americans generally do not like Muslims.” His first real exposure to the American society has been in college where he met people from different backgrounds. He was pleasantly surprised to find the college campus to be very inclusive of diversity in that he has thus far never been “discriminated for being Muslim.” He said, “If they hear I am Pakistani or I am Muslim, they become curious. In a good way. Like, they want to know more about my culture.” Alam was also very impressed with the America’s “law and order,” and that everyone had equal rights. Speaking in his characteristically heavy accent, Alam said:

I say America is more Islamic than Pakistan! This is what Islam says—to treat everyone equally. You can say you are an Islamic country and that most people are Muslim but you have to establish order [in the way] it is [prescribed] in Islam to be really Islamic. In America, there is law and order—look at the nature, everywhere it is beautiful and I see Allah’s grace in this country. Like, even if a big name does crime, he will go to jail. The level of corruption in the government is very low than Pakistan. I feel like this is the kind of order with justice and equality that is in Islam.

“Elsewhere” Dimensions of Pakistan’s Global National Image

Contexts and images of Muslim-relate conflicts in various “elsewhere” places are inextricably tied, and often conflated, with Pakistan’s global national image as a Muslim country that is a “safe haven” for terrorists. Alisha’s example illustrates this point. Alisha is a second-generation Pakistani American who works as a rotating healthcare assistant. While waiting for the physician, she sometimes chats with patients to keep them company. She is often asked where she is “originally from” based on her ethnic facial features. Alisha recalled how once, upon learning she is Pakistani, a patient had asked, “Oh. So do you practice Sharia Law?” Alisha replied that she tries to lead an Islamic lifestyle. The patient then asked, “Do you drive?” Alisha laughed and said that it is in Saudi Arabia, not Pakistan, where women are not allowed to drive. She added that that particular Saudi law has more to do with culture than religion as “the Quran doesn’t mention cars.” Alisha told me of another similar instance where a patient had asked, “I don’t know if you mind, but what do you

think of ISIS?” It is important to note that in these interactions, Alisha was not asked about her religion. Both patients had assumed that she is Muslim after learning that she came from Pakistan, and consequently asked her about her views on ISIS and Sharia Law. Moreover, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and ISIS-controlled Syria and Iraq all seemed to carry the same conflated meaning—they were all “Muslim” places, backward and wreaked with Islamist violence, that practice Sharia Law. Alisha was not come from Saudi Arabia, Iraq, or Syria. And yet, these “elsewhere” places are linked to the “Pakistani” identity in American public perception and thus have come to shape how she was identified in these particular interactions.

Similarly, a common question that Pakistanis hear from their American friends after returning from a visit to their or their parents’ homeland is whether they were safe during their trip. Although seemingly an innocuous question and one that has been asked with friendly concern, the underlying assumption is that Pakistan is not a safe place. Pakistani Americans are aware of this general perception about their homeland and view the American news media as partly responsible for perpetuating a negative global national image of Pakistan. For example, Atif from earlier said:

I have a problem with the news people. They focus on the negatives more than the positives. It portrays certain countries in a bad way, in a violent way. But the reality is that if someone who was brought up here and I take him to Pakistan, he’s gonna get a really big shock. Because it is a very important country in the world and the terrorism they say and the violent image they say are localized in a certain region, which is towards the north. The capital, if you go there, it’s one of the most beautiful cities in the world. You won’t even realize that you are in Pakistan. And if you have the main city, it has a lot of history, it is a very important and popular tourist attraction as well. So the violent image is localized to one place but the other countries, people are going to shocked if they go to the other cities. Especially if they heard the violent image of Pakistan in the news.

Pakistan’s global national image has also come to shape, to an extent, the perception of some second-generation Pakistanis towards their ancestral homeland. For example, Anwar was born in Lahore, Pakistan. After travelling extensively because of his father’s job to diverse places like Malaysia and the United Kingdom, Anwar finally settled in Los Angeles with his parents and

younger brother when he was around five years old. Although he largely grew up in Los Angeles, Anwar prides himself in being Pakistani American, an identity he has maintained by speaking Urdu fluently and flying home to his parents homes in Karachi and Lahore every 2-3 years. Now, twenty-two years old and a college graduate, Anwar recalls the warm memories he has of Pakistan and how much his birthplace has inspired him to go into teaching. He considers himself privileged to have been able to immigrate to the United States and pursue higher education, all privileges that according to him are denied to many children in Pakistan. Nonetheless, he admits that growing up in the United States and watching American media have given him “a biased view” of Pakistan as a violent country that is hostile to Americans. This image of Pakistan surfaced when Anwar went back to Pakistan during college. To his “surprise,” he was able to walk around Lahore wearing an American Eagle t-shirt without confronting any hostility triggered by it. During his interview, he recalled one instance that particularly made him realize about his biased views of Pakistan:

I remember seeing a white blonde British woman in Pakistan. I was horrified for her—because of the fear that was ingrained in me—and I was like, ‘Oh my God, what are you doing?’ I was actually sitting by her in a movie theatre and I was like, ‘Can I ask you a question?’ And she was like, ‘Yeah’. And I was like, ‘I am from the U.S. I am a college student. I hope it’s not a weird question to ask you but do you feel unsafe here?’ And she was like, ‘I have been living here for the last nine years.’ I had to then check my understanding of reality because that wasn’t the answer I was expecting. I was expecting her to say something like ‘I am a hostage—save me!’ Hahaha! And I would be like ‘Okay, let’s get you back.’ I realized then that that’s not how the whole country is. Yes, there is terrorism. Yes, the government is corrupt. But the people of Pakistan are some of the best people in the world. And that the violence is contained only within a certain region.

The Pakistani participants we have discussed thus far all belong to the Sunni sect of Islam. Their views of Pakistan, such as the violence being contained only within the border areas, are not always shared by their Shia co-ethnics who are violently persecuted by Sunnis back in the homeland. Whereas violence to the Sunni participants mostly refer to Islamist militancy in the border areas, for Shias, violence can come from anywhere within Pakistan. As Nargis, a Shia Muslim we will meet later, describes it: “Your male relatives can go to the mosque on a Friday and not come back because

it was blown up in a bomb or someone attacked the people praying inside.” As such, the Shia participants’ long history of being members of a persecuted minority has shaped their views towards Pakistan and the “Pakistani” identity, “the Muslim world,” geopolitics, and contexts in America. The following section analyzes these sectarian dynamics, and how they come to gain new dimensions based on hostland contexts and “elsewhere” geopolitics.

Sunni-Shia Sectarian Divide Among Pakistani Americans

Most of the Muslim population in Pakistan, roughly 85-90 percent, is Sunni (Central Intelligence Agency 2016), with just about 15 percent of Pakistani citizens being Shia (Council on Foreign Relations 2014). This demographic breakdown of Pakistani Muslims along the Sunni-Shia divide is representative of the global Muslim population—Shias only comprise 15 percent of the 1.6 billion Muslims in the world whereas Sunnis are the overwhelming majority (Pew Research Center on Religion and Public Life 2011). This is also representative of this study’s sample. Although I recruited participants based on who identified as “Muslim,” upon interviewing, I found that only 3 out of the 60 participants are Shia, and that all of them came from a Pakistani background.

In spite of this very small sub-sample, Shia Pakistanis present an instructive case that shows how variations in the participants’ self-identification as “Muslims” can lead to different worldviews with different “elsewhere” centers. For instance, whereas Saudi Arabia is a very prominent “elsewhere” place for Sunnis in their self-identification as “Muslims,” it is not the case for Shias. Rather, foreign places that are predominantly Shia or those that have ongoing Shia-related conflicts become “elsewhere” places in their sense of self as Muslims. The case of Shia Pakistanis also shows that despite being categorized within the same “Muslim” label in the hostland, variations in the immigrants’ religious experience from back home shape how they navigate being members of a stigmatized minority differently in America. Whereas the Sunni Pakistani immigrants find

themselves to be a stigmatized religious minority upon arrival in the United States, their Shia co-ethnics have been in a similar position even back in the homeland.

Indeed, in Pakistan, “Shia” is not only a minority identity but also a stigmatized category. In fact, 37 percent of Pakistanis believe that Shias are not even Muslims (Pew Research Center Religion and Public Life 2012b). According to this Sunni perspective, Shiism is considered religious innovation or heresy. In a country that has been founded on Islamic ideology specifically for Muslims, to be thus deemed as non-Muslims by a large segment of the population has exposed Shias to severe persecution at the hands of Sunni hard-liners. Although rooted in a centuries-old schism within Islam, the Sunni-Shia sectarian violence is perpetrated by regional militant networks with political goals and ties to transnational terrorist networks, such as Al Qaeda and the Taliban. Tensions and proxy wars between the Sunni global power, Saudi Arabia, and its Shia rival, Iran have served to give more potency to the sectarian militant networks on both sides of the conflict in Pakistan. Over 2,300 deaths have been reported in the four main provinces of Pakistan during 2007-2013 as a result of this conflict (Rafiq 2014).

Unsurprisingly, this deep-rooted sectarian conflict has shaped the worldview of Shia Pakistanis not only towards their homeland but also towards the global Muslim community (a topic we will revisit in Chapters 5 and 6). Moreover, the remnants of this conflict are present among both the Shia Pakistanis who left their homeland years ago as well as those who have been born and raised in the United States to immigrant parents. The second-generation Shia Pakistanis have grown up learning that Shias are different from Sunnis, that despite being Muslims and believing in one Allah and the Prophet Muhammad, they go to different mosques, have different religious rituals and festivals, believe in different symbols, and revere different religious figures than do their Sunni friends. Over time, they learn that these differences come with certain inequalities. They hear stories of Shia persecution from their parents and Imams at the mosque as well as news from their relatives

back home. As they become more informed and attuned to this schism, they interpret global dynamics, homeland politics, and the *Ummah* from a Shia lens. They use that lens not only to understand the collective position of Shias in the world, but also to classify and make sense of their immediate surroundings in the hostland.

For example, when introduced to Muslims in the United States, the Shia participants tend to look for indicators of the newly acquainted individuals' sectarian identity, such as their last names or whether they are wearing a Zulfiqar pendant (Many Shias wear a pendant in the shape of Imam Ali's legendary sword, the Zulfiqar, as a religious talisman). Again, in public prayer spaces the Shia participants would look for the *mohr* or the *turbah*, which a small egg-sized tablet that Shias keep on the prayer mat to prostrate on during prayers. This is exemplified in my interview with Arifa, a Shia Pakistani who had come to America with her parents at a very young age. Since then, she has gone to visit Pakistan as an adult. Soon after graduating from college, she got married to another Shia Muslim who is also from Pakistan. At the time I took Arifa's interview, she was still in college and had recently returned from a visit to Pakistan with her family. When I met and recruited Arifa as a participant for this study, I had not known that she was Shia. She informed me that she was Shia during the interview when I asked her questions about her "Muslim" identity. At one point when I asked her what sets her experiences as a Shia Muslim apart from her Sunni friends on a day-to-day basis in America, Arifa paused and seemed to have trouble finding where to start. She replied that she has "internalized the difference between Sunnis and Shias so heavily" that she "sees it on a regular basis." An excerpt of our conversation is as follows:

Arifa: I can tell when someone is Shia.

Me: Really? How? I honestly couldn't tell you were Shia before you told me.

Arifa: There are ways. We Shias know what to look for [small laugh].

Me: Like?

Arifa: Okay, so when we go to a public space to pray, like a mosque, I look for the *mohr* in front of them.

Me: What's a *mohr*?

Arifa: It's a small tablet about this size [makes an okay sigh with her thumb and index] that we keep in front of us when we pray. We touch our heads on it when we do *sajda* [prostration during prayers]. Only Shias do that. So when I see it I know the person is Shia. I actually saw a girl—she didn't tell anyone that she was Shia—but I saw her pray once and I told my friend that she is Shia. Some of my friends would be like, 'Oh I didn't pick up on that' and I would be like 'No, I know, I saw them.' Sometimes, but not always, Shias were specific rings or *Aqeeqs* with turquoise stone. So if they are wearing that, I know. If they are wearing black in the month of Muharram [the holy month of mourning for Shias] or for girls if they are not wearing makeup, then I know.

In Arifa's view, Sunnis use the same indicators of Shia faith in their own boundary-work.

But, whereas the indicators mark whether one is an "insider" for Shias, they are the markers of one's "otherness" for Sunnis. For instance, Arifa talked to me about her discomfort and sense of "otherness" when praying in public prayer spaces or at Sunni mosques. She said:

I definitely feel like even though I am Muslim, I feel like an "other" in some ways [uses hand quotes]. Even amongst Muslims. Even when you go for *Jummah* prayer [Friday noon prayers] and for Shias we have the *mobr*. And sometimes the people on either side [of the prayer line] would casually give you looks. They kind of give you these looks so that *you* know that *they* know. That since you are praying with your head on that [*mobr*], then you must be Shia.

For a long time I avoided going to *Jummah* prayers. And when I would go, I would go to a Shia *masjid*, which was farther away [from the Sunni mosque]...I would just avoid that [Sunni] space because I didn't want to feel uncomfortable during prayer. Because then during prayer instead of thinking about the prayers that I would be reciting, I would be thinking about the girl next to me—is she looking at me, does she not like me, does she not want to hug me after *Jummah* prayer [as is the norm]—and I would be thinking about all that and I realized that this is not good for me. So I would just stop going to those places. For a while, I just wouldn't bring up that I was Shia. I would just quietly let it go. It's only been in the last few years, especially since I came to college that I realized that this was something important to me and if it's important to me, the people who are important to me should also know that. So I started becoming a little bit more vocal about my identity among my friends.

However, these boundaries within the Muslim community sometimes hold little salience in how Muslims are generally perceived by the larger U.S. society. In post-9/11 America, both these historically opposing sects are grouped together into a "Muslim" monolith, and are subject to the same kind of hostility and suspicion from the larger American public. While this common hostland

experience leads to some sense of solidarity as “Muslims,” a collective sense of resentment nonetheless percolates among Shias towards the Sunni majority. These tensions emerge in the event of an exogenous shock or when news of violence against Shias makes it into the hostland media. The Shia participants tend to closely follow the reactions of the predominantly Sunni global Muslim community to these events. And most often, they find there is little impact of such events among their Muslim peers. Sunnis’ lack of response to the plight of Shias reinforces their sense of being “outsiders” in the Muslim community, leading them to be critical of the so-called *Ummatic* solidarity. Rashed, who is a first generation Shia Pakistani immigrant, talks about these issues in the following interview excerpt:

Shias are very critical of Muslims for the fact that collectively they talk about the oppression they are facing in America for being Muslims but they don’t address the oppression that they themselves impose on the minority communities in the lands that they call Muslim countries, you know? So Shias are very tightly knit in that we have faced the oppression from Muslims historically. It continues today. But now we talk about Muslims facing oppression but we still don’t talk about *Shias* facing oppression—in Malaysia it is *illegal* to be a Shia. In Saudi Arabia, they are putting a teenager to death because he criticized the government’s inactions to provide for Shias who are the minority community.

Rashed then went on to talk about the 2015 ISIS attacks in Beirut, and how little an impact it produced among even the Muslim community in the United States. Whereas all three participants were informed and cared to feel deeply about the Beirut attacks, the event was largely overlooked by most of the Muslim world and the global news media (we will discuss this more in Chapter 6). He believes that the lack of Muslim response to the event had partly to do with the fact that the attacks took place in a Shia-majority area. Rashed’s quote above also reflects how all three Shia participants interpret their identity and experiences as Shia Muslims with Shias from other nationalities. For instance, all three participants believe that their experiences are unique to being Shias from Pakistan where they comprise a religious minority. They often draw parallels between their experiences with those of Shias from Iran where Shias are the majority. They believe that contrary to Shia Pakistanis

who are more attached to their sectarian identity, Shias who come from Iran are more attached to their “Muslim” identity. As Arifa explains, “That’s because their being Shia is not under attack and they don’t feel like they have to preserve and maintain that cultural relevance.”

Indeed, as illustrated in the following example by Nargis, all three participants claimed to identify more as a “Shia” than as a “Muslim.” Nargis is a second-generation Pakistani immigrant who, at the time of the interview, was a first year graduate student studying Media and Communications. She believes that the “Muslim” label by itself normatively implies “Sunni”—which is why she is reluctant to identify herself as such. However, in America, as discussed earlier, her self-identification as explicitly Shia sometimes bears little relevance as she is identified by others as just “Muslim.” In her words:

My identity as a Muslim is...complicated. I don't really like identifying as Muslim. Especially with what's going on these days. Not for safety purposes but mostly because I am from the Shia sect. And the Shia-Sunni issue is pretty big. When you identify as Muslim, most people think of you as Sunni and I don't like being associated with that...If I were to identify myself on a blank page, I would say that I am Shia. When people ask me what religion are you, then I always say I am Shia—I don't say I am Muslim. But if somebody asks me, 'Are you Muslim?' then I say yes. But I will add on that I am *Shia* Muslim. But I do say I am Muslim... But in America, what's projected onto me is the Muslim identity—whether I choose to or not. Because even if I identify as Shia then somebody doesn't know what Shia is and they will say, 'Well, what is that?' Then I have to say, 'Well I am Shia Muslim.' So either way, the Muslim label is tagged on. It is quite different. Here [in America] it's just one big monolith of Muslims—there is no difference.

Some Shia immigrants seem to use their experiences living as a religious minority in Pakistan as a point of reference to navigate their lives as a religious minority in the United States. For instance, in Pakistan, Shias learned to strategically remain silent about their religious identity outside of their friends and families in order to avoid highlighting themselves as “Shia.” In the United States, Shia Pakistani immigrants adopt this same impression management strategy to avoid drawing attention to themselves—not only as “Shias” when among their co-religionists, but also as “Muslims” when amongst the general public (a visibility strategy discussed in Chapter 4). For

example, Rashed came to America when he was twelve years old. Growing up as a member of a persecuted minority back in the homeland, he learned to keep silent about his faith in general. Frequent outbreaks of sectarian violence against Shias have ingrained a sense of fear in his community's collective consciousness. The few conversations he had about religion with his school friends back in Pakistan had ended in arguments. Upon immigrating to the United States, he learned that while he has escaped the threat of sectarian violence that he was exposed to in Pakistan, in America too he is a member of an "outsider" category based on his religion. In order to navigate this different yet familiar setting as a stigmatized religious minority, he applies the same strategy as he did in the homeland—he intentionally does not talk about religion with his American and Sunni Muslim friends as he believes doing so will lead them to be "closed off" towards him or provoke arguments. Referring to his reluctance to engage in religious conversations in America, Rashed said, "I get this from being a Shia actually."

Notably, though, the effects of this sectarian conflict are not as apparent among the Sunni Pakistani participants as their Shia counterparts. Many had not even been fully aware of their Shia co-nationals' oppressed condition of life while in Pakistan. Being the dominant majority, Sunnis rarely had to cross paths with Shias in the corridors of power. It was *after* they had migrated to the United States that they came directly in contact with Shias at schools, mosques, religious-cultural centers, and college campuses. Even then, Sunnis had the privilege of overlooking this religious division in favor of a "Muslim" or "Pakistani" solidarity. For Shias, however, forgetting their multigenerational history of victimhood at the hands of Sunnis was not easily achieved or even always possible.

Bangladesh: Religious-Politics in a Secular Muslim-Majority Country

Greatly shaken by the use of religion as a tool for violence in both the 1947 partition and the 1971 war, Bangladesh emerged as an independent state based on ideals of secularism, socialism,

democracy, and Bangali nationalism, which emphasizes the unity of Hindus and Muslims based on the common use of Bangla language and culture. But only two decades since its independence in 1971, state politics transitioned from vehement exclusion of Islam from state affairs to embracing Islamist groups, such as Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh, as major power players in national politics (Ahmad 2008; Uddin 2006). This bipolar transition was possible because Islam is central to the overwhelming majority of the Bangladeshi population. Of the country's total population of over 156 million, almost 90 percent are Muslims while Hindus comprise around a dwindling 9 percent (Pew Research Religion and Public Life Project 2012a). Religion is embedded in public sentiment and is exploited by the two rival political parties—Awami League (A.L.) and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (B.N.P.).

A.L. claims to be a secular political party, advancing Bangali nationalism. A.L. spearheaded the independence movement and stepped into power after the war, banning Islamic parties from entering state politics. However, B.N.P. took power, although not immediately, but soon after the A.L. Prime Minister, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was assassinated in 1975. Once in power, B.N.P. withdrew the ban on religion in government and replaced Bangali nationalism with *Bangladeshi* nationalism, i.e. a Bangali *Muslim* national identity that separated Bangladesh from India or the “other” Hindu Bangalis in the Bengal region of India.

Eventually, Islam became the official state religion and Jamaat, partnered with B.N.P., became the ruling coalition in 2001. Jamaat seeks to advance revivalist Islam through the establishment of an Islamic state with the Shariah as state law. Many of its leaders were Pakistani allies in the 1971 Liberation War. Advancing Islamic solidarity with other Muslim states *including Pakistan* Jamaat's public image is largely that of “traitors” among large sections of Bangladeshis. Supporters of Jamaat as well as its historic ally B.N.P. are thus often branded as “*Rajakars*”—the Bangla word for traitor. On the other hand, supporters of A.L. are associated with a Bangali identity,

which renders them too close to India for comfort for many. Although India was Bangladesh's ally against Pakistan in 1971, the religious divide between Hindu India and Muslim Bangladesh and the contested India-Bangladesh border have created hostility towards India in the contemporary Bangladeshi public consciousness. A.L. supporters and/or those politically identifying as "Bangali" are thus often suspected to be India sympathizers.

In 2008, A.L. won the national election and began the 1971 war tribunals. In 2012, a number of key Jamaat leaders were sentenced to death and/or imprisonment for their activities against Bangladeshis and freedom fighters during the war. These sentences sparked controversy in the Bangladeshi public, both in defense of the country's Muslim leaders (Jamaat) and in support of the sentences or demands for harsher punishments. For example, in 2013, mass peaceful protests in the form of candlelit vigils began in Shahbag, a public square located in Dhaka, demanding capital punishment for a key Jamaat leader and a war crime perpetrator who had been sentenced to life imprisonment. Later, demands included banning Jamaat from politics. This massive demonstration of tens of thousands of ordinary Bangladeshis came to be known as the "Shahbag movement," which represented a reawakening of Bangladeshi nationalism based on the 1971 war. A major force in organizing this movement was bloggers, many of who advocated for secularism. Later that same year, when Hefazat-e-Islam presented its 13-point charter to the government (discussed in the previous section), their slogan "death to the atheist bloggers" and demand for the banning of candlelit vigils were in reference to this Shahbag movement. Thus, exploited by the main political parties (A.L., B.N.P., and Jamaat) and Islamist pressure groups (Hefazat-e-Islam) political divides underlined by religion have amplified within the country. Strikes, violent public conflicts, and killings led by student political leaders in the name of religion have become regular occurrences, news of which have made their way even in American newspapers, such as *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* (see for example, Hammer 2015 and *The Washington Post* 2013). Those in

defense of Islam are publicly branded as *Rajakars* while those in support of secularism are branded as “atheists.”

These political cleavages are mirrored in Bangladeshi immigrants’ collective identity-work once they have settled in the United States (Shams 2017a). Much like their counterparts back home, Bangladeshi immigrants struggle to collectively define themselves as either secular “Bangalis” or Muslim “Bangladeshis” in their ethnic/national communities. Through social media and advancements in telecommunication, Bangladeshi immigrants stay in touch with political headlines from their homeland, thus replenishing materials for their boundary-work along homeland-oriented political lines. When among their co-nationals in America, many still perceive each other through the prism of Bangladeshi politics, such as supporters of A.L., B.N.P., or Jamaat. In terms of religion, the Bangladeshi immigrant community in California is predominantly Muslim. Although there are some interpersonal relationships between Hindu and Muslim families, these religious groups tend to remain largely separate. Except for some homeland-oriented event that is open to all co-nationals, Hindus and Muslims do not usually participate in each other’s religious festivities. Some Bangladeshi Hindus join cultural/religious organizations with other Bangalis from India that Muslim Bangladeshis tend to avoid. The following sections trace the effects of homeland politics in the Bangladeshi participants’ lives in America.

Traces of Homeland Politics in Bangladeshi Immigrant Communities

In America, Bangladesh’ global national image as an “international basket case,” as coined by Henry Kissinger, invokes non-recognition on the one hand, and the image of a poverty-stricken, dysfunctional, and politically unstable country on the other (Kibria 2011). In American public perception, Bangladesh is usually lumped together with its other more powerful regional neighbors, India and Pakistan. For instance, when Americans recognize Bangladesh in mundane day-to-day

interactions, most usually do so in relation to India. For example, Farhana, a Bangladeshi American said:

People don't really know what Bangladeshi is, like they don't even know where it is. You tell someone you are from Bangladesh, and they'd be like, 'Where is that?' or 'Is it India?' And, you'd be like, 'No, it's a country that's next to India.' A lot of people don't distinguish Bangladesh from other South Asian countries like India and Pakistan. It's like you are all the same thing.

Moreover, when Bangladesh appears in the American news media, it is because of its corruption and political turmoil, some recent examples of such news stories being the 2013 Rana Plaza garment factory collapse (Manik and Yardley 2013), the 2016 ISIS attacks in the country's capital (Manik, Anand, and Barry 2016), the seemingly never-ending traffic jams (Rosen 2016), and the dismal conditions within the country's Rohingya refugee camps (Beech 2017). In this context, Bangladeshi Americans tend to cherish the few symbols of national pride that are globally recognized, a notable example being the 2006 Nobel Peace Laureate, Dr. Muhammad Yunus with his microfinance organization, Grameen Bank. Unlike other Bangali symbols that overlap with Indian and Pakistani cultures, such as *gulaab jamun*, *biryani*, *sari*, and *salwar kamiz*, Bangladeshis tend to view Dr. Muhammad Yunus and Grameen Bank as symbols that exclusively belong to their national group.

However, these symbols of homeland pride are nonetheless affected by Bangladesh's bipolar politics. For example, from 2011-2013, the A.L.-led government in Bangladesh had led a destructive campaign against Dr. Yunus, making world news (The New York Times 2013; Al-Mahmood 2013). Citing financial irregularities and unpaid taxes, the Bangladeshi government brought Grameen Bank under the supervision of the country's Central Bank. The government then forced Dr. Yunus to resign based on alleged legal violations. Many Bangladeshi political analysts argue that the conflict between Dr. Yunus and A.L. dates back to 2007 when Dr. Yunus tried to organize a rival political party. His immense popularity among the general public, admiration from the Bangladeshi youth,

global recognition as “banker to the poor,” and support of the country’s intellectual elites made Dr. Yunus a formidable opponent to Awami League’s ambitions to get back in power. Adding more fuel to the fire was Dr. Yunus’s alleged close relations with B.N.P. leadership.

As such, while many Bangladeshi immigrants revere Dr. Muhammad Yunus for his achievements with regard to Grameen Bank, some A.L. supporters view him as “anti-Awami League.” A few others find his achievements to have been exaggerated by urban intellectual elites, arguing that his micro-credit loans did the poor villagers more harm than good. This was the theme of a conversation among the men at an informal Bangladeshi *dawat* to which I was invited. Some time before the food was served, the men and women were sitting in the living room. The women were gathered around a small table on one side of the room while the men sat on couches lined along the opposite wall. Although I sat with the women—as was expected of me due to my gender—I tried to overhear what the men were discussing. The men appeared to have been talking about Bangladeshi politics based on the snippets of conversation I was able to hear. While the women were sharing news of mutual acquaintances, words and phrases from the men’s side made their way into our corner, words like, “Hasina” and “*Arey na na ki boltesen. Ekdom corrupt* [No no, what are you saying? Fully corrupt.]” Some time later, the men’s conversation became louder as their conversation grew more heated. One of the men appeared agitated and said: “*Bangladesh er pokkbeysi shombhob. Grameen Bank—koi eita ke aro government protection dibey, pura prithibir kachhe amra eita ke niye gorbo kore bolte pari. Nah! Eita ke ekke barey boshay dilo! Hasina eita ke niye, pochayei chharlo!* [It is only possible for Bangladesh. Grameen Bank—the government should be protecting it. We can tell the world proudly about it. But no! The government completely destroyed it! Hasina had to take Grameen Bank and make it all rotten!]”

Such candid conversations about Bangladeshi politics, however, only took place among co-nationals and first generation immigrants who were well-informed about “Deshi” or homeland

news. The second generation, who knew little of what they refer to as the country's "crazy politics," almost never talked about homeland party-politics. Moreover, besides their parents' fond memories of friends, family, food, and traditions back home, the young U.S.-raised Bangladeshis received little positive newsfeed about Bangladesh from the American media. Thus, some of the participants who went to visit Bangladesh as adults after many years or for the first time were surprised to see indicators of economic development, such as high-rise buildings, huge shopping centers, fancy restaurants, and smart technology.

However, when I had asked some of these young Bangladeshi participants about what they found most surprising about Bangladesh during their visit, their responses revealed the similar strands of tensions that were present back home. For instance, many of the participants particularly commented on the religious landscape—although in contradictory ways. To some, like Liana, a married *hijabi* college student who had visited Bangladesh twice in 2014, Bangladesh was becoming "too American" or "westernized" in that people wore western clothing, dated openly, and visited bars in the backrooms of upscale restaurants. Liana had also visited a private college campus in Dhaka and was shocked to see "free-mixing" between genders, and that young women were wearing t-shirts and jeans instead of the more modest traditional attire, *salwar kamiz*. "You couldn't tell if you were in Bangladesh or America. It didn't feel right to me. You could hardly tell they were Bangladeshi!" Liana had said shaking her head. Conversely, to others, like Umaila, a college-educated, non-*hijabi* but practicing Muslim, almost everyone in Bangladesh seemed to be wearing the *hijab* or *orna* (a long scarf) over their heads when she visited Bangladesh in 2013. According to her, whether or not a woman was modestly covering her hair and chest with an *orna* indicated if the woman as a "good" Muslim woman or not. These norms seemed to be particularly salient for young women as how she wears the *orna* indicated if she was "eligible" or not. She interpreted the societal emphasis of women's modest clothing as the country's growing religious conservatism.

Global Dimensions of the “Bangladeshi” Identity

More recently, in July 2016, Bangladesh made world news when five young Bangladeshi men, who had pledged allegiance to ISIS, held hostages and viciously killed 20 people, including citizens from Western countries, at a café located in Dhaka’s diplomatic district. These attacks seemed to renew the ambition of Bangladesh’s ingrown Islamist militants, triggering pinpoint assassinations of any perceived critics of Islam, such as secular bloggers, “atheists,” Hindus, and members of the LGBTQ community. American news outlets, which had provided wall-to-wall coverage of the July 2016 attacks, interpreted the event and the subsequent assassinations as ISIS now shifting its focus to Muslim countries beyond the Middle East (Manik, Anand, and Barry 2016).

The effects of these homeland events were almost immediately felt among Bangladeshis living abroad. In America, many of the Bangladeshi participants who heard the news contacted their loved ones back home via phone or social media to learn if they were safe. As a Bangladeshi myself, I too have received phone calls and messages from other Bangladeshis I met during fieldwork who had called in to check if my relatives in Dhaka were safe. For example, a voicemail I had received from Farida, an elderly woman I met from the Bangladeshi community went, “*Khobor nawar jonno phone korsilam. Asha kori desher shobai bhalo ache*” [Called to know how you were doing. Hope everyone is safe back in the country.] Another text message, this time from a Bangladeshi American I knew but did not get to interview, read: “I can’t believe this is happening. This is so heartbreaking.”

Some of the first generation participants closely followed the American news coverage to see how Bangladesh was being portrayed. They exchanged their opinions on how certain reporters covered the story and what information and visual images about Bangladesh were shown. Some wondered what the repercussions might be now that the name “Bangladesh” has been globally associated with “ISIS.” And, a few expressed their frustration that CNN was covering the story “all day long.” To them, the more the media covered the ISIS attack in Bangladesh, the more their

homeland would become associated with Islamist terrorism among the American public. Several of the first generation immigrants lamented over the direction of homeland politics, while others reported a sense of resignation citing the country's history of corrupt political regimes. Some others were shocked to realize that ISIS had arrived both on their homeland and hostland's doorstep.

Surprisingly, though, the young second-generation Bangladeshi participants who usually commented on political issues on social media, especially when the issues relates to Muslims, were all silent on the Dhaka attacks. This lack of response from Bangladeshi Americans did not go unnoticed even by some second generation Bangladeshis. My text conversation with Shopna, a *hijabi* second-generation Bangladeshi American, the night of the attack exemplifies this point. Although I had known Shopna before I started fieldwork for this study, she was friends with many of the participants on Facebook. In her texts, Shopna expressed her sadness at the loss of life, especially of the three U.S. college students, as well as frustration at the Bangladeshi media and government for what she thought was an ill-managed response. She also expressed disappointment at Bangladeshi Americans' overall silence regarding the event. Some of her texts read:

Yeah, I heard that the reporters were asking police officers on national television what their plan was to intervene. That's like shooting yourself in the foot...What a stupid thing to ask on TV! I'm very glad that your family members are okay and Alhamdulillah mine are too. But I'm feeling very affected by this today. I'm also disappointed because certain people who always post about these things on social media are for some reason silent today.

And how has the JAPANESE government confirmed hostage counts and given updates but there is no word from the Bangladeshi government as of yet??????????

More recently, in December 2017, Bangladeshi Americans once again was put under the national spotlight when an immigrant from Bangladesh, Akayed Ullah, set off a low-tech bomb in New York City's subway system. Ullah had entered the U.S. in 2011 through an "extended family chain migration" or F43 visa, which is issued to children of immigrants with a direct relative who is a U.S. citizen who sponsors them (Ballesteros 2017). Ullah obtained the visa by being the son of an

F41 visa recipient who was sponsored by a U.S. citizen sibling. Reportedly, he had been radicalizing since 2014, and conducted the attack for ISIS (Baker and Weiser 2017). Although he was the only one who was injured in the attack, the Bangladeshi community in New York feared an Islamophobic backlash (Hajela and Dobnik 2017). Indeed, soon after the attack, Donald Trump posted tweets on how “chain migration” allowed national security threats like Akayed Ullah to enter the country. Puzzlingly, Bangladeshi Americans were once again largely silent about this issue on social media. *Why* the participants were silent on both occasions—the ISIS attack in their homeland and the NYC attack by Akayed Ullah—when they are usually vocal about similar attacks in foreign, “elsewhere” places is tied to other issues pertaining to global geopolitics and Muslims’ collective position in the hostland society—a topic we will discuss in depth in Chapter 7.

India: Religion, Politics, and the Muslim-Minority

In contrast to Muslims in Bangladesh and Pakistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan, Muslims in India comprise a religious minority—only 14.2 percent of the total population is Muslim whereas 79.8 percent is Hindu (Central Intelligence Agency 2016). This is also reflected among the Indian American population where 51 percent of the immigrants are Hindu and 10 percent are Muslim (Desilver 2014). Nonetheless, India’s Muslim minority is comprised of 180 million Muslims. Economically, they are one of the poorest communities in India in almost every measure, as evidenced by their minimal representation in the national civil service and armed forces, poor healthcare outcomes, and low levels of educational attainment, income, and employment (Wilkinson 2008).

However, Muslims are located at the crux of India’s domestic political conflicts. Like its predominantly Muslim neighbors, India too has been struggling with secularism on one hand, and religious nationalism on the other. Its two main parties, the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), dominate its national political spectrum. Whereas Congress is secular and is in favor of

protecting minority rights, the B.J.P. advances an agenda that is anti-minority and Hindu nationalist. However, Congress Party has been losing its hold on power since the 1960s, and after the demise of its staunchly secular leader Jawaharlal Nehru in 1964, a number of Congress leaders have also come to view Muslims as either a “disloyal and non-deserving minority or at least as less deserving of state patronage than their own (Hindu) political supporters” (Wilkinson 2008: 178).

One of the most potent and emotionally charged sources of conflict between the two parties is Muslims’ rights to separate personal laws, with Congress in favor of protecting those rights and BJP in favor of their abolishment. India has inherited its legal system from the British common law from the colonial period. Under this system, each religious community is to be governed by its own codes of personal law. However, this raises both legal and ideological issues. From a legal standpoint, it raises the question of how to ensure individuals their constitutional right to equality before the law as many of the personal laws stem from regressive patriarchal traditions that are detrimental for women and minorities. From a religious and ideological standpoint, this system often puts different religions at opposing ends because of their respective traditions. For instance, cows are holy to Hindus, whereas, it is a tradition for Muslims to sacrifice cows in the name of Allah on Eid. Since Narendra Modi of the BJP has become prime minister in 2008, this issue of cows has come to carry particularly charged ideological subtexts in India, and has become intertwined with various other religious-political conflicts between Hindus and Muslims. A report in the New York Times on the rising influence of Hindu nationalism in India gives an eye-opening account of how these issues are manifesting on the ground for the Muslim minority:

Punishment for cow slaughter, which is proscribed in most states of India, has become more severe. A conviction can lead to sentences ranging from five years to life imprisonment. The foot soldiers of Mr. Modi’s party and its affiliates have run aggressive campaigns demanding that, apart from giving up beef, India’s Muslims must not date or marry Hindu girls or women. They should reconvert to Hinduism, the B.J.P. and like-minded others say, because their ancestors were Hindus who were forcibly converted by medieval Muslim rulers. They must sing ‘Vande Mataram,’ the national song, these proponents say, to prove their loyalty to India, and their children

must perform yoga in schools to show respect for India's culture. Since some medieval Muslim kings demolished temples to build mosques, the B.J.P. and affiliates say, Muslims in modern, democratic India should voluntarily hand over various mosques and shrines to the Hindus. The most alarming trend has been the lynching of Muslims suspected of possessing beef, for ferrying home cattle purchased legitimately from cattle markets elsewhere. (Ashraf 2017)

These issues surrounding personal laws have led to a decades-long heated debate on integrating Muslims' personal laws into a Uniform Civil Code (UCC). However, the Muslim community, which follows the Shariah, and many other minority communities oppose the UCC, especially as advanced by the BJP, as they view it to be detrimental to their religious way of life. This has reiterated the fissures between Hindus and Muslims. For instance, an opinion poll conducted in 1993 revealed that 78 percent of Hindus in India believed that separate Muslim personal laws are divisive and that "until a uniform civil code is established, there will never be national integration"; over half of them believed that Indian Muslims "consider themselves Muslims first and Indians later"; and a solid majority viewed Muslim leaders to be generally fundamentalist extremists (Anderson 1994). These views of Muslims being "extremists," "outsiders," and somehow less committed to India as a nation than Hindus are still present today, and date back to the 1947 Partition (Wilkinson 2008; Ashraf 2017). Indeed, the lasting rivalry between India and Pakistan, especially the ongoing conflict between the countries over the Kashmir border have added another, international dimension to India's Hindu-Muslim tensions. That Muslims wanted to part from the Indian subcontinent to create an Islamic state, Pakistan, and that many Indian Muslims still prefer to speak in Urdu (the state language of Pakistan) rather than Hindi further marks Muslims as "disloyal outsiders."

Homeland-Hostland Interactions

For the participants who have immigrated to the United States from this context, their social boundaries in the immigrant communities continue to be shaped by their homeland's religious-political divides. Moreover, some of the families have relatives who are *Mahajirs* or forced emigrants

who had fled to Pakistan from India after the Partition. As such, the religious-political cleavages from their homeland are intertwined with their family history. In the United States, while the older generation Muslims do have relationships with Indian Hindus, they nonetheless tend to engage primarily with South Asian Muslim communities, which are mostly comprised of Pakistani and Bangladeshi Muslims. For their children born and raised in the United States, however, these historical specificities lose their edge. Unlike the first generation parents and grandparents who have lived through the post-Partition sectarian riots, the younger generation's ties to India tend to be largely symbolic. They have learnt about history and their family's past from stories told by their parents or grandparents. However, the second generation tends to interpret their ancestral homeland with a more globally informed and U.S.-centric lens. As a result, they often get into arguments with elders in their family. For instance, Hamid, a second generation Indian Muslim often has debates with his grandfather about his friendships with Hindus. His grandfather often comments sarcastically, "*Ha, ha, ajkaal toh Hindu Musalman sabh bhai bhai hai.*" [Yes, yes, Hindu and Muslim are all brothers today.] Hamid, in turn, questions what happens to Muslims' supposed brotherly love when Muslims are killing other Muslims, such as Shias in Pakistan.

Nonetheless, there are some tensions based on Hindu-Muslim dynamics even among the second generation South Asians. For example, Indian Muslims often feel sidelined or excluded at organizational settings that are predominantly Indian Hindu because of their Hindu-centric themes. For instance, Hamid explained how the Indian and South Asian student organizations (both predominantly Hindu) at his college campus used to begin their cultural events with Hindu rituals such as *aarti* and coconut breaking. These traditions tended to make Indian Muslim students feel excluded. As such, they rarely attended their events, choosing to participate more actively in the events organized by the Pakistani and Muslim students associations. However, once he became a board member at these organizations, he strategically included both Muslim and Hindu prayer rituals

at all the cultural events along with other efforts to bridge the Hindu-Muslim distance among the student body. According to him, the number of students, especially that of Muslims, began to multiply at the events—a feat in which he takes great pride.

Although not as potent and politically charged as the Hindu-Muslim conflict, there are also fissures between the Sikh and Muslim minorities in India that date back to the Mughal period. Ajay, a second generation Indian American who had converted from Sikhism to Islam, provides another example of inter-generation conflicts based on homeland-oriented religious-political divides. Ajay comes from a highly educated practicing Sikh family. Although born and raised in Southern California, he grew up praying *Ardas* (Sikh prayers), going to the *Gurudwara* (Sikh temple) every Friday, and actively participating in Sikh cultural organizations. While in college, however, he started gravitating towards Islam through his friends. He did not like partying, drinking, and casual dating that many of his college friends were engaged in. He thus found himself spending more time with his Muslim friends whom he met through classes and cultural student associations. His parents noticed that most of his friends were Muslim, and implored him to stop spending time with them. At age 21, Ajay converted to Islam. For the next five and a half years, he hid his conversion from his family and Sikh friends, praying and fasting in secret. When he came out to his family, his father disowned him and threw him out of the house immediately. Ajay then went to his mosque where the Imam arranged for him to stay at another place. Several years after the event, Ajay is still in the process of mending his relationship with his parents. At the time of his interview, Ajay had been married for around three years to a Pakistani Muslim woman who he met in college. His parents did not attend his wedding.

During his interview Ajay also talked about fights he had had with his father long before he converted to Islam. For example, he and his family were in Punjab when the Pakistan-based Islamist group, Lashkar-e-Taiba conducted the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks. While watching the news of the

attacks, Ajay's father had commented, "This is Muslims. This is what Muslims do. They have no hearts," to which Ajay replied, "This isn't Muslim. These are just people with political agendas." His comment had infuriated his father who accused him of "always defending Muslims." Ajay knew about the bitter historic relationship between Sikhs and Muslims prior to converting. But for him, the salience of homeland-oriented history was much less compared to his father. Having grown up in multicultural Southern California, Ajay was comfortable interacting with Muslims even when he was a practicing Sikh. Long before converting to Islam, he had high school friends who came from Muslim backgrounds. For his parents as well as extended family back in India, however, the boundary between Sikhs and Muslims has always been clear. In their view, Muslims had been and still are "violent" and "heartless," as seemingly evidenced by ISIS attacks across the globe and Islamist violence along the Kashmiri border.

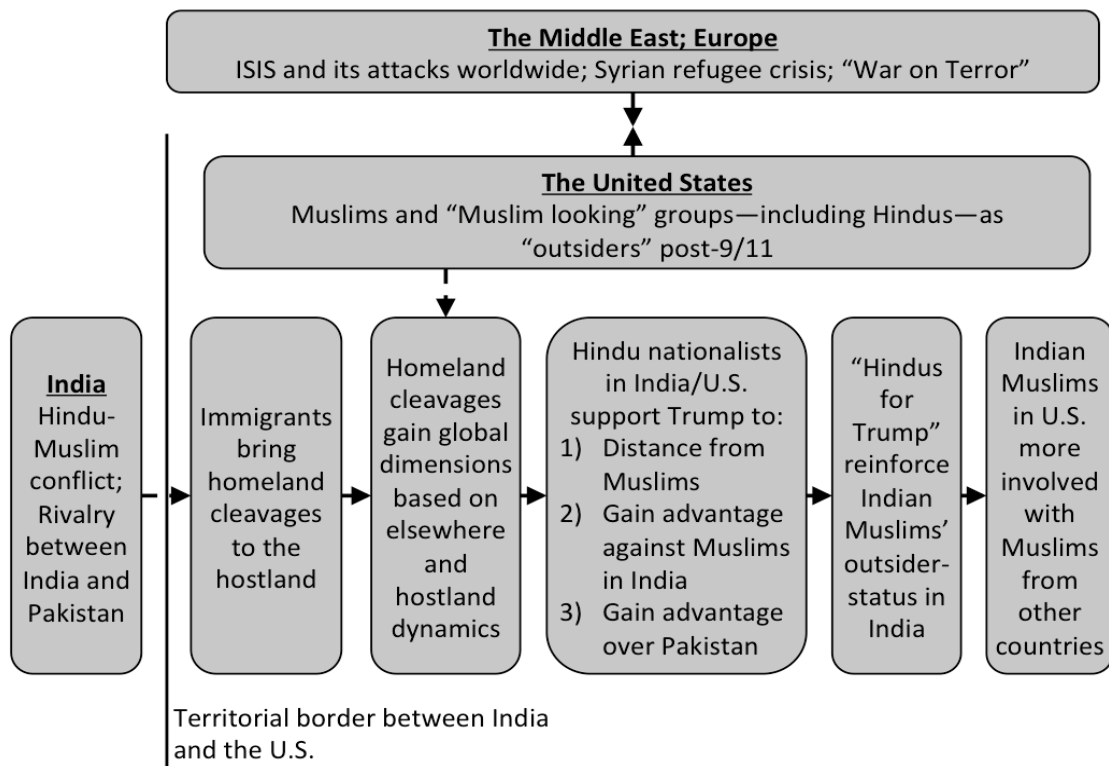
Politics surrounding the Kashmir issue sometimes also emerged among the second-generation South Asians in their organizational activities. For example, when tensions between India and Pakistan flared up in 2015, Indian and Pakistani American student organizations arranged publicity events where they held up placards on their college campuses with slogans proclaiming solidarity between Indians and Pakistanis, and Hindus and Muslims. However, these dynamics take on different meanings, even among some segments of the second generation South Asians, when the Hindu-Muslim divide, specifically the distinction between the two groups, becomes important for life in the United States. This is discussed as follows.

Global Dimensions

Locating Hindu-Muslim dynamics in the multicentered relational framework allows us to trace just how this religious-political divide from the homeland becomes woven together with hostland and "elsewhere" contexts. Doing so also allows us to explore how that interaction among the three centers at the global level shape immigrants' community-building (see Figure 3.3 below).

Using the example of Hindu nationalists’ support for Trump during the 2016 U.S. Presidential election, I argue that when immigrants from India arrive in the United States, they bring with them the long history of Hindu-Muslim tensions that have also shaped their homeland’s rivalry with Muslim-majority Pakistan. However, contexts in the United States are much different from those in India. The United States is not just multicultural, as many scholars have pointed out (Kurien 2004; Kurien 2016; Mathew and Prashad 2000) but it is also at a geopolitical and ideological war with the so-called “the Muslim world.” Events such as 9/11 and the subsequent “War on Terror,” the spate of ISIS attacks across the globe, and the ongoing Syrian refugee crisis have shaped (positively or negatively) the U.S. society’s views towards Muslims and incoming immigrants. Indeed, immigration and the question of Muslim integration are two key issues of divisiveness in American politics today and have significantly influenced the course of the 2016 U.S. Presidential election.

Figure 3.3: Global Dimensions of the Hindu-Muslim Divide in the Multicentered Relational Framework



In this U.S. context, not only are Hindus no longer the dominant majority as back in India, but they are also perceived to be the same as “Muslims” or suspicious “outsiders.” After their arrival in the United States, immigrants from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh confront a common hostile environment where on one hand, they are stereotyped as a “model minority” because of their political passivity, high education attainment, and professional success (Prashad 2000). On the other hand, they are a perpetual “outsider” group, especially in the post-9/11 terror-panic climate where all those perceived to be “Muslim” are viewed as national security threats (Mishra 2016; Ahmed 2002, 2004). This process of “other-ing” has racial undertones as often the indicators which seem to determine one’s “Muslim-ness” are one’s skin color, ethnic physical features, Muslim-sounding names, facial hair, foreign accent, and clothing accessories, like turbans, scarves, and head coverings. In this context, “Muslim” not only connotes a religious identity but also operates as a racial category that homogenizes South Asians, Arabs, Middle Easterners, North Africans, and blacks, all of who fall on a wide spectrum of physical appearance. It also includes “Muslim-looking” non-Muslims, such as Hindus, Sikhs, Arabs, and Middle Easterners who are Jewish or Christian, even agnostics. Many scholars have in fact argued that the religion of Islam itself has been racialized as inherently flawed and prone to violence, not just the people who subscribe to it (Cainkar 2009; Maira 2008). As Muneer Ahmed (2004) puts it, all “Muslim-looking” individuals are racially profiled into the same “Muslim” category based on the assumptions that: 1) all “Muslim-looking” people are Muslims, and 2) all Muslims are associated with terrorism. This post-9/11 security atmosphere has intensified with ISIS attacks taking place both in the U.S. and abroad, including the South Asian homelands and different “elsewhere” places in the Middle East and Europe (Levin 2016; Southern Poverty Law Center 2016). Moreover, the “Muslim ban,” the contentious debates surrounding “good Muslims/bad Muslims,” and proposals from high-profile politicians to launch a Muslim registration have all once again put the national political spotlight on “Muslims” in America.

For South Asian immigrants, their similar ethnic appearance, which renders them close to stereotypical Muslim images, means that they are often collectively viewed with suspicion, especially in times of heightened national security concerns. This is the case despite South Asians' otherwise model minority status, and regardless of whether they are Hindu, Sikh, or actually Muslim (Kurien 2003; Falcone 2006; Maira 2009). Hindu and Sikh Indians are often mistaken for Pakistanis and Muslims (Mishra 2016), sometimes producing dire consequences. The first known murder victim of the post-9/11 backlash was in fact a Sikh man who was mistaken for a Muslim because his turban and facial hair made him look like Osama bin Laden (Bakalian and Bozorghmehr 2009). Faced with this common hostile environment, South Asians, regardless of their national and religious differences, often respond in similar ways. For instance, they actively perform an "American identity" by engaging in various impression management strategies, like displaying American flags on their store windows, putting patriotic bumper stickers on their cars, shaving off facial hair, and avoiding or modifying the *hijab* in risky situations (Dhingra 2007; Shams 2015; Shams 2017b). A key objective for one to cultivate this "American identity" is to imply that one is "not a terrorist."

This categorical backlash against "Muslims" and "Muslim looking" groups adds more fuel to the Hindu-Muslim divide. For Hindu Americans, performing an identity that signals that one is "not a terrorist" includes distancing from their Muslim counterparts by highlighting their Hindu religious identity. For example, Kurien (2003; 2001) found that Hindu Indian American organizations tend to over-emphasize their "non-Muslim" identity by using anti-Muslim platforms. Moreover, as Hindu nationalists settle down in America's multicultural milieu, they use resources from this new environment to justify and legitimize militant Hindu nationalism (Kurien 2004), and constitute a "Yankee Hindutva" (Mathew and Prashad 2000). This American brand of Hindu nationalism is malleable and can take on versatile forms in order to adapt to diverse settings and attract people from all walks of life in America. These impression management strategies are not simply geared

towards gaining political mileage back in the homeland, but are also crafted to engage in American politics (Kurien 2016).

Figure 3.4: Members of Hindu Sena in India Celebrating Trump's Birthday (Associated Press 2015)



However, Hindu nationalists engage in mainstream American politics in ways that are advantageous particularly for Indian Hindus. This was clearly illustrated during the 2016 Presidential election when Hindu nationalists both in India and the United States support Donald Trump. Trump's inflammatory rhetoric against Muslims overlaps with the anti-Muslim sentiments incited by the Hindu nationalist leader, Narendra Modi in his rise to becoming India's Prime Minister (Peters 2016). As such, Hindu nationalists viewed Trump's confrontational approach towards Muslims and Islamist terrorism to be beneficial for their nationalist politics against both the Muslim minority in India and their regional rival, Pakistan, who they have long accused of sponsoring terrorism along the Kashmiri border (Bennett 2016). For instance, members of the Hindu Sena, a militant wing of Hindu Nationalists in India, celebrated Trump's birthday, an event where the members cut cake and

put *tilak* (a Hindu ritual in which a religious mark put on the forehead as a sign of honor and welcome) on Trump's photo (See Figure 3.4). Moreover, American Hindu nationalists' support for Trump's anti-Muslim platform also helps to collectively distance Hindus from Muslims, particularly in light of ISIS and other Muslim-related conflicts in the Middle East.

Figure 3.5: Poster from Hindus for Trump Fundraiser (Hindus for Trump Twitter 2015)



These dynamics become clear in the following example of “Hindus for Trump,” a coalition of Hindu nationalists in America. In October 2016, the Republican Hindu Coalition had organized a benefit event in New Jersey called “Humanity United Against Terror.” Staying true to the name, the theme of the event was terror threats. The proceeds were to be donated to the Hindu victims of Islamist terror in Kashmir and Bangladesh (Choksi and Paul 2016). The chief guest at the event was none other than Donald Trump who in his speech claimed to be “a big fan of Hindu,” and “a big fan of India” (Haberman 2016). The huge event arena was proliferated with imagery depicting Trump as a Hindu nationalist. At various places of the arena, for instance, stood posters where

Trump was photoshopped sitting in a Yoga pose on a red-white-and-blue lotus flower. And, splashed across the lotus flower was the Sanskrit word “Om” (a sacred sound and spiritual icon in Hinduism) in the colors of the American flag (see Figure 3.5). The image was clearly an attempt to combine symbols of “American-ness” (such as the red-white-blue color scheme and the American flag) with Hindu nationalism as the lotus flower is a religious symbol in Hinduism and is the official party symbol of the B.J.P.

Figure 3.6: Pamphlet from Hindus for Trump Fundraiser (Hindus for Trump Twitter 2015)



In contrast to Trump’s peaceful and holy depiction, attendees were given pamphlets that portrayed Hillary Clinton—Trump’s opponent—and Sonia Gandhi—Modi’s opponent—as evil

beings with protruding horns who had collaborated in framing Modi for the 2002 Gujarat riots (see Figure 3.6). The pamphlets read:

As secretary of state, Hillary Clinton created her “Get Modi Policy” to falsely accuse Narendra Modi of genocide for the 2002 Gujarat riots. The riots were sparked by Muslims burning a train full of Hindu mothers and babies, so why did Clinton target Modi for the resulting riots? Working with NGOs and opposition leader Sonia Gandhi, Hillary looked for mass graves as “evidence” against Modi but all she found were buffalo bones! Modi was acquitted in 2012, but not before Hillary’s “Get Modi” witch hunt!

However, one of the highlights of the event—a dance by some Bollywood performers—reflected how “elsewhere” adds global dimensions to this primarily homeland-oriented conflict in the hostland. The dance began with the performers dancing joyously to Bruce Springsteen’s “Born in the U.S.A.” Additional dancers joined others onstage, waving American flags. Then, another segment of the performance began, this time with two couples waltzing to a romantic melody as red hearts were projected on the screen behind them. However, their dance stopped abruptly as “Jihadis”—dancers clad in beige *thobes* (traditional Arab garments) and yelling in Arabic-sounding words—broke onto the stage with lightsaber-like laser weapons as an *azan*-like music played in the background. Then, as the “Jihadis” laughed villainously pointing their weapons at the two terrified couples, Hindu Navy SEALs burst onto the stage to fight the Jihadis and thus save the day. The performance then ended with the Star Spangled Banner playing loudly in the background, as all the dancers (costumed in SWAT vests and civilian clothing) stood solemnly facing the audience with hands held over their hearts while an image of the American flag waving in the wind was projected on the mega screen behind them. (see Paul and Choksi 2016, and Choksi and Paul 2016 for news coverage of the event).

After the performance, Trump entered the stage with rapturous cheers from the audience. Then, replicating the Hindu ritual for starting an important ceremony, he lit a *diya* or candle. In his

speech that followed, he stayed true to the night’s theme and drew parallels between Islamist terrorist attacks in the U.S. and India. Catering to the Hindu nationalists, he said:

Indians see firsthand the brutality of terrorism and cross-border violence, including the attacks in Bombay—and I mean, look, Mumbai is a place that I love. It’s a place that I understand. So, for all of the people in Mumbai, the attack on Indian parliament—absolutely outrageous and terrible. [Note: Trump had conflated the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks with a 2001 terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament, which is located in New Delhi, India’s capital. Both the attacks were conducted by Lashkar-e-Taiba, an Islamist militant group in Pakistan.]

Figure 3.7: Picture from Justice for Hindus Rally (Hindus for Trump Blog 2020)



Again, at a rally in front of Trump Tower, members of Hindus for Trump staged a peaceful demonstration, asking Trump to “save” Hindus and Hindu refugees in Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India. In that demonstration, they also drew attention to Islamist terror attacks in Paris and Mumbai, holding banners that proclaimed, “Hindus and the West united against Islam” (see Figure 3.7). The intended messages of the benefit event and the demonstration are arguably the same: 1) “Muslims” —whether Pakistani, Bangladeshi, or Arab—are potential terrorists who pose a threat across the globe (i.e., “from Paris to Mumbai”); 2) “Hindus” are “non-Muslims”; and 3) Unlike “Muslims,”

“Hindus” are peaceful, loyal citizens to the United States and are united with “the West” in its supposed war against “Islam.” These examples show that the scope of the Hindu-Muslim divide is now no longer within just India, as had been the case prior to the immigrants’ arrival to the United States. Rather, the perimeters of the conflict have now expanded to include dynamics in the hostland U.S.A, as well as contexts in various kinds of “elsewhere” places like Paris, the Middle East, and the West.

The Hindu nationalist support for Trump does not help to lessen the Hindu-Muslim cleavage existing already among South Asian Americans. Rather, the warm relationship between Trump and Hindu nationalists, and the parallels between Trump and Modi’s anti-Muslim platforms seemed to have highlighted some Indian Muslim Americans’ sense of “otherness” back in their own country. For example, in an op-ed published in the Huffington Post, Nafees Syed, who comes from an Indian Muslim immigrant family, wrote:

In recent years, India has mirrored the type of politics we have seen during this [U.S.] presidential race...In 2014, Narendra Modi shockingly rose to power, the politician in power during the notorious 2002 ethnic cleansing (a nice word for genocide) of Muslims. Modi was even banned from the United States for those human rights violations, until he became Prime Minister of the world’s largest democracy.

This posed a quandary to the U.S., but everything was forgiven and forgotten. Since then, communal violence has flared in India, against Muslims and Dalits, Christians and Sikhs. In one case, a Muslim was lynched for allegedly eating beef and the police conducted an inquiry not into the one who committed the crime, but into whether the meat in the dead man’s home was indeed beef. It is this world that even my family members who were born in India would never, ever want to go back to. (Syed 2016)

Within the larger South Asian immigrant community, Hindus and Muslims tend to keep to their own religious communities despite sharing the same nationality. Bangladeshi Hindus, for instance, tend to engage more in the Hindu West Bengali community based on common religion and language rather than with other Bangladeshis who are Muslim (Shams 2017a). And in the case of Indian Muslims, the five Indian participants I interviewed for this study came from South Asian

communities that were predominantly Pakistani or Bangladeshi. This is not to say, though, that they do not have any Indian Hindu friends. To the contrary, they have had several Hindu and Sikh friends in college. However, the South Asians in their close friend circles and the “Desi” communities in which their families engage tend to be predominantly Muslim from other South Asian nationalities rather than Indian Hindu. Moreover, whereas they are open to marrying across ethnic/racial groups, they tend to strongly prefer marrying within their religious community. Indeed, two of five participants have married Pakistani Muslims, and another is in a long-term relationship with a Bangladeshi Muslim American.

It should be noted that although there is wide support for Modi among Indian Americans, a very small portion of the Indian American diaspora publicly identifies and engages with the Hindutva movement. Indeed, despite the high profile of some Republican politicians with Indian ancestry, such as Boddy Jindal and Nikki Haley, most of the Indian American diaspora leans towards Democrats (Desilver 2014). Moreover, the right-wing’s turn towards religion, specifically Christian evangelicalism, has been argued to lead Indian Americans to overwhelmingly vote for Democrats in U.S. elections (Chakravorty, Kapur, and Singh 2017). For instance, a poll on Asian Americans’ political leanings conducted prior to the election showed that only 7 percent of Indian Americans said they would vote for Trump (Ramakrishnan et al. 2016). Nonetheless, the example of “Hindus for Trump” provides an instructive case to trace how interactions among contexts in the homeland, hostland, and “elsewhere” can add global dimensions to immigrants’ homeland-oriented boundaries.

Religious-Political Dimensions of Secular Identities in the Hostland

For many South Asian immigrants, physical distance away from the religious-politics of their homeland and the “elsewhere” Middle East allows them opportunities to express forms of identities in the hostland. A few of the participants in this study, for example, identified as lesbian, gay, and bisexual. Non-heteronormative sexualities are not only stigmatized but also criminalized in all three

homelands as well as in the “elsewhere” places in the Middle East that are salient for the Muslims’ self-identification. Although LGBTQ identities are also stigmatized in the United States, and are exposed to various forms of discrimination and violence, they nonetheless have the constitutional freedom and some societal flexibility to be openly homosexual. However, any expression of their Queer sexualities back in their homeland would have exposed the participants to punitive measures, such as hefty fines and even life imprisonment. Members of the LGBTQ members have even been targeted and killed by Islamic extremists in Pakistan and Bangladesh. Although no longer exposed to Islamist violence based on their sexuality, same-sex relations remain nonetheless taboo in their immigrant communities. Moreover, in the Bangladeshi and Pakistani immigrant communities, the participants’ Queer identities are generally viewed to be mutually exclusive from their national and religious identities. Meaning that one could not be “Muslim,” “Pakistani,” and/or “Bangladeshi” on one hand, and simultaneously be “gay” or “bisexual” on the other.

For example, Ayesha is a Pakistani American and identifies as gay. She is also a practicing Muslim, and considers her faith as an important component of her private life. She prays 3-4 times a day, fasts during Ramadan, believes in the basic tenets of Islam, and does not drink alcohol or eat pork. However, unlike many Muslims’ views, she does not believe that homosexuality is a sin. Rather, she believes that the Quran can be interpreted in different ways based on context. As such, she believes that the verses about homosexuals in the Quran can be interpreted in ways that are both against and accepting of gays. Overall, Ayesha believes Allah to be merciful and accepting of her being gay. She finally came out to her mother when she started college and her mother began looking for prospective grooms for her. At college, she had come out on the student newspaper through a piece she wrote on her experiences being Muslim and gay. Although the young South Asian Muslim Americans are generally much more favorable towards the LGBTQ community than the older generation, Ayesha found several of her Desi Muslim friends to be less than accepting of

her gay identity. When she came out to her roommates, for instance, one of them—who wears the *hijab*—“gasped in horror,” and wanted to arrange a religious intervention for her. Ayesha had brushed it off, as she claimed to not care about what her roommate thought. But her mother’s reaction was particularly important for her as it is just the two of them in their family—Ayesha’s father had died many years ago, and her elder sister married off and lived away with her husband. As Ayesha considers her sister to be quite conservative, she decided not to share this aspect of herself with her. To Ayesha’s surprise, her mother, who is quite traditional herself, received the news well and has been generally understanding of Ayesha’s sexuality. However, Ayesha’s mother had given her some conditions. After coming out to her mother and close friends, Ayesha began dressing in a masculine fashion, with cropped hair, little to no make-up, and clothes that one would find in the men’s section at a clothing store. Her mother takes an issue with Ayesha’s new appearance. She implores Ayesha to grow her hair long. According to her, Ayesha can “continue being gay” as long as people, especially from their Pakistani community, could not tell from her appearance that she is so. Her concern was that upon find out, the Desi community would ostracize Ayesha. As a further precaution, Ayesha’s mother has no longer keeps close relations with other South Asian Muslim families. On the occasions where Ayesha and her mother must attend a Desi event, such as weddings, Ayesha’s mother makes sure that Ayesha wears feminine traditional clothes. These interactions have reinforced Ayesha’s impression that “Muslim” or “Pakistani” and “gay” are opposing identity categories—“not necessarily inherently,” she clarified, “but in people’s perception.”

As such, often the ways in which the LGBTQ participants perceive and navigate their sexualities are shaped by the cultural norms and religious beliefs of their ethnic communities. However, outside their ethnic communities, these immigrants have to navigate another form of “otherness”—that as “Muslims.” At times, the precarity of their positionality compels them to

choose one identity over the other—a self-presentation strategy that could be personally, socially, and spiritually taxing. For example, Ayesha considers her experiences of coming out in college as lessons learned. Now in graduate school, Ayesha prefers to stay away from the Desi community as a whole. When among her non-Muslim American friends, she prefers not to disclose her “Muslim” identity but rather informs them early on about her sexual orientation. However, while Ayesha found her graduate school friends to be “very accepting” of her gay identity, she believes that if they know that she is also Muslim, they will ask her “awkward questions,” like how she could identify as both.

Whereas Ayesha’s example highlights the social interactional aspect, Anwar exemplifies the personal and spiritual struggles of being both gay and Muslim. Like Ayesha, Anwar too comes from a Pakistani background. Born in Lahore but raised largely in Southern California, Anwar claims to identify first as Pakistani before any other identity categories. For him, being Pakistani entails keeping close relations with relatives back home in Pakistan, being connected to Pakistani culture here in America, speaking Urdu, and being Muslim. He particularly thinks that being Pakistani and being Muslim “go hand in hand” and says that he has “trouble finding the difference between a Muslim and a Pakistani identity.” As a proud Pakistani, Anwar strives to be a “good Muslim” and represent Muslims in a positive light in America. He prays regularly, recites the Quran, fasts during Ramadan, does not drink alcohol, avoids eating pork, and like many other participants, considers Islam to be his moral compass. Given the strong presence of Pakistani culture in his life, he has struggled with his homosexuality since childhood. Anwar knew he was gay in sixth grade. But believing homosexuality to be a sin, he had repressed it for the next six years. He not only feared the social repercussions of being a gay Pakistani but also what it meant for his Islamic faith. Anwar narrates these struggles in his own words as follows.

It was a lot of self-hate because I would always think I am from Pakistan, my family is really religious, my grandparents are strong, good Muslims. So I was very

confused like why am I identifying to homosexuality, that that's not right, this is wrong, this wrong. So I was repulsed; I hated myself. In 10th grade, I tried really really hard to push it away from my Muslim and Pakistani identity. I wanted nothing to do with it. Anytime I saw anyone Middle Eastern or dark skinned, I would run away. I didn't want to be friends with them—not because I thought they were negative people but because I thought what if they find out I am gay and this gets back to my family, my mom finds out, what if these people judge me, what would be the repercussions of it, what's gonna happen—it scared me a lot. So I just hid who I was completely and had all white friends.

Junior year I told my mom that I was gay. My mom was in disbelief and denial. She cried that you don't know, you'll be fine, we will fix this. She thought the way to do it was through a lot of religious things—bringing me to mosque everyday, making me read religious scholars, get an MRI done. She tried to go logical, spiritual, religious. But that was desperation, that's what it is. I don't hold it against her. This was my mom's belief that heaven and hell are forever which I do too. That the earth is temporary. She would rather have me suffer temporarily and have me happy forever. But I started to realize in my senior year that it was something that I had to live with and accept. And the second that I did start accepting it I became better, stronger, a better Muslim, a better everything.

My mom didn't tell my dad for 2 years. I ended up telling him. And he said well you are just like a terrorist. I was shocked to hear that from my own father. He was like the evil that they do, which is *haram*, you are also acting upon certain evils. My dad didn't talk to me for 2 years. Not a single word. My mom would barely talk to me unless it was go see a doctor and things like that. They took away any financial support they had for me. I had to work 3 jobs and go to community college. I finished high school, wanted to go to university but couldn't afford it. And then I got my job at the city government office and that was really helpful. That helped me financially support myself. I got a lot of scholarships and then I got into my dream college. I told my parents. They were really happy for me, like 'Oh cool. But you are still gay.' And then I got into grad school, I was going to Ivy League. I told my parents that look I am going to Ivy League and they were again like, 'Oh cool, but you are still gay.'

Wasim's experiences of being bisexual and a Bangladeshi Muslim are somewhat different from Ayesha and Anwar's. This difference may partly be based on variations in their religiosity. Whereas Anwar and Ayesha follow most of the restrictions and beliefs conventionally observed by practicing Muslims, Wasim drinks alcohol, and supports the idea of extramarital sex. Yet, he performs all five prayers daily, does not eat pork, fasts during Ramadan, has read the Quran, and even plans to go to *Hajj* after graduating college. In further contrast to Ayesha and Anwar's experiences, Wasim's entire family is very accepting and supportive of his LGBTQ identity. However, although like Ayesha, Wasim also takes an interpretive view of the Quran, he too

sometimes has to choose between his religious and sexual identities to avoid stigma. While he is not as concerned about being stigmatized himself, he is careful not to expose his father, who is a top government official in Bangladesh, to the stigma of having a Queer son. This information would not only be detrimental to his father's position, but could also expose him to Islamist violence. As such, while he tends to be open about his sexuality in America, he is much more careful and reserved when within the Bangladeshi immigrant community.

“Elsewhere” Dimensions of South Asian Panethnic Identities

Panethnicity refers to the grouping of different ethnic and/or national collectivities largely perceived to be homogenous by outsiders under a single identity label, largely at an organizational level. Some prominent example of panethnic identity categories are “Asian American,” “Latino,” and “Hispanic” (Okamoto 2003; Okamoto 2014; Mora 2014; Lopez and Espiritu 1990; Sommers 1991). However, “South Asian” and “Muslim American” panethnicities are still evolving and have not yet solidified in the American racial structure (Borzorgmehr, Ong, and Tosh 2016; Okamoto 2003). However, a sense of panethnic solidarity is emerging among South Asian student populations in college campuses (Prashad 1998; Kibria 1998). According to Mishra (2016: 79):

Students of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and Sri Lankan descent who were born and/or grew up in the United States found the category South Asian a useful one since it captured their racial positioning as brown Asians with shared cultural backgrounds, who were racialized and faced discrimination but could not easily become a part of the campus Asian American organizations.

This section focuses on two forms of panethnic identities that I have found among South Asian Americans—“Desi” and “Muslim.” Moreover, I show how “elsewhere” dynamics influence both the emergence and suppression of South Asian panethnic identities.

“Desi” Panethnicity

The word “Desi” refers to something or someone from “*des*,” meaning the homeland. Used colloquially in several South Asian languages, the term “Desi” likely originated from the word “*des*,”

which means country or the homeland. As a category, Desi refers to something or someone from the homeland, which in this context refers to the Indian subcontinent, rather than any one particular South Asian country. As such, it is also a secular South Asian category as Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs can all be coming from the sub-continent. Overall, Desi is a diasporic term as it is only when one is outside the *des* in a diverse, multicultural society, that it becomes necessary to distinguish peoples and things as from one's own homeland and culture. Indeed, that is how the participants use this term in their day-to-day lives—to distinguish “insiders” from “outsiders.”

For instance, a common self-deprecating joke among all three South Asian groups is that “Brown people run on Desi time,” meaning that South Asians are never on time for *dawats* and appointments. As such, when South Asian students organized any cultural event, the program schedule is always printed to be an hour early than the actual show time. Moreover, at these South Asian cultural gatherings, attendees are often categorized as “Desi” or “non-Desi.” This became clear when an unfamiliar student came to an open-to-all Bangladeshi cultural event on a college campus. Because of the student's ambiguous ethnic features, the organizers, who were all second-generation Bangladeshis, had difficulty placing him neatly into a “Desi” or “non-Desi” category. The hall room, which was the venue for the night, was arranged in a way that the attendees upon entering the room would see a table with sign-in sheets where they would write down their names and contact information. As the student was writing down his information, some of the organizers who were standing a little further away from the room's entrance, muttered amongst themselves asking if anyone knew him. When no one could recognize him, one of the organizers asked in a low voice, “Do you think he's Desi?” The organizer's friend, a Pakistani American who came to show support, replied, “Hard to tell. He looks Asian. He could be Chinese but he could also be someone from Nepal or India.” Another organizer then said, “Someone should go and talk to him. It looks kinda awkward that we are standing here by ourselves. We should try to make him feel welcome.”

Later in the event, I learned from an organizer that the student was Chinese but was interested in learning about South Asian cultures, having had travelled to India in the past.

A prominent component of “Desi” identity is Bollywood. South Asians from all three homelands consume Indian songs, movies, celebrity gossip, and fashion. The first generation watched Bollywood even when they were back in their homelands. Pakistani musicians are equally popular. Bangla music, however, is less so and is consumed mainly by first generation Bangladeshis. This could partly be because there are a lot more linguistic similarities between Hindi and Urdu than between these two languages and Bangla. Although Indians and Pakistanis generally do not know Bangla, many Bangladeshi can speak or at least understand Hindi because of Bollywood movies and songs. Bollywood movies serve as an important bridge when tensions between India and Pakistan run high. For example, most of the second-generation South Asians do not stay tuned to ongoing developments between India and Pakistan with regard to the Kashmir conflict. But back in 2015 when news of the escalated tensions in Kashmir started trending among South Asians on social media, both Indian and Pakistani students became aware and engaged with the issue through Facebook and their cultural associations on campus. They formally issued a statement criticizing the bans in both countries. They also held a demonstration on their college campus where they drew posters with peaceful slogans advocating for friendly relations between their homelands. In addition to sharing statuses on social media, they posted pictures with Indian students waving Pakistani flags and Pakistani students carrying Indian flags.

Another example shows how inter-ethnic cleavages start to lose salience, and give way to panethnic Desi identity. Many Bangladeshi Americans actively participate in Pakistani cultural events, and vice versa. But I was particularly struck at a Pakistani cultural event where several first and second generation Bangladeshis performed a Bollywood dance number on stage, waving a Pakistani flag. The juxtaposition of Bangladeshis joyfully waving a Pakistani flag cheering “*Pakistan*

Zindabaad!" [Long Live Pakistan!], after dancing to Indian Bollywood music would most likely be impossible and largely condemned as un-patriotic in all three South Asian homelands. However, in the hostland, these homeland-oriented differences matter little, as these immigrants are more concerned about creating a sense of groupness among Desis against "foreigners." Particularly in the context of post-9/11 racialization of South Asians as discussed earlier, sweeping aside aspects of the homelands' history that are unpleasant and not pertinent to life in a foreign land is an easier course of action for South Asian immigrants.

Of course, inter-ethnic cleavages are much more pronounced for the first generation. For example, Hasnat and Taher are two older first generation Bangladeshis who still remember the Liberation War of 1971. Taher's father was killed in the war and was viewed as a martyr, and Hasnat can still remember hiding from the Pakistani military in fear for his life. Neither of them believes that they can ever forgive Pakistanis and become friends even after all these years. While they are willing to interact with them for work purposes, they do not initiate conversations with Pakistanis even though they go to the same neighborhood mosque for prayers. When asked if they would ever consider asking their Pakistani neighbors to a *dawat*, they both said they would not. Again, Sameera, a Bangladeshi first generation immigrant and mother of two college-going daughters, does not like her children's friendship with Pakistanis. Although she wants her children to interact with people from diverse backgrounds in order to easily incorporate into America's multicultural society, she does not want them to be "too friendly" with Pakistanis.

"Muslim" Panethnicity

However, not all Desis are the same. For instance, whereas Pakistani and Bangladeshi Americans actively participated in each other's cultural events, I seldom observed them partake in Indian cultural organizations. While many attended the Indian cultural events, few would perform in these events. Even outside organizational activities, young Bangladeshi Americans tend to have

more Pakistani friends than Indian within the South Asian community. Saleh, a Pakistani American, explained why he did not participate in Indian associations on campus when he was in college. According to him, although the Indian cultural events are “a lot of fun” because of their Bollywood-centric themes, he remembers feeling left out. The cultural events usually began with an *aarti* or a Hindu ritual of worship, which indicated to him that the association catered to a Hindu Indian American population. Similarly, Raima is a first generation Bangladeshi immigrant who at the time of the interview was a college student. She was actively engaged with the Pakistani and Bangladeshi student organizations but not the Indian students association. After a Pakistani cultural event where she performed in a group dance, I had asked her how she became involved with the Pakistani students association. She replied that when she came to America and started college, she felt alone and wanted to be around people from her “culture.” She explored all the Desi associations on campus. When she learned about the Pakistani association, she also went to check it out. Once there, she felt comfortable as the members were “all Muslims” and had “similar cultural values” as her.

Again, interactions beyond the college campus, in the larger Desi community, can inform second generation South Asians about homeland cleavages that are still salient in the immigrant community. For example, Liana is a second-generation Bangladeshi. At the time of interview, she was a college senior in the process of applying to a psychology graduate program. She wears the *hijab* on and off. Over the summer, she worked at an Indian restaurant for a few weeks where she learned about the Hindu-Muslim divide through interactions with her employer and customers. She narrates the interactions as follows.

Over the summer I had a job for a few weeks. And it was at an Indian store, restaurant basically. And I had to serve people and it was during Ramadan. During Ramadan I was like this would be a perfect time to start wearing *hijab*! So I started covering my head and then I would go to that job wearing my *hijab*. The owner is Hindu but she does have Muslim workers there. The person who was training me, she was a Muslim and she didn't have a *hijab* on. She was telling me how she was

fasting too. And I would be like ‘oh are you fasting?’ and we would like converse about religion and stuff. After a few days of training, the Muslim worker pulled me to the side and told me do you mind taking your the *hijab* off? I was very confused and asked her why. And she was like ‘oh because a lot of customers have complained—Hindu customers—that they don’t like being served by a Muslim person.’ And I was just like going what century are we in? Do people like really care about these things anymore? And she was like do you mind taking it off? At that moment I was barely starting out [wearing the *hijab*] and was like ‘oh people are judging me.’ And so then I went to the bathroom and I actually took it off. Later I felt really stupid I did.

Liana later found out that the Hindu manager had instructed the Muslim co-worker to ask Liana to take off her headscarf. The manager did not want to ask Liana herself because it may “look bad.” After a few days working at the restaurant (without her *hijab*) Liana quit because she felt unwelcome after the incident.

While on one hand, common hostland experiences in post-9/11 America can lead to panethnic Desi solidarity, they can also lead to distinguish “Muslims” from “non-Muslims.” This became clear at a Bangla movie screening organized by the Bangladeshi student association at a college campus. It was a rainy evening so the turnout was low, with just about 10-12 participants who were mostly Bangladeshi although there were three who were Pakistani and one who was Indian Muslim. The movie being shown was called *Matir Moyna* or The Clay Bird. It was a Bangladeshi production and depicted life in a small Bangladeshi village shortly before the outbreak of the 1971 war. The story follows a family grappling with the brutal political, religious, and cultural changes and how the war affected Bangladeshis from all walks of life. The protagonist is a little boy who is sent off to a *madrasah* by his religiously conservative father who favors a unified Pakistan while the boy’s the uncle goes to join the Bangladeshi guerilla fighters. The goal of presenting this movie was to inform both Bangladeshi and the wider South Asian American audience about Bangladesh’s 1971 War of Independence. Over the course of my fieldwork, I have found few second-generation Bangladeshis to be knowledgeable about their homeland’s past although all of them viewed the war to be that key marker that distinguishes a “Bangladeshi” national identity from

“Indian” and “Pakistani.” As specifically a “Bangladeshi” students’ association—as opposed to “Bangali,” which encompasses Bengali-speaking populations in both India and Bangladesh—some of the board members felt it was their responsibility to learn and inform other “Desis” of their homeland’s past. In some ways, their goal to do so was prudent as many of the young Pakistani Americans I met during fieldwork did not even know about the 1971 Bangladeshi genocide before coming to college. Moreover, whereas Bangladeshis—even those of the second generation who have never visited their ancestral homeland—understand their country’s independence as “gaining liberation” through the 1971 war, the Pakistani Americans were vaguely informed of Bangladesh just “seceding.” The Pakistani Americans encountered the history of the Bangladeshi genocide for the first time at Bangali cultural events on campus where Bangladeshi American students gave presentations on their homeland, such as the *Matir Moyna* movie screening.

After the movie ended, the event’s organizers opened the floor for discussion. They had requested that I moderate the discussion. I agreed as I considered it as an opportunity to learn more about the students. After a few moments of silence, a Bangladeshi male student spoke up, “I think it’s a good thing we are all Muslim here.” I was a little taken aback by his remark. Given the plot of the movie, I had expected the students to react to the Pakistan-Bangladesh conflict. When I asked him why, he replied, “Well, you know. Islam already has a bad rap here [in America] with the media and stuff. I just don’t think the movie would go over well with folks who aren’t Muslim. They are gonna see Islam as violent and it’s [the movie] just gonna give Muslims a bad name.” I looked around the room and saw that some other students were nodding in agreement. I realized that the main conflict depicted in the movie—that between Bangladeshis and Pakistanis—were less salient than the boundary between “Muslims” and “non-Muslims” in America.

Moreover, as Chapter 5 will show, several Pakistani and Bangladeshi students were involved with organizations that advocated for Palestinian rights based on a sense of obligation as fellow

“Muslims.” Like Bushra, a Pakistani Muslim we will meet in chapter 5, they feel that “standing up to any injustice is the duty of a good Muslim.” As such, she advocates for divesting Turkey because of its refusal to recognize the Armenian genocide. Many are also actively engaged in donating, keeping up-to-date, and sharing information regarding the Syrian refugee crisis. However, when asked why they are not also divesting or protesting against Pakistan for its denial to recognize the 1971 Bangladeshi genocide, I found that most of them (usually Pakistanis) do not know about the events. Even if some of the second generation South Asians are somewhat aware, the 1971 Pakistan-Bangladesh conflict does not carry the same level of salience as conflicts between Muslim and non-Muslim populations in the “elsewhere” Middle East.

This could be partly explained by the fact that ongoing politics in the Middle East has more impact on the hostland than religious-politics in South Asia. As such, rather than blaming each other for what happened years ago far away in their homelands, a more favorable strategy to develop a sense of solidarity is to fight for a common cause that is removed from homeland cleavages and without direct impact on day-to-day life in the hostland. Muslim-related issues in the Middle East, such as the Israel/Palestine issue, Turkey and Armenian genocide, and the Syrian refugee crisis, highlight the immigrants’ shared “Muslim” identity. Moreover, engagement with these issues through American organizations provide the immigrants with a platform on which they can build cross-ethnic relationships with other immigrant and native groups in the hostland (topics discussed in Chapter 5).

Conclusion

This chapter analyzed how religion or, more accurately, the manipulation of it by various actors for geopolitical goals, has played a major role in shaping Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and Indian Muslim identity. In each of the sending countries, religious-politics have caused historical conflicts and enduring cleavages. These conflicts and sense of nationhood are brought into the hostland

through the South Asian Muslim immigrants who reiterate and reconstruct some of these boundaries in the process of settling down in a new environment. Although some of the homeland-oriented boundaries lose relevance, deep-rooted homeland-oriented conflicts, such as those between India-Pakistan, Pakistan-Bangladesh, Hindu-Muslim, and Shia-Sunni, remain salient. Homeland politics and religious beliefs are salient even in how some of the immigrants navigate their secular forms of identity, such as sexuality. However, in the process of reiterating or reconstructing homeland-boundaries in the hostland, many of the homeland identities are given new meanings and “elsewhere” dimensions. As a result, cleavages that previously remained largely bound within or between the homelands become tied to global geopolitical conflicts.

Conversely, common hostland experiences allows for these immigrants to coalesce under panethnic identity labels, such as “Desi.” However, “elsewhere” comes to shape the immigrants’ panethnic boundary-work in two seemingly contradictory but overlapping ways. On one hand, foreign “elsewhere” places come to have a more immediate impact on hostland contexts rather than religious-politics from homelands far away. As such, many South Asian immigrants, especially the second generation, tend to brush off some of their homeland-oriented boundaries. Instead, they construct a sense of group-ness based on the “elsewhere” issues that have more salience for their day-to-day lives in America. On the other hand, some “elsewhere”-rooted Muslim conflicts reiterate pre-existing cleavages within South Asian communities, such as that between Muslims and Hindu Nationalists, suppressing opportunities for some forms of panethnicity.

Three key themes discussed in this chapter are relevant to analyzing how “elsewhere” dynamics come to shape the immigrants’ self-identification as “Muslims” in the hostland—the topic of the following chapter. First, the homelands are not geopolitically static or isolated once the immigrants have left for the United States. South Asia has long maintained relationships with the “elsewhere” Middle East, the effects of which have shaped various aspects of society in the

homelands, including politics and religious life. These have come to affect immigrants not only by shaping their national and “Muslim” identities, but also how they are perceived by the larger host society. Second, while nationalism is high in all the three South Asian countries, nationhood is still very much a work in progress. However, these nation-building struggles are not just limited within the home countries’ borders. Rather, dynamics in “elsewhere” places interact with the historic and ongoing religious-political divisions of the homelands to shape “Pakistani,” “Bangladeshi,” and “Indian” identities. Third, the subcontinent’s colonized past at the hands of British colonizers is still salient in the worldview of South Asians, including those who have immigrated to the West, such as the participants. Moreover, the remnants of these countries’ colonized past are deep-rooted in their architecture, law, education, religion, and nation-building. In more recent times, the South Asian public is generally aware of the global political tensions in various parts of “the Muslim world,” such as Iraq, Iran, and Palestine in the Middle East, as well as in neighboring Afghanistan (Pew Global Attitudes Project 2003). These ongoing conflicts between “the West” and “the Muslim world,” combined with the immigrants’ collective past of being colonized by a Western power have led to a sense of resentment among segments of the South Asian population towards the West, particularly the United States in light of the War on Terror. Many South Asian Americans echo these feelings even after they have settled in the United States for many years. Overall, this chapter shows how analyzing the sending countries through the multicentered relational framework reveals global, “elsewhere” dimensions of immigrants’ homeland-oriented identities. The following chapter shifts the analytical focus to the hostland, showing how global geopolitics politics shapes the immigrants’ Muslim identities and their interactions with the U.S. society.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE EFFECTS OF GLOBAL GEOPOLITICS ON THE CONSTRUCTION OF “MODERATE,” “HIJABI,” AND “MUSLIM AMERICAN” IDENTITIES

This chapter analyzes how South Asian Muslim Americans manage their day-to-day social interactions in post-9/11 America, a context where “Muslims” are largely perceived as not just “foreigners” or “outsiders” but also as dangerous national security threats. Although Muslims have long been viewed as suspicious outsiders or an “Other” based on orientalist notions of Islam and the Middle East (Said 1979), the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent terror-panic climate have amplified the fears, hostility, and suspicion towards Muslims as terrorists (Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2009; Cainkar 2009). As a result, Muslim immigrants have been the targets of several U.S. government-run surveillance programs. For example, from 2002-2011, the National Security Entry-Exit System (NSEERS) enforced foreign nationals from twenty-six Muslim-majority countries to be registered, fingerprinted, and photographed upon U.S. entry followed by annual reports to U.S. immigration agencies. Again, from 2001-2013, the New York Police Department and the Central Intelligence Agency—both state agencies with a history of aggressively spying on domestic political dissidents (Boghosian 2013)—maintained a secret surveillance program on Muslim communities in New York that monitored and analyzed their everyday lives, going as far as to recruit insiders of the community as informants (Apuzzo and Goldman 2011). Even after many of the post-9/11 surveillance programs ended, the fear of being surveilled did not perish, with President Trump promising to create a database that will register and track all Muslims in the United States. Moreover, the Federal Bureau of Investigation not only plans to continue using undercover informants to detect terrorist plots—programs that disproportionately target Muslims (Human Rights Watch 2014)—but also expand such operations to purportedly defend against ISIS (Lichtblau 2016).

The U.S. media has arguably played an influential role in perpetuating the stereotype of Muslims as terrorist threats through its portrayal of Islam and its followers from even prior to 9/11 (Powell 2011; Shaheen 2001; Silva 2017). But since 9/11, it has served as a “key force” in creating a cultural change where anti-Muslim fringe organizations have a rising influence on media discourses than mainstream pro-Muslim civil rights organizations (Bail 2012: 857). Despite being fewer in number, fringe organizations have been heavily overrepresented in media discourses after 9/11 whereas mainstream civil rights organizations have been underrepresented (Bail 2012; Bail 2015). As such, anti-Muslim messages from these previously obscure groups have now become mainstream discourses that shape popular understandings of Islam. However, even mainstream news organizations such as *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *LA Times*, and *USA Today* cover Islam and Muslim-related news stories in ways that closely associate Muslims with fear, radicalization, and international terrorism (Altheide 2006; Powell 2011; Silva 2017). For instance, in exploring U.S. media coverage of terrorism, Powell (2011) finds a pattern that reiterates the “clash” between “the West” and “the East” or between the so-called “Christian America” and “the Muslim Other.” In cases where the terrorists are Muslim, media coverage moves from identifying the perpetrator as Muslim to making a connection to an international terrorist cell, the attacker’s motivation being a holy war against the United States. Contrastingly, if the terrorists are non-Muslim, the attacks are covered as isolated incidents, with the perpetrators being humanized as “mentally unstable,” “troubled” individuals whose shocked family members are then shown to condemn violence (Powell 2011: 106). Overall, the spate of ISIS terrorist attacks across the globe, the contentious national debates surrounding President Trump’s “Muslim ban,” and mass media coverage of Muslim-related conflicts depicting Islam as directly opposed to Western, Christian ideologies have all added to the hypervisibility of this minority as “threats” in American society.

This context of hypervisibility and increased surveillance of Muslims as potential terrorists have contributed to creating a climate of insecurity, fear, suspicion, and anxiety that organizes Muslim Americans' community life in many ways, such as through self-policing. As will be shown, for Muslim Americans, self-policing comes in the form of everyday precautions, taken in apprehension of being perceived as threats, unwelcome outsiders, or anti-American. Most of the South Asian Muslim participants fall into the racialized "Muslim" category because of their stereotypical "Muslim-looking" facial features and brown complexion. As such, they stand largely exposed to "Islamophobic racism" (Love 2017) whose effects become particularly clear in the event of an Islamist terrorist attack. In these instances, Muslims are held collectively accountable and so feel obligated to loudly condemn terrorism. For if they do not, they run the risk of being perceived as terrorist sympathizers or of being accused of enabling terrorism by remaining silent.

This Muslims-are-to-blame mentality is institutionalized through government-run counterterrorism initiatives such as the Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) program, which places the responsibility on Muslims to weed out extremists from their midst. Launched in 2014, CVE purportedly aims to prevent U.S. residents from becoming "radicalized" and address the root causes of violent extremism by engaging community and religious leaders, law enforcement, healthcare professionals, teachers, and social service providers (Department of Homeland Security 2017). If any of them identifies "visible" signs of individuals from their community joining extremist groups or becoming terrorists, he/she is to take action by pinpointing that suspect to law enforcement authorities (Patel and Koushik 2017). In practice, these programs focus mainly, if not only, on Muslim communities, as evidenced by President Trump reportedly proposing to rename these initiatives to "Countering Islamic Extremism" or "Countering Radical Islamic Extremism" (Houry 2017). The government-run undercover surveillance programs immediately after 9/11 had sown mistrust within Muslim communities where friends and neighbors suspected each another of

being government infiltrates on the one hand, and extremist sympathizers on the other (MACLC et al. 2013). By placing Muslims as their own surveillors, CVE paves the way for sowing further mistrust within Muslim communities. Moreover, if a terrorist attack does occur, it seemingly justifies the blaming of Muslims as they have either “failed” to “adequately spy” on their community members or have “enabled” the attack by not reporting relevant information to law enforcement authorities.

In this overall climate of fear and suspicion, the onus to prove themselves “innocent,” “good,” or “unthreatening” falls upon individual Muslims. By tracing the interactions of South Asian Muslim Americans, this chapter analyzes how the participants present their “Muslim-ness” both when they are amongst themselves and when they are interacting with the larger U.S. society. I particularly focus on how participants self-police and present themselves as “moderate” and “*hijabi*.” Both are labels that the participants often use to describe themselves and each other. Although both tend to imply diverging levels of one’s “Muslim-ness,” this chapter will show that these labels are often inaccurate measures of one’s religiosity and that rather than being opposites, often overlap. Many “*hijabis*,” for instance, identify themselves as “moderate” Muslims. Overall, “moderate” and “*hijabi*” provide two different lenses that capture how “Muslim” as an identity category is experienced and enacted on the ground.

In the case of “moderate,” how Muslims themselves use the term as a form of self-identification is often different from how it is largely viewed as a category in politicized discourses surrounding Muslims. Again, why and how “moderate” is used by Muslim Americans differ at the individual and organizational levels. At the individual level, many Muslim Americans try to distance themselves from the “Muslim” identity category by largely relegating religion to the private sphere, and striving to avoid any indicators of their “Muslim-ness” in day-to-day public interactions. However, if the need to publicly address their religion does come up, such as in the event of an

Islamist terrorist attack, they do not forsake their “Muslim” identity altogether, but qualify themselves as “good,” “moderate” Muslims. Making oneself visible as “moderate,” in turn, involves self-policing on an everyday basis that includes avoiding political conversations and highlighting apolitical similarities with other Americans. However, these strategies are double-sided—on the one side, they provide Muslims with some protection in times of heightened Islamophobia, but on the other hand, they silence Muslims and render them politically passive.

The label “*hijabi*” appears to set a contrast to the “moderate” identity category in many ways. Whereas “moderate” implies one’s level of religiosity to be somewhere in the middle of the spectrum, “*hijabi*” as an identity label that is based on an explicit marker of faith, tends to imply a high level of religiosity. Moreover, because of their external marker, “*hijabis*” are automatically identified as “Muslims,” and thereby categorized as “outsiders” in the prevailing sociopolitical climate. As such, in contrast to “moderates” without the headscarf, *hijabis* do not have the choice to mute and distance from their “Muslim-ness” in public. “*Hijabi*” also comes with complex gendered connotations where veiled women are perceived as somehow oppressed and forced to wear the veil. Many *hijabis* respond to these stereotypes by presenting themselves as “calm,” “empowered,” and “free” “American” women. However, these strategies are often burdensome and emotionally taxing for *hijabi* women as they feel they often come to represent all Muslims, and that what they do or say in public may shape how others view Islam and Muslims at large. Despite encountering Islamophobic interactions, for instance, they feel they cannot afford to express their anger and frustration in the case that their reactions reinforce stereotypes about Muslims being prone to violence.

At the organizational level, Muslim leaders also deploy visibility strategies to appear “moderate,” but with the goal to insert Muslims into mainstream U.S. politics as active participants. They strive to do so by constructing a “Muslim American” identity category, using organizations

such as ISNA and Islamic schools. “Moderate” is but one component of this identity category, which overall aims to establish an American brand of Islam that is compatible with American values of freedom, multiculturalism, and democracy. In this project, Muslim American community leaders, educators, and organizations aim to on the one hand “Islamize” the components of mainstream American culture that do not contradict Islam. On the other, they present tenets of Islamic belief, such as Sharia Law, in an “Americanized” fashion. Based on this identity platform, religious and community leaders urge Muslim Americans to advocate for Islam and demand for their rights as “Americans.” The following section first analyzes the participants’ day-to-day self-policing strategies as members of a hypervisible and often surveilled category before the chapter delves into these arguments.

Everyday Experiences Under “Muslim” Hypervisibility

The participants’ interviews revealed not only how their collective hypervisibility shapes their daily lives but also that they were cognizant of being monitored. For example, Tabassum, a Pakistani American who had recently graduated from college, recalled the following incident:

So we moved to Orange County in 2001, two weeks before 9/11 happened. It was a white suburb but we didn’t realize how much white it was until we started school. I remember we went to school and it was like everyone was white. So one day [in 2011, according to her estimate], my brother’s friend had a beard and they were getting their tires changed. He was just pointing at a map and was saying this summer we are going to drive from here to all the way to NY. My brother was like okay so you are driving here and they were talking about all this. Two days later, an FBI agent came. I was at the door. I was like 9 and I called my mom. And then they [the FBI agent] were asking me oh where is your brother and we [Tabassum and her mother] were like he is in college, what is this about. And he was like can you please ask him to call me. And then it turns out that someone in the neighborhood reported a suspicious behavior about my brother potentially planning something dangerous.

Tabassum explained that while she herself is not “Muslim-looking” because of her fair complexion and the absence of the *hijab* or headscarf, her brother’s and his friend’s facial features, especially the friend’s beard, rendered them close to the stereotypical Muslim image. As such,

Tabassum believes that their merely consulting a map was perceived as possibly planning a terror attack.

Again, some participants remain fearful of being perceived as “too Muslim” or of being surveilled by “government spies” because of their association with other Muslims. For example, a few years after 9/11, the Bangladeshi family of another college student, Lamia, had relocated to a predominantly white neighborhood from a suburb known to have a large Muslim population, and where they had lived for almost a decade. Her parents owned a small business and feared that by being seen as close to Muslims, they would be suspected as terrorists and lose customers or, worse, sent back to Bangladesh. Even now, her parents decline invitations to attend prayers at their previous local mosque when friends and neighbors from their old neighborhood call on *Eid*, the biggest Islamic festival. Sometimes, her parents refuse to even answer phone calls from old friends, who, in light of 9/11, they consider to be “too Muslim,” by which they meant those friends regularly attended mosques, wore *hijab* or other forms of conservative clothing, were highly observant of Islamic practices, and were vocal about their faith. A number of other participants also showed reluctance to talk about religious topics on the phone for fear of being tapped by the government.

The participants’ fear that they were being monitored led many of them to modify their visibility in public, but in ways they believed contradict stereotypes about Muslims. For instance, Adeena is a Bangladeshi woman who has been living in Los Angeles for almost thirty years. She wears a *burqa* (an outer garment covering from top of the head to the ground) when stepping out of the house. I interviewed her daughter, Farhana, who was a junior in college at the time. Neither Farhana nor her two teenage sisters wears the *hijab*. Although she and her sisters often urged Adeena to wear bright colors, Adeena always opted for muted, neutral colors like white, black, and brown to blend in with the crowd as much as possible. However, Farhana described an incident that occurred not long after the ISIS terrorist attacks in Paris and San Bernardino in which Adeena had donned

her usual black *burqa* to go shopping before suddenly taking it off. Instead, Farhana recalls how Adeena brought out a pink *hijab*. At Farhana's surprise, Adeena explained, "If I wear black, people stare at me longer. They notice me more." According to Farhana, Adeena thought that black is too closely associated with stereotypical images of "oppressed", "conservative" Muslim women in foreign lands like the Middle East. In contrast, Adeena found pink to be a color that presents a friendlier and more open image. As such, Farhana explained, by wearing pink instead of black, Adeena hoped to distance herself from the stereotype and make herself visible as a friendly, open, empowered Muslim woman.

Similarly, Anwar, a Pakistani American, recalled an incident when he was at a mall with his parents and younger brother one day. His mother unwrapped a piece of candy while walking by a line of stores. She threw the wrapper at a nearby trash container but missed, with the wrapper falling on the floor. She did not stop to pick it up but had walked past. However, Anwar's father suddenly stopped on his tracks, turned around, and asked Anwar's mother to pick up the wrapper and put it inside the container. Baffled, Anwar's mother asked why he was making this a big deal. Anwar said that his father had then asked, "Do you realize what you just did?" Anwar's mother replied, "No what did I do?" To which he replied, "You just dropped trash on the ground." Anwar's mother, now slightly annoyed, asked, "Okay...why did you stop us all for that?" Anwar then quoted his father's response, which he still remembers as an important lesson. According to him, his father explained:

Remember you are wearing a hijab. Everybody around you is looking at you and saying that you are Muslim. And if you litter, they are going to say bad action, headscarf, and they are immediately going to equate those two together. Negative, negative, Muslims are bad. That's how easy it is for people to judge us. So we have to be role models to show others this is who we are, these are the actions that we do, and this how we behave, and then you be the judge.

Anwar's mom then appeared to understand her husband's point as she walked back a few steps to pick up the candy wrapper and put it carefully inside the trash container. Anwar explained

to me then that although his mother was not initially aware of her hypervisibility as “Muslim,” once she was made aware, she consciously tried to subvert the stereotype attached to her religious identity by making herself visible in a positive light.

Distancing from the “Muslim” Category by Separating the Public from the Private

Even though the participants are not constantly aware of their “Muslim” identity, that their “Muslim-ness” could be viewed negatively is ingrained in how they interact differently in public and private spaces. The common experience of leading lives as Muslims in a largely Islamophobic social context has led to a shared understanding among the participants in that they generally do not talk about religion and relevant topics when in unfamiliar and non-Muslim company. Rather, individuals adopt various strategies to make themselves visible in ways that distance them from the “Muslim” identity in public. Those wearing explicit markers of faith, namely the *hijab*, are exceptions to this strategy as they are automatically “marked” as “Muslims”—a theme we discuss later in the chapter.

The divide between the public and private became apparent during fieldwork when I was triangulating interview data with ethnographic observations. On most occasions, I had formally interviewed the participants before spending time with them in more unstructured settings. I used the interview sessions not only to introduce myself as a researcher and derive responses but also to create rapport with the participants, that later enabled me to ask for referrals. During the interviews, I usually asked the participants to walk me through an average day of their week. I hoped their responses would give me insight into what tasks, places, and people the participants deemed relevant to their daily lives. At that stage, I was still an unfamiliar “outsider” in the field, with only my Muslim-sounding name and physical appearance indicating to the participants my religious and ethnic background.

In many of the interviewees’ descriptions of their daily routine, I noticed that although the participants described their day in intricate detail, they hardly mentioned observing religious

practices. This was the pattern for even those who wore religious markers (such as the *hijab* and the *Zulfiqar*, a pendant only Shia Muslims wear) as well as for college students whom I knew were active in Muslim student groups on campus. Participants also appeared indifferent to social and political issues that existing surveys had found to be important for Muslim Americans, instead providing aloof responses like, “I don’t know.” Overall, it appeared as if their religious identity was not relevant to their lives at all.

However, as I began to make myself more familiar to the participants, I observed how their Muslim identity implicitly shaped many aspects of their daily routine. For instance, in addition to mundane topics like dating, weekend plans, concerns about classes, rivalries within their communities, family disputes etc., participants also shared their views on different Muslim-related issues ongoing not just in the United States and their homelands but also in places like Syria and Palestine. In most cases, religion seemed to be a natural or taken-for-granted part of their lives—a way in which they organized their activities and interactions without dispensing much thought. Instead, they appeared to be more actively concerned about course grades, paying rent, finding employment, raising children, marriage, interactions at the workplace etc.

The following description gives a sense of what such an average day, filled with the participants’ mundane preoccupations look like. The day would begin with one preparing for work—making breakfast, packing lunch, wearing appropriate clothes for the day ahead. Students would rush from their dorm rooms to their back-to-back classes and study sessions from morning till noon while professionals would commute to their work places. At around noon, some participants preferred to have lunch by themselves or call their families to know how their day has been, whereas others would meet up with friends or coworkers. For office workers, the second half of their day would resemble the first. For college students, afternoons would usually include campus organizational meetings, errands, and study sessions before heading back to their dorms in the late

evening. At home, dinner is usually family time with the television playing either the news or South Asian soap operas in the background. In the college dorms, dinner would usually consist of home-cooked meals prepared and delivered in Tupperware by mothers over the weekend, to be microwaved when needed, and enjoyed while watching sports, Netflix, or TV shows like Grey's Anatomy, Gossip Girl, Friends, and Scandal with roommates.

And yet, my ethnographic observations gave me a different view of their routine that brought to light the latent salience of their Muslim identity. For example, as individuals dressed for their day, some consciously selected clothes that would enable them to offer prayers between their schedule, usually during lunch or between classes. Women wore “modest” clothes, meaning full-sleeves, jeans or long dresses, whereas men wore trousers instead of shorts. Some of the organizational meetings that students attended on campus were Muslim student associations or Palestinian human rights organizations. Some students were *zabeeha* and thus ate only *halal* food (i.e., food permitted by Islamic dietary restrictions), making microwaved home-cooked dinners the most cost-effective and convenient option. Several college-going participants had known their roommates long before coming to college through their families and community mosque, or have found each other through Muslim student organizations on campus.

Again, several participants refrained from drinking alcohol because it is *haram* (forbidden) according to Islamic dietary restrictions. This posed a problem as drinking is embedded in American culture as a form of casual socialization. Whereas some participants avoided situations involving alcohol altogether, some others, like Rashed, an aspiring Pakistani American filmmaker looking for work, had to find creative solutions to “fit in” without drawing attention to his religious identity.

According to Rashed:

I would be one of the earlier people to arrive and I would go to the kitchen, pour myself a glass of coke and just grab on to the glass for the rest of the evening haha! And then when people ask me if I am drinking, I am like ‘Yeah...I got a drink!’ Because I didn’t want to have that conversation like, ‘Oh you don’t drink? How

come?’ ‘Religious issues.’ ‘Oh really? Who are you?’ ‘I am Muslim.’ ‘Oh. Okay, cool.’ What does that conversation change? If you learn that I am a Muslim that doesn’t change anything. Only that now, you closed yourself off to me. And I feel like I won’t be able to connect to people. So sometimes I pretend to be hyper, like I am drunk, and having fun.

All this is not to say, however, that the participants never subscribe to the Muslim identity label. As the next section will show, rather than forsaking the “Muslim” category altogether, the participants qualify themselves as “moderate” Muslims when their religious identity needs to be addressed in public. In contrast to the lone “Muslim” label, which most of my informants believe connotes “terrorists” in the larger political discourse about Islam in America, the “moderate” Muslim category supposedly indicates positive values of peace and hard work shared by all Americans. In so doing, the participants attempt to draw an explicit boundary between them and Islamist extremists.

Before proceeding to discussing the “moderate” Muslim label, however, I should note that some interviewees conversely *over*-emphasized their “Muslim” identity, or at least specific aspects of it. This usually happened with interviewees with whom I was unfamiliar and when I had not met them prior to our scheduled interview session. Because of snowball sampling, these interviewees and I would have a mutual friend put us in touch for an hour-long interview. Usually, I requested that the friend provide only general information about me to the potential interviewee, such as that I am a doctoral student interested in studying Muslim Americans’ community life. Even during the interviews, I rarely shared my religious and political views to avoid priming the participants’ responses. Yet, the participants could usually tell my religious background from my appearance and first and last names, which are fairly common Arabic names in South Asian Muslim families. As such, some of these interviewees saw me as an “insider.” While on the one hand, their impression of me as an insider allowed them to be candid about their prejudices and controversial religious-political views—which tend to remain strictly within South Asian Muslim settings—it also meant

that they sometimes over-communicated their “Muslim-ness” to me during interviews that in their day-to-day interactions is often not the case.

For example, Arabic words, such as *Inshaa.Allah* or *Mashaa.Allah* would frequently pepper their conversations with me and they would talk at length about how much their religion means to them. However, my later ethnographic observations of them outside of the formal interview setting often showed that they seldom used as many Arabic words when they are hanging out with their Muslim and South Asian friends. Moreover, despite giving the sense during interviews that they are highly observant or practicing of Islam in their daily lives, such as praying five times a day, as I spent time with them in their regular routines, I would often observe prayer times pass by without the participants even noticing. Moreover, perhaps as an indication to how much Islamophobia has come to characterize the Muslim American experience, particularly in the increasingly polarized political climate during fieldwork (Semple 2015)—the interviewees presumed I was asking about Islamophobia when I asked them general open-ended questions about their religious experiences. As a fellow “insider,” they would ask me in turn if I have ever felt stigmatized as a Muslim. The theme of Islamophobia would predominate their interviews. Based just on their interview responses, it would seem that their Muslim identity or the stigma attached to it affected *every* aspect of their lives. Yet, my ethnographic observations showed that these people led regular lives, which were preoccupied with mundane concerns about managing the monthly budget, getting promotions at work, applying to graduate school, and maintaining relationships. Direct Islamophobic encounters were few and far between, although the participants nonetheless often interpreted their worldview through that lens.

Being “Moderate” Muslims

Today, “moderate” is a contentious word carrying both religious and political meanings. Scholars, media personalities, bloggers, and political commentators from both liberal and

conservative isles use it to interpret Muslims in relation to Muslims' views on Western democratic values and Islamic terrorism (Rabasa et. al. 2007). However, "moderate" could mean devout to some and liberal to others, thus leading to endless debates on who exactly are "moderate" Muslims as opposed to "radicals" and "extremists" (Ibrahim 2016; Rabasa et. al. 2007; Rashid 2011). For example, while the West largely views Wahhabis as "extremists," Saudis generally deem Wahhabism as "moderate" (Hubbard 2016). These labels become all the more powerful because of the consequences they carry. A call for a more "liberal" interpretation of Islam could be seen as "radical" and thus enforce punitive measures, as has been the case in Saudi Arabia (Hubbard 2016). Conversely, women choosing to cover themselves based on notions of freedom and empowerment could be viewed as "extremist," as has been the case in France with regard to the *niqab* (a religious covering showing only the eyes) and the *Burkini* (a modesty swimsuit covering all but the face, hands, and feet) (Rubin 2016). Some argue that there is no such thing as a moderate Muslim because there is a moral vacancy within the religion itself (Rizvi 2014). Whereas, others argue that the word is meaningless to describe ordinary followers of a peaceful religion (Manzoor 2015).

Again, some use "moderate" to favorably distinguish Muslims from Jihadists, whereas others use it derogatively to condemn Muslims who refuse to support their coreligionists against a global enemy—"the West". For example, while American political commentators perceive the Muslim Brotherhood as "radical Islamists" based on its hostile view towards the United States, Jihadists condemn it as "moderate" for rejecting global jihad and embracing democracy (Leiken and Brooke 2007). Thus, "moderate" as a category is inextricably tied to the global phenomenon of Islamic terrorism, and has come to be understood in contrast to the categories "radicals" and "extremists." Simplistically, "moderate Muslims" generally refers to those who adhere to secular ideals such as, democracy and freedom, gender equality, separation between mosque and state, just governance, and the vehement denunciation of violence (Rabasa et. al. 2007). In contrast, "extremists" or

“radicals” are understood as those Muslims who believe in an “Islamic state” and condone violence as a means to establish it.

According to these discourses, the participants could all be categorized as “moderate” Muslims. They are all in favor of democracy as practiced in the United States because they view it to be in accordance to the *Shura* or the egalitarian political system in the Quran. Although critical of the United States’ foreign policy towards Muslim countries, they do not view the United States to be contradictory to Islamic values of freedom, social justice, and equality. Instead, they view American democracy as an example of just governance in compliance with Islamic ideals. Furthermore, all participants vehemently reject violence in the name of Islam. More importantly, the participants themselves used the term “moderate” to describe themselves in ways that reflected the general discourse surrounding the label. For example, when I asked Nazia, an Indian American college student about her religious upbringing, she said:

I would say it was kind of moderate. They [her parents] are not very conservative in the sense that I have to sit at home or they never followed the very strict rules, I guess. I don’t know how to describe this. They are not liberal in the sense that they don’t drink, and they don’t let me drink. They have been very open-minded, especially after moving here [her parents came to the U.S. ten years ago from India]. They have been more open to differing ideas. For example, different social issues. They are okay with me having a different point of view on certain things. More like open with the idea of me being independent.

Although Nazia uses the word “moderate,” she does so in relation to her own interpretations of “conservative” and “liberal”. Her parents are “moderate” because they are “not very conservative,” which she gauges in light of their attitude towards gender roles and implementation of Islamic rules in the household. Yet, at the same time, she does not think her parents are “liberal” as they strictly follow some Islamic regulations, like the restriction of alcohol and dating. Despite coming “closer” to religion on her own in college, Nazia goes on to say later in her interview that her religiosity tends to align with her parents, meaning that she too falls within her understanding of a “moderate” Muslim.

However, the label “moderate” is not an accurate description or indicator of the participants’ religiosity. Although the participants overwhelmingly describe themselves as “moderate,” their religiosity reflects the heterogeneity of the Muslim population and challenge the idea of a Muslim monolith. For example, while some participants regularly observe all five prayers, dietary and clothing regulations, and gender relations, their political views could be described as liberal progressive in that they espouse feminist ideals and support gay rights. Others are symbolic believers but have strict views against homosexuality based on religious beliefs. Again, some participants pray everyday but consume alcohol and engage in premarital sex, both of which are forbidden according to Islamic scriptures. Many women wear liberal Western clothing but eat only *halal* food. Some wear the *hijab* but do not pray regularly; whereas, some are not *hijabi* but wear modest clothing and try to pray five times a day. A few self-identify as gay or bisexual but still pray and read the Quran regularly. However, almost all participants, even those who do not practice Islam in their everyday lives, claim to be, in their words, “culturally” and/or “politically” Muslim, meaning they want social justice for all Muslims, even if they no longer spiritually identify with the religion.

In general, the participants colloquially use the label “moderate” to mean “not extremist” or “not terrorist.” This became clear in my interview with Tahira, a Bangladeshi American engineering major. In the excerpt below, Tahira describes herself as “moderate” to distinguish herself from Islamist terrorists, who she views to be reinforcing Islamophobic stereotypes.

Tahira: When I see those things on the news I definitely feel angry. It’s making people who think Islam is a violent religion...it helps their case. It shows them like oh look they blew this up, how can you say this is a peaceful religion. We are trying so hard to convince people that Muslims are not terrorists. There is a small minority who are...who does violent things but our religion doesn’t teach us to do that. When those kinds of things happen I get angry at the people who view our religion as violent but angrier at the people who actually did it. If you [referring to the terrorists] are Muslim, why don’t you understand that our religion doesn’t teach these things? So why are you making people view it like that!

Me: You say “we”. Who are “we”?

Tahira: Like, normal, moderate Muslims.

However, Mamdani's work (2002, 2004) point to the slippery slope in using categories like "moderate" and "extremist." He argues that doing so shifts the cultural discourse from talking about terrorists and civilians to differentiating between "good Muslims" from "bad Muslims." Such talk further entrenches the perceived link between Islam and terrorism in that it presumes terrorism as an "essential" characteristic of Muslims—those who have rejected this violent inclination and embraced secularism are the "good Muslims"; whereas, the terrorists or the "bad Muslims" are expressing Muslims' so-called characteristic tendency to inflict violence upon "the West" (Mamdani 2002: 766). This binary also implies that the "good" or "moderate" Muslims who are rejecting terrorism are not being their "authentic" selves, and so should be always watched in case they give in to their "essentially" violent character.

My interview with Amir, a Pakistani American college senior mentioned in Chapter 3, addressed the burden that the "moderate-extremist" categorization places upon Muslims to not only distinguish themselves from "bad Muslims," but also stress on the similarity they share with other—i.e., non-Muslim—civilians. For example, when I asked Amir, a Pakistani American college student, on whether he would describe himself as a "moderate" Muslim, he appeared offended. "Uhh what do you mean by that? Who is a moderate Muslim?" He asked. "I don't know. I am not sure. What do you think?" I replied. He slightly shook his head and said:

See, I think that word [moderate] is problematic. It's like saying there are good Muslims and then there are bad Muslims and we have to be like, "Oh no, we are the good ones. We are just like you [non-Muslim Americans]! We believe the same things you guys do!" It's as if the burden is on us to show them that we are not like the terrorists you see on TV blowing up things.

Despite these problematic aspects, describing oneself as "moderate" nonetheless has some instrumental value, especially in times of extreme Islamophobic tensions. Muslim Americans then have to either explicitly differentiate between them and the attackers or be in danger of being perceived as potential terrorists or, worse, exposed to Islamophobic attacks (Benchemsi 2015).

However, to convincingly make their case in such moments of crises, Muslim Americans have to carve their visibility as “moderates” incrementally over time. Furthermore, being publicly perceived as “moderates” even on an everyday basis carries the benefits of being (at least conditionally) accepted by peers and co-workers. This dilemma of Muslims having to use a double-edged sword to procure a relatively more favorable or safer position in society reflects the embeddedness of Muslim Americans in the United States’ racialized power structure.

But *how* do participants make themselves visible as “moderates?” I found that they tend to do so by largely remaining silent about their political views in public, underlining their preference to keep indications of their “Muslim-ness” inside the private sphere. In the current sociopolitical climate, expressing political opinions or critiquing the U.S. media and foreign policies as biased against Muslims could not only reinforce their perceived “otherness” but also expose them to anti-Muslim backlash. Muslim-related politics thus are usually discussed in intimate, informal places where “Muslim” is the “normal, default, taken-for-granted” “unmarked” category (Brubaker et. al. 2006: 211).

For example, in addition to homeland politics, the 2016 U.S. presidential election cycle was a main topic of conversation in intimate social gatherings at home, indicating that the participants were keeping informed about mainstream U.S. politics. Men talked about Donald Trump’s anti-Muslim views, Hillary Clinton’s foreign policy towards the Middle East, Bernie Sanders’ vocal support for Muslim Americans, and the candidates’ stance towards Palestine. The inflammatory anti-Muslim rhetoric from the Republican candidates reconfirmed what these individuals had already come to believe based on their lived experiences—that Islamophobia, which has been an undercurrent in post-9/11 American society and politics, has been brought to the surface for the world to see. Although the Democrats vocally supported the Muslim American community, many within the South Asian community viewed Hillary Clinton’s Middle East policies to be unfavorable

towards Palestine that in turn indicated her position towards Muslims globally. In contrast, most of the South Asian Muslims I have come to meet during fieldwork favored Bernie Sanders as he represented a break from mainstream politics, which participants viewed to be biased against Muslims, and because of his willingness to advance Palestinian rights.

Even those who did not routinely follow American news and preferred to orient themselves toward their homeland contributed to the conversation indicating some knowledge on the candidates' platform on Muslims and the Middle East. Indeed, many of the participants, especially those of the younger generation, stay informed about news headlines about Muslim-related issues not only within America but also across the world, particularly the Middle East. Deeming mainstream American news channels, such as CNN, MSNBC, and Fox, to be biased against Muslims, they subscribe to Al Jazeera and BBC. As such, many of the participants knew about the ISIS bombings in Beirut even though it was not widely covered in American mainstream news channels. Many of these young Muslim immigrants also subscribe to Islamic civil rights organizations, like the Council for American Islamic Relations on social media where these sources would post their take of Muslim-related events. The participants sometimes share these news stories with their parents. Farhana, the Bangladeshi college student who we met earlier provides such an example. Farhana came to the United States when she was just a few years old with her parents and two older sisters. Most of her extended family lives in the same neighborhood in California. She considers herself a practicing Muslim in that she tries to pray five times a day, fasts during Ramadan, wears modest clothing, has never dated or drank alcohol. Most of her close friends are Desi Muslims whom she met in college through her Islamic studies class. Farhana does not watch the news but reads articles that trend on social media. It was on Facebook that Farhana read the news story about the three Bangladeshi British Muslims who were caught on their way to joining ISIS in Syria (Bennhold 2015). When she went home for the weekend, she shared the news with her mother and

sisters, leading to a discussion about how ISIS can lure any young Muslims to joining their Jihad against the West. In their discussion, her mother warned Farhana and her sisters from speaking to strangers, especially on social media, about their religion.

In contrast to these conversations in intimate spaces, I was talking with Faizah, a Bangladeshi American, one day when I learned that she was going to go watch a movie with some friends. I asked if I knew those friends as she had introduced me to some of them earlier. She replied, “No, I don’t think so. They’re my white friends.” I asked what movie she was planning to watch. She replied, “Pitch Perfect 2.” I laughed, saying I would not have thought her to like “sugary teen movies”. Smiling, Faizah said, “Of course! I am not gonna go watch American Sniper with them!” When I asked why not, she said, “It’s too political. I don’t ever talk about politics when I am with them.” The movie Faizah referred to, American Sniper, was a biographical movie that had come out the year before about an American marksman in the Iraq War with the highest number of kills in U.S. military history. Faizah, however, used the title to refer to all political movies concerning wars in the Middle East, a hotbed of geopolitics between “the West” and “the Muslim world.” Movies such as this might trigger discussions about Islam or Muslims and put Faizah on the spot, a situation she wanted to avoid when with her “white” friends. As such, Faizah chose to watch a movie from an apolitical, “safe” genre that highlights commonalities with her friends, such as their similar taste in pop-culture. Here, “white” is implied to mean “non-Muslim” and “non-South Asian” as I later learned that this group of friends included Latinos as well.

If political issues did come up when among friends from outside their religious-ethnic communities, many participants opted to listen quietly to gauge others’ views of Muslim-related issues, even if the conversation was not directly about Muslims. For instance, at a group study session during student government elections at a college campus, two members from opposing student political parties brought up the ongoing debate surrounding Palestinian and Israeli rights, a

contentious topic which had created divisions within the campus community. The three Muslim students who were there did not contribute to the discussion although I knew from my conversations with them earlier that they were well informed about the ongoing debate and had already decided to vote for the party supporting Palestinian rights.

However, the strategy to remain distant from political issues in public tends to render the participants politically passive. For instance, even if the college-going participants were to encounter Islamophobic interactions, their parents have advised them to “never get in fights” and “just walk away.” Parents also instruct their children not to engage in political organizations, instead stressing the importance of education and building a stable career, preferably in a STEM field. The common mindset among parents is that the children can enter politics when they are “ready,” meaning professionally successful with a recognition and social status. Some parents especially forbid their children from becoming involved with political student organizations regarding the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, a topic that has gained momentum on some college campuses and which tends to engender polarized religious-political views. Parents worry that by being too vocal about this politically charged issue in public would draw attention to their “Muslim” identity and even depict them as politically subversive or “radical” Muslims, hurting future career prospects. For example, in her interview, Faizah described the instructions she had received from her parents before moving to her college dorms.

Faizah: My parents actually told me not to get involved in the MSA [Muslim Student Association] and not to be too close to *hijabis* and people who are very very religious by our standards [she had previously described her family as “moderate”].

Me: Why would they say that?

Faizah: Because especially in college I guess people can have very extreme views. My parents didn't want my faith to get in the way of my education. It hasn't but I guess there is a possibility that it could have. Especially like in campuses where the Muslims are really active and they make themselves very very known when they act politically. So for example when the Irvine 11 happened, the Muslims made it a point to be known. And that wasn't the most positive thing. My parents were aware of these events and they were

like you know if that's what the MSA is like then try to distance yourself from it—you don't want to be involved in that. I think they would have been very upset if they knew that I was involved in Divestment [against Israel] to be honest because that gets a lot of negative attention from different groups and makes you known politically. You make enemies even being involved with Muslims or the MSA in that sense. So my parents didn't want that.

In the excerpt, Faizah is referring to an incident colloquially called “Irvine 11” where ten Muslim students at University of California, Irvine were found guilty and sentenced to three years of probation for disrupting a speech by Israel's ambassador Michael Oren on campus (Cruz 2011). This incident had sparked debates about free speech and highlighted the fault-line between the Muslim and Jewish groups on many U.S. college campuses. Whereas the Jewish community lauded the guilty verdicts, the decision to take this non-violent student protest to court and then the sentencing was overwhelmingly criticized by the Muslim student groups. To several college students I spoke with, this incident reinforced their view of the United States' anti-Muslim biases.

Like Faizah, Daliah, a Bangladeshi Muslim we will talk about in length in Chapter 5, received similar instructions from her parents to not be involved in Palestinian rights organizations. Despite being sympathetic towards the Palestinians' plight themselves, when Daliah's parents came to know about her interest in the issue, they insisted she not get involved. They argued that not only her involvement would make little impact on resolving the conflict, but that employers would not hire her after graduation given if they come to learn about her activism. Although Daliah has been an active member in the Palestinian rights organization throughout college, she has not kept up her activism after graduation and has since begun working as an engineer.

***Hijabi* Muslims**

The self-policing strategies discussed thus far, such as distancing from one's “Muslim-ness” in public, are inapplicable for *hijabis*, who—despite also identifying as “moderates”—are automatically marked as “Muslims” and thus “outsiders” as a result of their headscarves. Although primarily a symbol of faith, the *hijab* has come to carry multiple, sometimes contradictory, meanings

based on historic and ongoing political contexts at both national and global levels (Bullock 2003). For example, whereas to some segments of the U.S. population, the *hijab* symbolizes freedom of religious expression, to others it symbolizes the seemingly ever-looming threat of Islamic terrorism and the encroachment of Shariah Law in the United States. Again, while some view the *hijab* as a symbol of particularistic ethno-religious identity (Bullock 2000; Killian 2003), others see it as a representation of an “American Islamic” identity (Haddad 2007). Many others perceive the *hijab* as a symbol of anti-colonial Muslim solidarity (Haddad 2007), while others conversely view it as an obstacle towards immigrant integration (Read and Bartkowsky 2000). The *hijab* is also intricately tied to gendered power relations. Whereas some see the *hijab* as a symbol of patriarchal oppression inherent within Islam, others see it as a symbol of women’s equal rights and empowerment (Williams and Vashi 2007).

Based on these contrasting notions, the *hijab* has sparked contentious national and global debates about a range of issues, such as citizenship, nationalism, secularism, multiculturalism, and religious interpretation. Contentions over the *hijab* have also spilled over to other items of clothing indicating Muslim faith, such as the *Burkini*, which is an all-coverage bathing suit for women. In 2016, the controversy surrounding its ban in France has spilled across to affect Muslim-related issues in other Western countries, including the United States (Bilefsky 2016). Politicians, social commentators, researchers, bloggers, human rights activists, and religious organizations debated over whether the *hijab* and the *Burkini* symbolize freedom and multiculturalism on the one hand or the presence of radical Islam in the West on the other. These discourses have also influenced public opinion. On one side, they shaped the opinions of ordinary Western citizens towards Muslims in their societies; on the other side, they shaped how Muslims perceived their collective position in the West (The New York Times 2016, Dremeaux 2016). Overall, although only a small percentage of Muslim women in the West wear some sort of veil (Ahmed 2017; Chalabi 2013), they have

nonetheless come to represent the ongoing tensions and contestations surrounding Muslim integration in the West.

However, the *hijab* is an inaccurate measure of one's religiosity and political views. For example, thirteen women in this study either wear the *hijab* or have had in the past. Even within this small sample, opinions and experiences regarding the *hijab* varied. For example, while some viewed the *hijab* to be a step towards strengthening their faith, a couple of other participants left the *hijab* because they viewed it as an impediment to their spiritual development as Muslims. They claimed that they were so preoccupied worrying about how others perceived them, that the headscarf became burdensome for them. They claimed to feel more connected to Islam after they stopped wearing the *hijab*. How despite leaving the *hijab*, they still tend to wear modest clothing covering their arms and legs. Again, some *hijabis* espoused more progressive liberal views than those without the headscarf, advocating for LGBTQ rights. Some were even more relaxed about offering prayers five times a day and Islamic dietary restrictions than women who did not wear the *hijab* but wore modest clothing.

Furthermore, the *hijab* is not always worn only for religious purposes, but to also achieve more worldly goals. For example, while some liked wearing the *hijab* because they felt it provided a barrier from the male gaze, I met a young Bangladeshi woman during fieldwork who had left the *hijab* because she was looking to get married and thus wanted to attract suitors. Again, the *hijab* can also serve as a way to gain respect in religious spaces and widen one's social network. For instance, older Bangladeshi women wear the *hijab* not only for spiritual faith but also because they believe it to be the norm. One older Bangladeshi woman I had come to know during fieldwork said that the *hijab* garnered her respect from her ethnic and religious peers. This was important for her as she was well known in her Bangladeshi enclave and used her social network for various materialistic purposes, such as searching for a bride for her son.

Most of the *hijabi* participants began to wear the headscarf on their own. Only a few—like Dina, a Bangladeshi Muslim—started wearing the *hijab* at their family’s behest. At the time of my fieldwork, Dina was a college sophomore planning to apply to medical school after graduation. She had come to the United States when she was only a month old with her family on a diversity visa. She had visited Bangladesh only once since then, that too when she was a child. Her wardrobe consists of mostly denim jackets, light cardigans, full sleeve tops, long skirts, jeans, scarves, and a few traditional *sahar kamiz*. She likes painting, sometimes applying henna designs at cultural events to earn some pocket money. In her free time, she likes watching American sitcoms with her friends. Although she does not speak Bangla fluently, some of her friends come from Bangladeshi families. In general, although most of her friends are Muslim, they are ethnically diverse. She has met most of them through the Muslim student association in which she is an active member. Politically, Dina leans more towards the left although she says that she is not “very interested” in American politics. As such, she does not watch the news or subscribe to news apps on her smartphone. Rather, she prefers to keep up only with the news stories trending on social media. However, if she hears something from her friends about a prominent news story, she usually goes on Google to learn more. Although Dina has been wearing the *hijab* regularly for the last few years, she does not view or want it to define all aspects of her life. Rather, she sees it as a continuous process in which she struggles with various aspects of her faith. This process is also shaped by social interactions and Muslim stereotypes. Dina recounts this process in the interview excerpt below:

Hijab was a process. My parents wanted me to wear it in middle school and I firmly said no. I was very nervous about what people are going to say and stuff, remarks like ‘You are terrorists’ and that I am gonna be stigmatized. I was afraid of that. The middle school I went to, my friend group was diverse and it wasn’t the best neighborhood either. So some people were very vocal about their opinions of us. My mom wears the *hijab*. So I was scared that they would be vocal about me being outwardly Muslim. I actually wouldn’t tell people I was Muslim growing up. It was something that I didn’t talk about. I kind of hid it. I was sure that people were going to take my *hijab* negatively. Even one of my friends who I became really close to in high school, he would make jokes like, ‘Osama is your father.’ Nowadays, if someone

says that I wouldn't care. I would think them ignorant. It won't bother me. But back then being a kid and knowing that people have these negative expectations of the person that you are even before they get to know you...I didn't want that. I wanted people to like me. I didn't want them to be like, 'Oh let's stay away from her; let's make fun of her.' I was really insecure about that. So I chose not to wear it in middle school. The high school I went to, I knew there were many Muslims around. In my middle school there were no Muslims. In high school, there were more Muslims and the *masjid* was just across the street. From what I had heard, the people there were a bit more open-minded. So I decided that I do want to wear the *hijab* and that this is the point where I feel more comfortable doing it. Ever since then, I have been really happy wearing it. In my first year, it was on and off sometimes. I wore it at school and I didn't wear it outside until later on in the year. One day, I had it on and went outside but I forgot that I had it on! At that point I realized that although this is a big thing, the *hijab* doesn't define me completely—I am still myself. But even to this day, I struggle a lot with still finding what I need to do in terms of finding my faith.

Hijabis as Representatives of Islam

Because of the explicitly visible marker of faith, *hijabi* women often come to be seen as representatives of Islam—even when they are among other Muslims. In Muslim settings, *hijabis* are subjected to more stringent measures of what is and is not allowed for “good” Muslims. In other words, what at best would perhaps be largely frowned upon by the Muslim community, such as smoking or dating, if done by *hijabis*, would generate harsher comments and become topics of gossip. Bushra, the Pakistani American we had met in chapter 3, explained how *hijabis* are largely viewed within the Muslim community:

Hijabis are put, you know because of their appearance, on this pedestal to act a certain way or behave a certain way because they are seen as Muslims. And I guess *hijabis* feel more aware of what they are doing because of that. So even if they make mistakes or make a flaw then people will generate rumors, gossip, bad mouth Islam.

But this expectation of both Muslims and non-Muslims from *hijabis* to embody Islam and represent Islam through their actions is far more salient in public settings where the boundary between “Muslim” and “non-Muslim” is salient. In contrast to predominantly Muslim community spaces where *hijabis* are among their coreligionists and where “Muslim” is an unmarked category, in public spaces, *hijabis* are marked “outsiders” and exposed to negative Muslim stereotypes. In these spaces, by donning the headscarf, the *hijabis* themselves come to symbolize Islam and Muslims. As

such, *hijabis'* actions—and even their minute expressions—come to carry repercussions on the ongoing debate about whether Muslims are “good” or “bad.” The *hijabi* participants are aware of these pressures, and thus strategically police their appearance and interactions to depict Islam and Muslims in a positive light. For example, below Dina talks about how she strives to appear calm, open, and peace-loving in her day-to-day interactions, especially with strangers, and when she confronts Islamophobia.

I make sure to smile...When you are wearing the *hijab*, you stand out. And if people have a perception of you from before because of your *hijab*, they might not be as open to talking to you initially. So for me, a big thing is that I have to break that barrier. I just try to be myself around them and show them that I am not really different from someone who doesn't wear the *hijab*.

[“Can you explain a bit more about what you mean by breaking that barrier?” I asked.] So...the Arab and the predominantly Muslim countries are seen as the enemy. And so when people see a Muslim, how they behave are all they're gonna put together. They are not gonna sit with you and try to know and understand you like ‘Oh what do you believe about this and this?’ It's all about perception. If I am putting myself in a negative way, it's gonna be like, ‘Oh already Muslims are doing this and that. They are also waging wars and killing people. These Muslims must be bad too because just look at how she is carrying herself.’ And so the big thing is that I have to make sure that I maintain my composure because if I don't, they are gonna associate Islam with my negative actions. So my interactions with people are a big thing. I realized that the way I act around people is important because I might be the only Muslim that they interact with. And so I have to be the best person that I could possibly be to them regardless of what they think of me. Whether I can help them out with something, if it's just a smile, even if it's something small, I want to make sure that if they think about a Muslim, they have a good experience or thought. It's not that like ‘Oh what's portrayed in the media is actually correct’. Once they meet an actual Muslim they think that ‘Oh they are actually good people’.

[“Can you recall an actual incident where you had to maintain your composure? Can you please walk me through such an incident?”] Yeah...let's see...umm okay so there was this one time when I was driving. There was a white guy who was driving a van. I had to go the lane behind him, I had to switch lanes and I could tell that he was looking at his rearview mirror to make eye contact with me. And I kept smiling. I was like, ‘This is stupid but I am going to keep smiling.’ So he comes to the other lane, drives next to me and goes ‘You motehrf—ing Muslim!’ And I just laughed because I am not going to let him see me angry. So I do feel that pressure...I do feel that sometimes when I meet new people I have to put myself out there a little bit more to show them that I am interested in the same things as they are. Sometimes I sense that when people first meet me they are a bit more reserved as opposed to when they get to know me. Then they are like ‘Oh I can be myself around her. We have similar interests.’

Despite Dina's reservations about the *hijab* being seen as the defining feature of her identity, she nonetheless has to represent Islam in order to subvert the negative images about all "Muslims" being aggressive and violent. As such, even in interactions when a normal or expected reaction would be to show anger, she actively portrays herself as calm, smiling, and friendly. Moreover the example illustrates how *hijabis*, unable to distance their "Muslim-ness" in public, strive to highlight their similarities with non-Muslims in different ways.

Hijabis: "Empowered," "Free" American Women

Unlike many "moderates" without the headscarf, *hijabis* have to confront gendered stereotypes that implicitly categorize them and Muslims at large as "un-American." Whereas "American" implies freedom, equal rights, and empowerment, to many segments of the U.S. population, the *hijab* symbolizes a backward, patriarchal, and oppressive Islamic culture that does not allow women the right to choose her clothing. Even when *hijabi* women claim to have chosen the headscarf, they are still viewed as devoid of agency and submissive to a backwards religion. This was the crux of an interaction that Shehnaz, a Pakistani Muslim woman, had to encounter on the bus to work. Shehnaz owns a non-profit organization that moderates inter-religious coalitions. Although she is a first generation immigrant from Pakistan, she has traveled to various parts of the world before immigrating to the United States over a decade ago. As a naturalized citizen, she considers America to be her home. Shehnaz is unmarried and lives with her parents and younger siblings. She is one of the income providers in her household. Even though Shehnaz was raised in a "relaxed" Muslim family, she began wearing the *hijab* on her own when she started college in America. She is the only woman in her family to wear the headscarf. Even her grandmother who lives in Pakistan had discouraged her from wearing it because she saw *hijabis* as "too conservative." Her interview excerpt below shows how some *hijabi* women tend to present themselves when confronted with gendered stereotypes about the headscarf:

I understand that people may have a lack of knowledge and information [about Muslims]. They may actually feel afraid at some level. The fear and concern that they feel may be expressed in anger and so for me it makes sense to respond with as much compassion and empathy as I can. So I just respond with calmness. There was one time where I was talking with a lady on the bus. And she was asking me why I was choosing to—well she didn't use the word *choosing*—to wear the headscarf. But she wanted to know why I was wearing the headscarf. And she told me that, 'You know, this is America. You don't have to do this—you are free here.' And I was like, 'Yes! I *am* free here and that is why I choose to wear the headscarf. I am happy that America provides me the freedom to *choose* to wear my headscarf.' And just hearing me that I choose to do it was a big surprise for her. And I was able to tell her that this is actually a way for me to empower myself. For me, I choose to do this because it's not just about the headscarf that I am wearing. The headscarf is just one part of how I dress. And the way I dress is just one part of how I behave and all of that—the reason that I choose to dress this way and behave this way, is because for me it is a way to resist the sexual objectification of my body and for me that is a really empowering thing to do. And that was something that she could understand. Even if she didn't agree with the practice at the end of our conversation, my reason for empowering myself was something she understood because she had the same values as an American woman.

Dina and Shehnaz both represent *hijabi* South Asian women who are young, U.S. college educated, exposed to the diverse American society, and who are fluent in English. As such, they can interact with some ease with non-Muslims compared to older, first generation immigrant women like Hasna and Haleema whose identities remain homeland-oriented and who have very limited exposure to society beyond their small ethnic community. Whereas Dina and Shehnaz can choose to inform non-Muslims about “real” Islam, this is not an option for older women like Hasna and Haleema who speak very little English. Hasna and Haleema are both first generation immigrants from Bangladesh who have come to the U.S. through family reunification visa. Their older brother had sponsored them and their families. However, both widowed by the time their visa came through they came to America alone. Both have come with little formal education, having barely passed tenth grade back in Bangladesh. Their days are spent largely helping around the house. During their free time, they watch Bangla soap operas on Desi T.V. channels. Their exposure to American society tends to be when they go out for groceries and to their weekly English classes. In contrast to Dina and other younger *hijabis*, Hasna and Haleema do not engage in conversations through which they

can present their similarities with other Americans. They seldom fully understand conversations in English. Yet, they are aware that because of their *hijab* and *burqa* (an outer garment covering everything but the eyes), they are viewed as “different,” and not always in a positive way. In such interactions, rather than attempting to subvert Muslim stereotypes, their only option tends to be to walk away. In the interview excerpt below, I asked Hasna and Haleema to describe their public interactions when they step out of the house.

- Me: Fupi [Bangla word for paternal aunt], when you go out, how do you think other people see you? How do they interact with you?
- Haleema: We wear different clothes. We cover ourselves, and sometimes people stare at us. They wonder what we are wearing, why we’re wearing what we are.
- Hasna: Americans wear pants and shirts when they go out, and we wear *burqas*.
- Haleema: They stare at us, but we also stare at what they wear, like shorts.
- Hasna: They think we’re Pakistani or Indian, but they don’t know that we are actually Bangladeshi.
- Haleema: I think they believe we’re Saudi Arabian [gesturing with her hand to show the *burqa* covering her face].
- Me: Haha. Is this good or bad?
- Hasna: I don’t get the feeling that they look at us in a good way. [Looking at Haleema for confirmation; Haleema nodding in agreement]. They look at our covering and they sometimes clap, shout, make hand gestures, honk their cars. When they make a sound, we turn around and look at them once but after that we don’t pay them any attention. We just want them to know that we understand what they are trying to do to us, what they mean. Often we hear them but we don’t pay attention as if we didn’t hear them. We just walk past them.
- Me: You go away?
- Hasna: Yes, we try to stay far away and walk away by ourselves. We don’t care about what they’re doing and we just walk. They know then that we don’t care. We do our own thing.

From “Moderate” to “Muslim American”

Visibility strategies to appear “moderate” are also practiced by Muslim organizations, such as ISNA (Islamic Society of North America). However, in contrast to the strategies at the individual level, being visible as “moderate” is part of the organizations’ larger project to construct a “Muslim American” identity that would allow members to actively participate in American public and political life. By portraying Islam as a peaceful and moderate religion that is compatible with American

values, Muslim leaders aim to establish an “American” brand of Islam that can overcome the limitations of political passivity and pave the way for Muslims’ engagement in mainstream U.S. politics.

“Constructing Muslim American identity” is one of the most recurring and extensively covered themes addressed in the *Islamic Horizons* issues. These publications frequently include columns penned by Muslim scholars, educators, and activists who address the need to construct a Muslim identity specifically for the U.S. context, one that would highlight the compatibility between Islam and American values. For instance, a Muslim leader and educator writes, “Muslim Americans should accept and Islamize those cultural symbols and traditions of mainstream culture that do not contradict Islam.”

The growing number of Islamic schools, which offer an alternative to public schools, is a key way through which Muslim leaders aim to inculcate a “Muslim American” identity. In their view, public schools do not help parents wishing to raise their children as Muslims—“at best they will ignore” that dimension of the children’s identity. In contrast, Islamic schools claim to teach students basic cognitive skills, like math, as well as how to become “better Muslims” and “God-conscious Americans.” Students are supposedly taught “universal” values of freedom, tolerance, and pluralism. From this view, Islam is a religion that promotes peace, pluralism, intellectual freedom, and tolerance for all—the same core-values in the American ethos of freedom and democracy.

Islamic schools are thus spaces that construct and distinguish an “American” brand of Islam—one that is “moderate” and tolerant (as opposed to religiously and politically extremist), respectful of freedom and pluralism (i.e., equal human rights for all), and in favor of democracy (as opposed to dictatorship and military autocracy). Efforts at defining an “American” Islam based on these characteristics indicate how Muslim leaders are trying to differentiate the Muslim American community from other Muslims abroad, especially those in the politically turbulent and non-

democratic Muslim-majority countries in the Middle East. One of the magazine issues alludes to this difference by saying, “Transplanting a specific response to the colonialist threat in Muslim countries is not appropriate in the American context” and that “Islamic schools must foster a healthy God-conscious identity that is compatible with America’s pluralistic culture.” Furthermore, Islamic schools claim to act as “buffers against extremism” by inculcating in their students an interpretation of Islam specifically for the American context.

Pluralism has been one of the main aspects emphasized in the community’s effort to establish an “American” brand of Islam. For example, ISNA is aware that the Muslim American community is embedded in the racially charged political sphere in the United States, and that that has produced fissures among different Muslim groups. Partly because of these contested group boundaries, ISNA has sometimes struggled to present a unified front, which would presumably highlight its compatibility with America’s pluralistic multicultural ethos. For instance, ISNA has usually downplayed the racial tensions that have historically existed between immigrant and Black Muslims. Then, after years of silence, ISNA made a hugely publicized gesture to “bridge” the divide between Black and immigrant Muslims by publishing an Islamic Horizons issue showcasing African American Muslims. An overall aim was to project ISNA’s image as a tolerant, multicultural group that is unified against Islamophobia.

As for the “Muslim American” identity, the main goal of this category is to embed Muslims more firmly in U.S. civic and political life. Rather than shrinking to the private sphere as Muslim individuals have been shown to do, ISNA uses the “Muslim American” platform to encourage its readers to actively engage in local and national politics. For instance, an issue of Islamic Horizons encouraged readers to engage in policy discussions and lobby for availability of *halal* food in fast food franchises instead of silently consuming vegetarian alternatives. During presidential election cycles, issues of Islamic Horizons inform its readers on how each candidate’s platform impacts the

Muslim community, encouraging them to actively participate in the elections. Each year, ISNA sends envoys to meet political leaders in Washington to reinforce the image of Muslim Americans as a politically engaged constituency that is peace-loving, loyal, law-abiding. Moreover, to foster political awareness among the Muslim American youth, ISNA, with other Muslim organizations, arranges annual Islamic youth conferences, scholarships, and internships that train young Muslims on how to gain leadership roles in their lives, engage with politics in Washington, forge coalitions, and advocate for civil rights.

Muslim American leaders also encourage readers of its publications to voice their opinions on international politics concerning Islam and Muslims. Each issue of *Islamic Horizons* usually has two political sections: “Politics and Society,” which covers topics of domestic politics that ISNA thinks Muslim Americans should pay attention to, and “The Muslim World” or “Around the World,” which covers Muslim-related issues abroad, in places like China, Palestine, Libya, Myanmar, France, and Australia. By spotlighting Muslim-related global issues, like the Syrian refugee crisis, and advertising charities to raise funds for such causes, ISNA aims to foster the platform that “Muslim Americans”—although distinctively “American” and “moderate”—are nonetheless part of the *Ummah* or a global community of Muslims. One objective of such a platform is to allow Muslims in America to actively participate in Muslim-related issues in foreign places without running the risk of seeming “un-American.”

Furthermore, leaders urge Muslim individuals to strategically utilize their visibility to promote a positive image of Islam, dispel ignorance about the religion, and represent “Muslim Americans” by providing guidance through ISNA’s publications on how to do so on an everyday basis. For instance, one magazine issue focused specifically on how Muslim Americans should talk about Sharia Law, a topic that continues to stoke nationalist and Islamophobic fears in many parts of America, instead of remaining silent in fear of a backlash. The magazine provided information to

readers about parts in the Sharia that highlight democracy, equality, and freedom—values compatible with the U.S. constitution.

Conclusion

This chapter traces the ways in which Muslim-related global geopolitics and discourses shape the everyday experiences and interactions of South Asian Muslim Americans. Muslim Americans, at both individual and organizational levels, strategically render some aspects of themselves visible and invisible to the public in efforts to resist against negative stereotypes imposed upon them. At the individual level, many Muslim Americans try to distance themselves from the “Muslim” identity category by largely relegating religion to the private sphere, and striving to avoid any indicators of their “Muslim-ness” in day-to-day public interactions. However, if the need to publicly address their religion does come up, such as in the event of an Islamist terrorist attack, they do not forsake their “Muslim” identity altogether, but qualify themselves as “moderate” Muslims. Making oneself visible as “moderate,” in turn, involves self-policing on an everyday basis that includes avoiding political conversations and highlighting apolitical similarities with other Americans. Some of these visibility strategies are not useful for *hijabis* who despite also identifying as “moderates” are automatically marked as “outsiders” and exposed to the stigma attached to their “Muslim” identity. However, in presenting themselves, they too strive to highlight attributes that render them similar to their non-Muslim fellow Americans, such as freedom, empowerment, and peacefulness. However, these identity-making strategies have a double-edge. Appearing as apolitical, peace-loving “moderates”—although useful in distancing from terrorist attackers in moments of crises and getting by with peers and co-workers in daily life—serves to politically silence Muslims in the long run.

At the organizational level, Muslim leaders also deploy visibility strategies to appear “moderate,” but with the goal to insert Muslims into mainstream U.S. politics as active participants.

They strive to do so by constructing a “Muslim American” identity category, using organizations such as ISNA and Islamic schools. “Moderate” is but one component of this identity category, which overall aims to establish an American brand of Islam that is compatible with American values of freedom, multiculturalism, and democracy. In this project, Muslim American community leaders, educators, and organizations aim to on the one hand “Islamize” the components of mainstream American culture that do not contradict Islam. On the other, they present tenets of Islamic belief, such as Sharia Law, in an “Americanized” fashion. Based on this identity platform, religious and community leaders urge Muslims in the United States to advocate for Islam and demand for their rights as “Muslim *Americans*.” The following chapter will show how Muslim Americans’ insertion into U.S. politics interacts with their political orientation towards Muslim-related contexts “elsewhere.”

CHAPTER FIVE: SOUTH ASIAN MUSLIM AMERICANS' SELF-IDENTIFICATION WITH THE "ELSEWHERE" MIDDLE EAST

This chapter continues the story started in chapter 3, which showed how religious-political influence emanating from “elsewhere” has shaped the immigrants’ homeland contexts as well as how they view themselves as “Muslims” and members of more particularistic national/ethnic categories. As was also shown, interactions between the homelands and “elsewhere” continued to shape the immigrants’ sense of self after they arrived in the hostland. By pulling the homeland contexts onto the hostland, the immigrants on the one hand mirrored the historic and ongoing nation-building struggles of their sending countries in their immigrant communities. On the other hand, their national origins in relation to “elsewhere” Middle Eastern geopolitics shaped how the larger hostland society viewed these immigrants as monolithic “Muslim outsiders.”

Chapter 4 delved into how upon encountering the post-9/11 hypervisibility of “Muslims”—made more intense because of recent ISIS attacks and a polarizing national election—the immigrants managed their Muslim-ness in public. Muslims at both individual and organizational levels actively presented themselves as “moderate,” in other words, “good” Muslims. The chapter then showed how Muslim leaders and organizations aim to deploy various impression management strategies to construct a distinct “Muslim American” identity, which would allow Muslims to insert themselves in mainstream U.S. politics to advocate for Muslims’ interests, both in America and abroad.

This chapter locates “Muslim Americans” on a global level using the multicentered relational framework. In so doing, it reveals how the participants are politically oriented towards particular places in the “elsewhere” Middle East, such as Palestine, Syria, and Turkey, and how they engage in the Muslim-related politics of these places by becoming involved in American politics. For example, many of the South Asian Muslim immigrants interpret politics surrounding Muslims in the United

States through a global lens, which is informed by their co-religionists' experiences in places where Muslims are also a stigmatized minority. These examples help to reinforce many of the participants' worldview that "the West" is biased against "Muslims" at large. Citing a sense of Ummatic solidarity, the participants, regardless of their immigrant generation, evaluate mainstream U.S. politicians based on the politicians' attitude towards Muslim-related issues "elsewhere," among other issues. For example, as mentioned in chapters 2 and 4, during the 2016 Democratic presidential nomination, most participants favored Bernie Sanders over Hillary Clinton because they viewed Sanders as being more open and sympathetic towards Palestine rather than Clinton whose Middle East policy they saw to be too pro-Israeli and thus biased against Muslims' interests.

Sometimes, Muslim-related issues in the Middle East gained priority even over those in the participants' own homeland. For example, in late 2015, around the same time when the Syrian refugee crisis caught the world's attention, another refugee crisis was unfolding in South Asia, that of Rohingya Muslims fleeing violent persecution in Myanmar and seeking asylum in Bangladesh. However, although, unlike the Syrian refugee crisis, the Rohingya refugee crisis directly involves many of the participants' homeland, Bangladesh, I was surprised to find that many Bangladeshis were unaware of even who the Rohingyas were. Whereas they avidly paid attention to the Syrian refugee crisis, the Rohingya crisis went largely unnoticed.

But why are the participants more politically oriented towards "elsewhere" places in the Middle East than their homelands? More broadly, how do these foreign places gain salience in these immigrants' political worldviews? If their orientation towards politics "elsewhere" is indeed based on a sense of religious solidarity, then why do these immigrants not engage with Muslim-related politics anywhere in the world, such as Myanmar? This chapter explores the answers to these questions by tracing the links between the homeland, hostland, and "elsewhere" in South Asian Muslims' worldviews.

Interpreting Muslim American Experiences through a Global Lens

This section shows how many of the South Asian immigrants locate their “Muslim American” identity and experiences in a global setting. More specifically, I discuss here how many of the participants interpret their collective position as a hypervisible group in America using examples of “elsewhere” places where Muslims are also a stigmatized minority. For instance, many of the second generation participants draw parallels between their collective and subjective experiences of growing up Muslim in post-9/11 America with the experiences of Palestinians facing discrimination in Israel. The following interview excerpt from Bushra, the second generation Pakistani we had met in chapter 3, illustrates these points:

I feel as Muslims—as a minority in this world—we feel the discrimination against the Palestinians. Even here [in America] Muslims feel the discrimination against them [Muslims]. They don’t feel completely comfortable as a white Christian person would. So, the fact that the U.S. and Israel are allies, it is obviously...So our [Americans’] tax money are helping the occupation, which has a huge affect on us [Muslim Americans] because we are basically helping kill people, Muslims, and settle into other people’s homes, drive them away from their own homes, putting them in disastrous situations. That’s kind of what is really great about the Muslim community is that we’re unified on this issue because we understand it. Even if we are not Palestinian, you still understand how that feels, especially being in America. And I feel most people [from the Muslim community] have gone through some form of it, some form of discrimination, some sort of emotion that relates to it.

Muslims are of course by no means a minority in the world, with a population of over 1.6 billion (nearly equaling Christians), and comprising the second largest and fastest growing religious group in the world (Pew Research Center 2015). Yet, Bushra seems to think they are a minority because in her worldview, places where the Muslim population is indeed a minority appear to be the most salient. These particular examples, which are based and colored by her own experience as a member of the Muslim minority in America, reinforce her “us against them” worldview. And, like many other participants, she uses this worldview as a lens to interpret her interactions as a Muslim in America as well as ongoing national and global politics.

This interpretation is exemplified in how Sifat, also a second generation Pakistani, made sense of the highly-charged politics that were unfolding in America and the world during fieldwork, with back to back ISIS attacks across the globe, calls for a “Muslim ban,” and the Syrian refugee crisis. Sifat, who we met back in chapter 2, believes that the Syrian conflict has tied together anti-Muslim contexts in different Western countries, in turn also reinforcing Islamophobia in the United States. During her interview, I asked her if she recently watched the news. I learned that she was following the news on the Syrian refugee crisis. When I asked her what she found interesting about the news story, she replied:

I was actually discussing this with a friend recently. I don't know if you know this but after the Paris attack happened, France didn't change its policy on letting Syrian refugees into the country but the U.S. did. And even though the attacks didn't happen here, they [Americans] are pretty much going to keep an eye on how many Syrian refugees they are going to let into the country just because of that incident in Paris. I think that goes to show that America or whoever that's controlling all of this in America is looking for a reason to limit Muslims, limiting Middle Easterners, South Asian Muslims. I think they want to do that and this [the Paris attacks] gave them an excuse to do it.

Although these interpretations seem to seldom be based on facts, they are nonetheless important to understand how it is that the participants make sense of their world and their location in it. More relevant to this study is how the participants interpret global geopolitics and how those interpretations shape their self-identification with “elsewhere” as “Muslims.” There are, again, some variations to the “West versus Muslims” worldview based on the participants’ sectarian identities. In the Sunni participants’ worldview, the most salient boundary tends to be that between the predominantly Christian “West” and “the Muslim world,” which often implies the Middle East.

However, for Shias, predominantly Muslim countries—including those in the Middle East—where Shias are a persecuted minority are also, if not equally, salient. In their worldview, it is not only that “the West” is against “Muslims,” but also that the Sunni Muslim majority is against the Shia minority. For example, in Rashed’s worldview as a Pakistani Shia Muslim, “elsewhere” places

where Shias are persecuted have particular salience, unlike his Sunni Muslim American friends who are largely unaware of Shia persecution in these places. The combination of Sunnis' overall indifference towards Shias' plight in the hostland Muslim community, the history of sectarian violence against Shias in the homeland, and the various "elsewhere" examples of Shia persecution from around the world reinforce Rashed's views of Shia victimhood. Yet, he finds that in the United States, it is often the seeming divide between "the West" and "Muslims" that seem most salient in how he is perceived by the larger American society. The following quote reflects Rashed's views.

Shias are very critical of Muslims in that the fact that collectively the Muslims talk about the oppression that they are facing in America for being Muslims but they don't address the oppression that they themselves impose on the minority communities in that land that they call Muslim countries, you know? We talk about Muslims facing oppression but we don't talk about Shias facing oppression in Malaysia where it is illegal to be a Shia. Saudi Arabia where they are putting a teenager to death because he criticized the government's inaction providing for the minority community. So I do feel that Shias are very tightly knit because we have faced the oppression historically. Wherever Shias were the minority they were mostly the subject of oppression. It continues to day. It opens your eyes to the world. In America if you befriend someone, they don't care if you are a Muslim hyphen Shia or Muslim parentheses Sunni. They think you are ISIS whether you are Shia and Sunni, it doesn't matter.

Political Orientation Towards the "Elsewhere" Middle East

In the worldview of several participants, the Israel-Palestine conflict arguably stands as the most potent symbol of the West's continuing anti-Muslim attitude at the global level. Indeed, according to a 2003 Pew Global Attitudes poll, overwhelming majorities in Arab and other Muslim-majority countries—including Pakistan and Bangladesh—believed that the United States "favors Israel too much" (Pew Global Attitudes Project 2003). Moreover, the perception of U.S. foreign policies towards this particular conflict in the Middle East works as a driving force in perpetuating "anti-Americanism" in Arab and predominantly Muslim countries (Kohut 2005).

I inferred from conversations with first and second-generation participants that the older South Asians knew about the Palestinians' plight before their migration to the U.S., its emotional

resonance having been passed on to them by the prior generation. To them, Palestine is a reminder of the consequences of Western intervention in various parts of the Muslim world, including their homelands where they had been under British colonization for over two centuries. In their view, around the same time when Indians were fighting to oust their British colonizers in 1947, so were their Muslim brothers in Palestine, which at that time was a mandatory territory under British control. However, whereas South Asians succeeded in their anti-colonial efforts, Palestinians did not. Although both regions were partitioned in 1947, these territorial divisions had a key difference. In the case of South Asia, despite the refugee crisis and the large number of deaths that had resulted from the Partition of Bengal, many natives from within the region (such as the All-India Muslim League and the Bengali Hindu Homeland Movement) desired the partitioning of the province between India and Pakistan based on religion. In contrast, the U.N.-approved partition of Palestine between Arabs and Jews was unwanted by the Palestinian Arabs and caused a civil and regional war, the effects of which seem to still generate headline-grabbing attention on an almost everyday basis.

Conversely, younger participants usually come to know about the specificities of the Israel-Palestine conflict when they enter college and encounter Palestinian classmates, activists, and human rights organizations. Prior to college, they were only somewhat familiar with Palestine from glimpses of news headlines and snatches of their parents' conversations with other Muslim co-ethnics, and thought of it as yet another conflict-ridden Muslim place in the Middle East. This has been so for Dina and Jahan, two Bangladeshi Muslim college students. Dina wears the *hijab*, prays five times a day, and is actively engaged in the Muslim Student Association. Jahan, in contrast, does not wear the *hijab* but wears "modest" clothing (meaning full-sleeves and leggings), tries to pray if her class schedule allows, and participates in the Bangali student organization. Despite these differences in religiosity, Dina and Jahan came to care deeply for Palestinians based on an *Ummatic* sense of solidarity. In their words:

Dina: I know people who are Palestinian and there is also the religious aspect behind it. In the Quran it says that Palestine will be free [according to Dina's interpretation of the Quran]. We are supposed to help the oppressed. Again, them being Muslim is, I think, a big thing. When a Muslim brother or sister is in pain you feel that too.

Jahan: I used to think it was a Palestinian issue and not a Muslim issue until I got to college and learned about more about it and then I considered it a Muslim issue as well. It's more of that we feel for the Palestinians and a lot of Muslims take their side because Palestinians are Muslim. I think its also basically because Israelis tend to be Jewish and Palestinians tend to be Muslims and they are fighting over a land, horrible things are happening, Palestinians are dying, their homes are being destroyed and they are our people. We are an *Ummah* and we are supposed to support each other. I think it's our job to help them as much as possible. But I don't think the cause of the problem is only religion.

Like Dina and Jahan, although most other college-going participants are not members of the Palestinian rights organization on campus, they show their support by participating in demonstrations and forums organized by the group, purchasing its organizational t-shirts, making donations, "liking" its posts on Facebook, and following its members' activities on social media. Moreover, during campus elections, almost all participants who are either attending American colleges or have had in past support the BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) movement and voted in favor of divesting Israeli companies built in occupied Palestinian territories.

Even in mainstream U.S. politics, the participants, regardless of their immigrant generation, evaluate politicians based on their stance towards Palestine, among other issues. During the 2016 Democratic primaries, for instance, most of the participants favored Bernie Sanders over Hillary Clinton. Though they knew that Sanders was a Jew, they nonetheless viewed Sanders as more sympathetic and open towards Palestine than Clinton whose Middle East policy was seen as being too pro-Israeli and thus biased against Muslims' interests. Their favorable view of Sanders seemed to be more affirmed after the Democratic primary debate when he criticized Hillary Clinton for "barely mentioning" the Palestinian people in her speech at AIPAC and for Sanders critiquing Israel for its "disproportionate" rocket attacks in Gaza the year before (Lachman 2016). Sanders's sympathy for

the Palestinians seemed to send a signal to Muslim Americans that he is also sympathetic towards them.

This became evident when shortly after the debate I had visited a retired elderly Bangladeshi couple at their home—a small, cramped one-bedroom apartment in downtown Los Angeles in a neighborhood close to the Bangladeshi ethnic enclave, called Little Bangladesh. The couple, Rahim and Rahila, came to the United States when their adult daughter, a naturalized U.S. citizen through marriage, had applied to bring them over to America. Now, the couple lives with their adult unmarried son who pays the rent and takes community college courses in addition to working full time. Rahila spends a busy day cooking for the family and cleaning up the house. She is also friendly with a lot of Bangladeshi families in Little Bangladesh and often cooks food to take to them during house calls in the evening. Rahim, on the other hand, does not have many friends although he sometimes goes to the Bangladeshi restaurants nearby to watch cricket matches together with other Bangladeshi men. Sometimes his son's Bangladeshi friends come to their apartment to watch cricket matches together when their home country is playing. Otherwise, he spends all day in front of the television watching both Bangladeshi and American channels. I sat with Rahim and Rahila in the tiny sitting area of their apartment, sipping a can of fruit juice which Rahim had kindly offered and insisted I drink. From where I sat, on my left was the apartment's narrow sliver of a balcony where on a chair was folded a prayer mat. Rahim seemed friendly and curious, and yet was a little shy about talking to me which I found to be typical in Bangladeshi Muslim households where older male members tend to keep a distance from young women outside the family. To break the ice before I asked him if he would be willing to be interviewed for my study, I struck up a conversation with him about what he usually watches on TV, which was then turned on mute. Slightly smiling, he gave a small one-shoulder shrug and said, "*Eito eita-sheita* [you know, this and that]. *Kbobor* [the news], cricket." I asked him if he is following the news on the presidential election. He answered

“somewhat” and that he mostly follows *Desbi* or the Bangladeshi news. I learned that he leans towards the Democratic party. When I asked him who he favors in the Democratic primaries, he said, albeit a bit reluctantly but still with a small smile, “*Oi buratare beshi bhal lagey* [I like the old man more],” referring to Sanders. When I asked why, he said, “*Oita tao to money boy amader kotha shoney* [It seems like he at least listens to us].” In another instance, at a *dawat* (a Bangladeshi get-together at someone’s home), I was sitting with a small group of Bangladeshi women who were all mothers, but were a mix of homemakers and educated professionals. One of the women, who from what I gathered worked at a bank, asked a stay-at-home mom, “*Sheidinkar debate dekseen?* [Did you watch the debate from the other day?]” “Yes,” the other woman nodded, “*Oi buirata, Sanders, tej ase. Maya lagey.*” [That old man Sanders has spunk. I like him].

Many of the younger participants’ support for Sanders were also indicated on their Facebook activities. For example, Afroza, a Pakistani American college senior shared an article by Bazian and Beydoun (2016) titled, “Why Muslims are Voting for Bernie Sanders,” encouraging her Muslim friends who she views are “advocating” for Clinton “without even doing their research” to read it. In another instance, after Sanders lost to Clinton in the primaries, Nilufer, an Indian American Muslim college student, shared a post that listed all the reasons why she would rather vote for third party candidate Jill Stein than Hillary Clinton in the 2016 presidential election. Among the reasons were, “[Hillary] is partial when it comes to Israel and Palestine. She is openly hostile towards Palestinian human rights and does not care about the occupation and colonialism Palestinians face that have led to apartheid conditions.” I later learned that a few of the participants had indeed voted for a third party candidate in the main election.

These orientations based on a sense of solidarity with Palestinians reveal a form of cross-border political tie that goes beyond the existing homeland-hostland framework. Although scholars have long studied long-distance nationalism and political transnationalism—specifically, how

immigrants have sought to participate in homeland nation-building, regime change or democratic political processes from the hostland (Anderson 1983; Eckstein 2009; Glick-Schiller and Fouron 2001; Itzigsohn 2000; Smith 2003; Smith and Bakker 2008)—many South Asian Muslim Americans in this study engaged in anti-colonial efforts in the forms of demonstrations, consumer boycotts, and calls for economic sanctions directed at “elsewhere” places in the Middle East. Even those who did not directly take part in these organizational activities were oriented towards Muslim-related issues in that region.

Prioritizing the “Elsewhere” Middle East Over the Immigrants’ Homelands

That many South Asian Muslim Americans engage in political activism targeted towards Muslim-related conflicts in foreign places would not have been as surprising had they been equally engaged in similar ongoing events that involve their co-religionists and co-ethnics in their homelands. However, many of these participants who usually tuned in to Muslim-related world news and subscribed to homeland-oriented ethnic/cultural identities (such as, “Desi,” Bangali, or Pakistani) were not even aware of some prominent historical and ongoing religious-political conflicts in their countries of origin. Rather, their political engagements were overwhelmingly aimed towards “elsewhere” Middle Eastern places, such as Syria, Palestine, and Turkey.

For example, in late 2015, around the same time that the Syrian refugee crisis caught the world’s attention with the body of three-year-old Aylan Kurdi being washed ashore on a beach in Turkey, another refugee crisis was unfolding in South Asia, that of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar. Rohingyas are a Muslim ethnic minority in the Western Rakhine state of Myanmar who are seen as illegal Bangladeshi immigrants by the Myanmar government despite their living in the country for centuries (Barry 2017). Fleeing violent persecution by the Myanmar government, Rohingyas have sought asylum in neighboring countries, mainly Bangladesh, but have been denied, with most living in dire conditions in refugee camps (Fuller 2015; Sattar 2016).

Unlike the Syrian refugee crisis, the Rohingya crisis directly involved the homeland of most of the participants. Yet, the Bangladeshi and other South Asian participants did not react to the Rohingya refugee crisis with the same sense of urgency triggered by the turmoil in Syria. Whereas the participants avidly paid attention to events in Syria—following social media trends, posting statuses on Facebook, organizing forums, donating and raising funds to help Syrians flee for safety—the plight of the Rohingya refugees virtually went unnoticed. Indeed, many of the Bangladeshis were unaware of even who the Rohingyas were, despite sharing with them not only a common religion but also a common ethnicity. Only one of the participants, Taslima, a Bangladeshi American then a college senior at the time, shared a news post on Facebook criticizing the Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina’s refusal to grant asylum to Rohingyas. Even so, Taslima’s critique mainly addressed the widespread corruption of Bangladeshi politicians, rather than Hasina’s refusal to provide asylum.

Even the Bangladeshi Americans who usually tuned in to news about Muslim-related conflicts in “elsewhere” places were unaware of the issue. This was exemplified in my interview with Faizah, a Bangladeshi American college student. Faizah identifies as a “practicing” Muslim and believes her religious and Bangladeshi identities to be closely tied. She does not wear a *hijab* but, like her older sister and mother, dresses modestly. She tries to pray as many of the five prayers as she can during the day and fasts during Ramadan. She is active in the Bangladeshi students organization along with some of her closest friends. Although she could not speak Bangla fluently, she described herself as “culturally Bangali.” When I asked her what that meant, she replied that she likes wearing “Desi clothes,” eating “homemade Bangali food,” and watching Bollywood movies. Although she is not active in the campus Palestinian rights organization, she sometimes goes to its events and town hall meetings with her friends from the Muslim students association. She also shares and likes the organization’s posts on Facebook. Her timelines also shows posts by BBC and Al Jazeera about

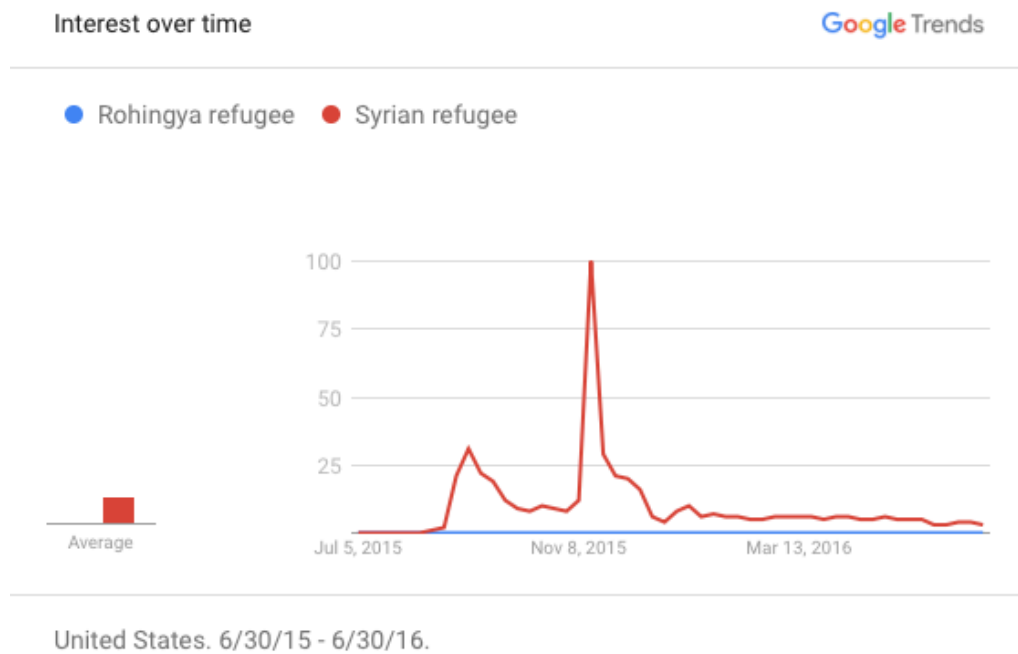
outbreaks of violence in Gaza, indicating that she kept in touch with news of Palestine on social media. Sometimes—usually during campus elections when BDS becomes a particularly heated issue in the college community—she even posts statuses that call attention to the Palestinian plight, urging students in favor or divestment. During my interview with her, I had asked her about why she supports the Palestinian issue when it has little impact in her life in America. Like many others, she replied feeling a sense of groupness with fellows Muslims. Yet, when I had asked her about Rohingya Muslims, I found that she was completely unaware. The interview excerpt is as follows.

- Me: Why do you feel so deeply about Palestine? A) It's so far away and B) you don't live there; you are not from there.
- Faizah: Well, you feel more personal attachment to a country where the citizens are either of your own culture or your own religion, who look like you, who has similar beliefs as you.
- Me: Do you feel the same way towards the Rohingyas then?
- Faizah: Umm...I am sorry but I don't know about that. [I give a brief overview of the Rohingya persecution in Myanmar and their struggle for asylum in Bangladesh.] Oh wow, that's so sad. I know this is bad but I didn't see this news. I don't follow the news that religiously actually. But this is very bad what's happening. If something bad happens to Muslims or anyone else basically we all need to step up.

Faizah's example also reflects the roles of mainstream news outlets and social media in raising awareness about particular issues. Like most of the second generation participants, Faizah's main source of news is social media trends. She rarely goes out of her way to read newspapers or watch news channels. When she does watch television, it is usually to watch *Grey's Anatomy* and *How to Get Away with Murder* with her friends. Generally, it is when she comes across a news item that other college students around her are talking about, that she goes online to look up the story. Even then, she prefers to receive her news from not just U.S. news sources but also Al Jazeera or BBC because she thinks she "may not get the full picture" from American news networks. Indeed, most of the participants shared her mistrust of the U.S. news media, which they believe to be biased against Muslims, especially when it comes to the Israel-Palestine issue. At the time of fieldwork, the Rohingya refugee problem was still largely overlooked by the world media and the American public.

Still today, the Rohingyas are called “the forgotten people” and the world’s “most friendless people” (Tharoor 2017). The Google Trends in Figure 5.1 shows the disparity in U.S. public attention between the Syrian and Rohingya refugee crises during fieldwork.

Figure 5.1: Levels of U.S. Interest on the Syrian and Rohingya Crises (Google Trends 2018b)



Based on this context, it is not that surprising that Faizah and many other Bangladeshi Americans were unaware of the Rohingya refugee crisis. News of Rohingyas hardly ever “trended” unlike the Syrian case. It was only recently in late 2017 that the global media picked up the Rohingya news story and that the American public began paying some attention to it (see Figure 5.2). Interestingly, it was also in late 2017 that I observed some concerted effort within the Desi Muslim community to raise funds for the Rohingyas, but that too was because a Bangladeshi American recent college graduate had taken the initiative through her community mosque.

Figure 5.2: Increase of U.S. Public's Interest in the Rohingya Refugee Crisis (Google Trends 2018c)



I observed a similar contrast in the participants' political orientation towards Turkey and Pakistan. Both countries have conducted genocide against an ethnic minority in their respective territories—Turkey against Armenians from 1915 to the early 1920s, and Pakistanis against Bangladeshis in 1971. Moreover, the governments of both countries still deny having conducted the mass killings. However, whereas many South Asian Muslim Americans engaged in divestment efforts to force the Turkish government to recognize the Armenian genocide, there was no similar pushback against Pakistan for its denial of the Bangladeshi genocide.

For example, one day, while preparing for a student-organized South Asian cultural event, Daliah, who was a Bangladeshi college senior at the time, asked me if I would support a movement to divest Turkey. Caught off-guard, as the only divestment movement I was aware of was that towards Israel in favor of Palestine, I asked her why one would divest from Turkey. She replied that the Turkish government's denial of the Armenian genocide is "wrong" and that "we should stand up and make them recognize what they did." As I knew Daliah was actively engaged in the BDS movement against Israel, I asked if she does not think that divesting from Turkey would be a conflict of interest given that it is a predominantly Muslim state and a major provider of humanitarian resources to Palestine. Daliah replied that despite Turkey being a Muslim state, "we Muslims can't be blind" to our own wrongdoings. She added:

We [Muslims] have to stand up to all human rights abuses—not only to those against us. We have to own up to what we do. If we don't, we can't expect others to own up to theirs. Besides, I know many Armenians and the Armenian student association supported BDS.

In the following weeks and interviews, I enquired further, seeking to find out whether other South Asian participants shared Daliah's views. I learned that the Palestinian rights organization and several South Asian cultural associations had signed and released official statements divesting from Turkey. Members of these organizations justified their support by emphasizing organizational coalition-building centered round the BDS movement against Israel. As the Armenian student association had supported BDS and was therefore considered an ally of the Palestinian rights organization, Muslim students were inclined to return the favor by signing the divestment resolution against Turkey, further underscoring the salience of Palestine in many South Asian Muslim Americans' political identities and how it is intertwined with their political decision-making. In fact, support for BDS was a key criteria when Muslim, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi student associations vetted candidates and student political parties during the campus government election.

Again, many other participants supported divestment from Turkey advocating for human rights and religious obligations as “good Muslims.” While Daliah above exemplifies the human rights advocates, Bushra represents those who cited religious reasons for divesting from Turkey. At the time of the interview, Bushra was the editor of the student-run Islamic magazine on campus. In her view, it was the “duty of a good Muslim” to stand up to any injustice. Yet, she and other students appeared unaware or indifferent to the fact that Turkey is governed by an Islamist party, as evidenced by their silence on the topic.

Moreover, the salience of persisting divisions based on the homeland appears to fade, replaced by concerns oriented towards “elsewhere.” For example, when I asked Bushra why she then did not also divest from Pakistan, she looked embarrassed and replied that she was not very familiar with that part of her homeland's history but that the Pakistani government should apologize

to Bangladesh for the genocide. Indeed, many of the young Pakistani Americans I met did not know about the Bangladeshi genocide prior to college. Moreover, whereas Bangladeshis—even those of the second generation who have never visited their ancestral homeland—understand their country’s independence as “gaining liberation” through the war of 1971, the Pakistani Americans were vaguely informed of Bangladesh just “seceding.” The Pakistani Americans encountered the history of the Bangladeshi genocide for the first time at Bangali cultural events on campus where Bangladeshi American students gave presentations on their homeland.

The Salience of “Elsewhere” in South Asian Muslims’ Political Self-Identification

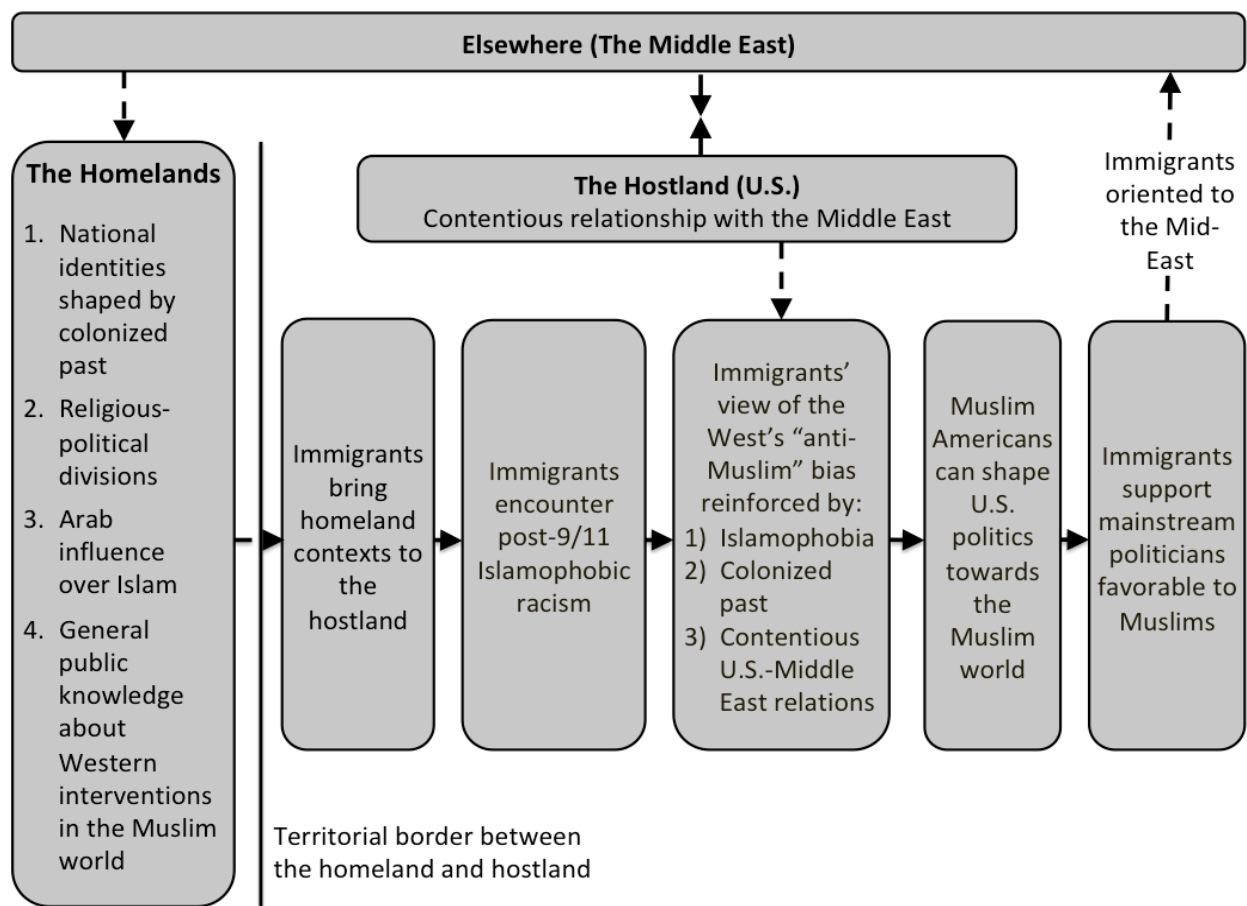
So why do these immigrants pay more attention to Muslim-related contexts in “elsewhere” Middle East than in their own homelands? Based on the findings in chapter 3, I argue that these immigrants come from homelands where religious-politics is used as a lens to inform boundaries both within and between the homelands, as well as those between the so-called “Muslim world” and “the West.” The national, political, and religious lives in these countries are still very much shaped by the subcontinents’ direct conflict with the West during British colonization. Moreover, the general public is aware of the more recent Western interventions and conflicts in various parts of the Muslim world, such as Palestine, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan (Pew Global Attitudes Project 2003). Arab influence over Islam and religious institutions in South Asia has added global dimensions to these historic and ongoing conflicts, shaping the homelands’ internal religious-political dynamics as well as the worldview of many segments of these countries’ Muslim population. The immigrants bring these homeland contexts with them to the United States. But upon arrival, they encounter the heightened Islamophobic contexts after 9/11, as discussed in chapters 3 and 4. These Islamophobic encounters combined with the immigrants’ homeland contexts, and the contentious relationship between the U.S. and the Middle East reinforce many of these immigrants’ worldviews in which “the West” is generally biased against Muslims. However, based on findings in

chapter 4, as “Muslim Americans,” these immigrants can now influence U.S. policies towards the Muslim world by voting and engaging with mainstream U.S. politics—something they were not able to do back in their homelands despite having sympathies for fellow Muslims. As such, the immigrants tend to favor those mainstream politicians who they view to be sympathetic to Muslims both in the United States and abroad, as was the case for Bernie Sanders. Indeed, as was discussed in chapter 4, engaging in mainstream politics not only within the U.S. context but also towards fellow Muslims in other countries has been one of the goals of Muslim leaders and organizations in constructing a “Muslim American” identity. This analysis based on the multicentered relational framework is visually depicted in Figure 5.3.

With regard to why Muslim-related contexts particularly in the Middle East have salience for the participants, at times even more than similar contexts in the homelands, I argue that South Asian Muslim Americans engage with the Middle East not just based on a sense of groupness with fellow Muslims, but also because Muslim-related conflicts in the Middle East are more influential in how they are identified in the United States than regional South Asian events. For example, whereas the Syrian refugee crisis that has produced an impact on U.S. immigration policies and border control, the Rohingya refugee crisis—despite also involving Muslims—did not have any direct impact on the United States. Moreover, homeland-oriented engagements could be absent partly because a confrontation over conflicts back in the sending countries, such as the Bangladesh-Pakistan war, would create cleavages among the South Asian American community, and run against pan-national and pan-religious platforms, such as “Desi,” in the United States. Instead, sweeping aside aspects of the homelands’ history that are unpleasant and not pertinent to life in a foreign land is an easier course of action for the South Asian immigrants. Moreover, rather than blaming each other, a more favorable strategy to develop a sense of group-ness is to fight a common opponent for a cause that is both detached from their homelands and without direct impact on their day-to-day lives. In this

context, engaging with causes rooted far away in the Middle East, such as the Israel/Palestine issue, Turkey and Armenian genocide, and the Syrian refugee crisis, serves as an effective group-generating course of action that highlights a shared “Muslim” identity among many in the three South Asian national groups as well as pave the way for building cross-ethnic coalitions and friendships with other immigrant and native groups in America. However, “elsewhere”-based politics may create new forms of boundaries within the Desi Muslim community, as discussed in the next section.

Figure 5.3: South Asian Muslim Americans’ “Elsewhere” Orientation to the Middle East



New Forms of Cleavage among South Asian Muslim Americans Based on “Elsewhere”

Politics

Despite having sympathy for the Palestinians as fellow “Muslims,” not all college-going South Asians find engaging with the Israel-Palestine issue appealing. For example, Atif, the first

generation Pakistani immigrant we met back in chapter 3, represents the small handful of South Asian Muslim students who were reluctant to get involved with the issue although many of their Desi friends were actively involved in divestment. In Atif's view, the issue is divisive for the college community, with the student-led divestment having little impact on actually improving conditions for Palestinians. In this words:

Personally, I don't see a point of divesting. Because by doing that you are actually excluding a part of campus community who actually thinks we shouldn't divest. And you are walking away from them. Even though I am Muslim and obligated [he laughs] to not be in favor of the Jews but if you think rationally you have to think from their side as well. I don't know if you've ever seen a Pakistani passport before. So on every page it says this passport is valid for every country except the republic of Israel. So anyways, students here are not responsible for the killings in Palestine. The Palestinian students should have their say and this organization is good that they give them that platform. Of course the Israelis obviously do horrific things to Palestine and there should be an organization to support the Palestinians but at the same time we also have to think about the student organizations on campus that represent the Jews because they are a big part of the college community as well. So I don't think there should be animosity between us. Obviously you are not Israel and Palestine yourself. You are just organizations—students—you are the future of the world. And if you continue with those views, if you don't get along, it's not gonna get better anytime soon.

Sometimes, these differences of opinion led to tensions among Desi Muslim college students. This became evident in the case of Yunus, a new student who had entered the Desi community at a college campus while I was conducting fieldwork. Yunus is Bangladeshi American, having come to the United States with his family when he was 5 years old. Both his mother and sister wear the *hijab*. He describes himself as an observant Muslim. New to college, he became involved with various student organizations, such as those for Muslims, Bangladeshis, and Pakistanis. In fact, the first time I met Yunus was at a South Asian cultural event. Like many other college-going participants, he thought the student organizations would be a good way to make new friends. Tall, handsome, and with a charming, easy-going personality, he soon became a popular name within the Muslim and Desi college communities. However, this began to change when Yunus decided that he was going to run for student government on a party platform known to be “pro-

Israel” and “anti-BDS” among the South Asian Muslims. Soon a subject of gossip within the South Asian Muslim community, many Desi Muslims, some of who used to go out of their way to invite him to parties, came to see him as a “social climber.” Adding more fuel to the fire, it became known that Yunus would also be going to Israel as part of a sponsored trip for college students. It was around this time that I had interviewed Yunus, who had come to our scheduled meeting looking fairly distraught. During our hour-long interview, which became more like a long and winding conversation, I came to know that he was worried that the Muslim and South Asian students would “ostracize” him because of his visit to Israel. He had thought he could rely on the Desi Muslim population to endorse and vote for him during campus elections. However, his recent political decisions have induced derision from even his friends within the community. He said, “I don’t feel I am doing anything wrong. My religion is important to me. But they [the Muslim and South Asian students] think that I am going to be the token Muslim, you know?” His views towards the Israel-Palestine issue was similar to that of Atif’s in that while sympathetic towards Palestinians, he wanted to know the other side of the story, and felt that divisiveness within the college community about the issue was somewhat unwarranted.

These “elsewhere”-based cleavages have not been present in the homelands, but have emerged in particular immigrant communities in the hostland, usually where there are sizeable Muslim and South Asian populations. For instance, I did not observe these forms of mobilization in the South Asian and Muslim populations in my prior research in Mississippi where these groups comprise a very small minority (Shams 2015). By contrast, the Palestine issue has gained political momentum particularly among the younger, second-generation South Asian Muslim population. Whereas their parents tend to be very reluctant to talk about these issues beyond their families and trusted network of friends, their children—who are more exposed to the larger U.S. society and identify as “Americans” rather than particularistic homeland nationalities—are vocal in their support

and political opinions about fellow Muslims in “elsewhere” Palestine. Although these mostly student-led activities reflect, to some extent, the hyper-politicized environment on college campuses, and which may not persist after graduation, they nonetheless show how many of the young South Asian Muslim participants have become politically aware as “Muslims,” and the salience of the “elsewhere” Middle East in that process. Indeed, the participants who had already graduated from college, no longer engaged in organizational activities directed at Palestine. Yet, their sentiments and views towards the issue remained unchanged, and they still subscribed to news related to this and other places in the Middle East long after graduation. Furthermore, Muslim-related issues continued to shape these participants’ interpretation of American politics and foreign policies.

Conclusion

This chapter tells only one half of a two-part story about how different “elsewhere” places shape not only how the South Asian Muslim Americans view themselves, but also how others in the hostland view these immigrants. Whereas this chapter has shown how the participants self-identify *with* “elsewhere,” the next chapter will show how these immigrants are identified *by others* in relation *to* “elsewhere.” More specifically, Chapter 6 will show that South Asian Muslim Americans’ identification with “elsewhere” Middle Eastern places often has little impact in how they are largely perceived by their host U.S. society. Rather, it is the exogenous shocks in “elsewhere” Europe that determine how these immigrants are viewed as “Muslims” in America.

CHAPTER SIX: SOUTH ASIAN MUSLIM AMERICANS' IDENTIFICATION BY OTHERS IN RELATION TO "ELSEWHERE" EUROPE

While the previous chapter has shown how many South Asian Muslim Americans self-identify with various "elsewhere" Middle Eastern places, this chapter will analyze how they are identified by others in relation to "elsewhere" events, but particularly those in Europe. Although the Middle East is salient in the immigrants' religious-political worldviews and self-identification, how the participants view themselves does not determine how they are viewed by their host society at large. Instead of "elsewhere" places in the Middle East, this chapter shows that it is the Muslim-related conflicts in Europe that produce exogenous shocks in the U.S. society, shaping how the immigrants are viewed by their hostland as "Muslims."

I make these arguments based on an analysis of six ISIS attacks that happened during fieldwork—four in "elsewhere" Europe and Middle East, and two in the hostland United States. As Figure 6.1 indicates, reactions from the global and American public, the U.S. media, and the immigrants themselves to the ISIS attacks in Europe were either "high" or "very high"—similar to the reactions that happened after those in the United States. For example, the safety precautions that the South Asian Muslim Americans adopted in fear of Islamophobic backlash after the Paris and Brussels attacks resembled those they took after the San Bernardino and Orlando attacks. Indeed, Figure 1.1 back in chapter 1 indicates that each of these four attacks in the United States and Europe had produced a spike in anti-Muslim sentiments in the United States. Especially after the Paris attacks, reactions to that event in the U.S. society was so intense and wide-spread that it was as if the attacks had taken place here in America. Many political commentators, including several of the participants, likened the Paris attacks and the subsequent Muslim backlash to 9/11 and its aftermath. In contrast, ISIS attacks of similar magnitude in the Middle East generated low levels of reaction from both global and American public. Surprisingly, even the South Asian Muslim participants for

whom the Middle East seemed to be salient largely responded with silence after the Middle East attacks. For example, whereas they were very vocal in condemning the Paris attacks and expressing solidarity with the French on social media, they were largely silent after the Beirut bombings just one day prior. Yet, many of the participants were aware of the incident and, when with “insiders,” i.e. other Muslims, they expressed outrage at the lack of global outcry over the event.

Figure 6.1: Variations in the Level of Salience of Different “Elsewhere” and Hostland Events

Event	Date of Event	Location of Event	Level of Salience	Where Are Most Victims From?	Reactions of U.S. Host Society and Participants			
					Had Participants Taken Safety Precautions?	National and Global Outcry?	Anti-Muslim Backlash In the U.S.?	Level of Media Coverage?
Beirut Bombings	12 November 2015	The Middle East	Low	Middle East	No Precaution	No	No	Low
Paris Attacks	13 November 2015	Europe	Very High	West	Extra Precaution	Yes	Yes	High
San Bernardino Shooting	2 December 2015	U.S.	Very High	West	Extra Precaution	Yes	Yes	High
Brussels Bombings	22 March 2016	Europe	High	West	General Safety Precaution	Yes	Yes	High
Orlando Shooting	12 June 2016	U.S.	High	West	General Safety Precaution	Yes	Yes	High
Istanbul Airport Attack	29 June 2016	The Middle East	Low	Middle East	No Precaution	No	No	Low

These on-the-ground observations suggest that not all “elsewhere” places have the same level of salience. Rather, variations in their level of salience are based on multiple hostland-centric factors, such as geographic proximity, prevailing public imaginary, and the hierarchy of power among different regions at the global level. Specifically, I argue that the ISIS attacks in Europe generated a strong emotional reaction in America because of its geographic proximity and its location in the prevailing public imaginary of “the West,” which also includes the United States. As such, Europe is seen not as a foreign place, but as part of the “we”—a “we” that is presumably

different from the seemingly homogenous Muslim “outsiders.” Thus, the U.S. public generally sees an Islamist attack in Europe as an attack against “us” by “them.” In contrast, a similar Islamist attacks in the predominantly Muslim Middle East does not invoke that feeling.

However, there are some variations in the level of salience even among the “elsewhere” European places. For example, although both France and Belgium are friendly Western countries and part of the “we,” Belgium does not have the same level of historical significance, emotional salience, and cultural proximity with the United States as France. As such, although the ISIS attacks in Brussels produced “high” levels of reactions, they were not “very high” like those after Paris. Moreover, by the time the Brussels bombings took place, there had been a series of high-profile ISIS attacks in the West and across the world, normalizing the threat of Islamist terrorism and Islamophobia into “the new normal” (Sussman 2015).

With regard to why the South Asian Muslim participants themselves largely remained silent after ISIS attacks in the Middle East, such as those in Beirut, I argue that despite sharing a sense of group-ness with fellow Muslims in the Middle East, the participants live in the United States and are thus directly exposed to its social and political contexts. The embeddedness of the participants in American society is reflected in how many of them identified as “American.” But, the heightened Islamophobic context in the United States often puts the identities “American” and “Muslim” at odds with each other with the participants having to balance their seemingly bifurcated sense of selves in moments of crises (as shown in chapter 4). Given the highly charged sentiments after the back-to-back ISIS attacks, showing solidarity with Beirut or critiquing the American establishment as biased against Muslims on Facebook would have associated the participants to an ISIS-related event in the Middle East. This in turn would have highlighted their “Muslim-ness” and potentially exposed them to Islamophobic backlash. Yet, many participants tend to feel “forced” to talk about their religion when Islamist attacks take place in Europe because Muslims at large are held collectively

responsible for those attacks. If they do not speak out, they run the risk of being seen as somehow supporting or enabling Islamist terrorism through their silence. As the Beirut attacks had taken place in the Middle East, the participants did not feel the need to come out and vocally condemn the attacks because Muslims were not collectively called upon to account for them. The following section begins to explicate these arguments.

Variations in Hostland Reactions to “Elsewhere” Attacks

From June 2015 through August 2016—the duration of my fieldwork—ISIS had conducted or inspired 58 attacks across the world (Yourish et al. 2016). However, all 58 of these attacks did not appear to produce an impact on the U.S. society nor affect the participants on the ground. I myself was not aware of all these events as I spent time in different South Asian Muslim communities and interviewed respondents. Effects of the large-scale attacks, which had grabbed the whole world’s attention, however, were clearly visible in the participants’ day-to-day routines and interview narratives. I describe how these effects took shape in the participants’ lives and the larger U.S. society in the following sections. As mentioned earlier, I will particularly focus on six ISIS attacks—two in Europe (the Paris attacks and Brussels bombings), two in the Middle East (the Beirut bombings, and Istanbul airport attacks), and two in the United States (the San Bernardino and Orlando shootings). I selected these specific events because either the participants mentioned them in their interviews and conversations and/or the impact was so widespread in the overall U.S. society that they also produced observable changes in the participants’ daily lives. I will first talk about the ISIS attacks in the United States and “elsewhere” Europe to show how similar the public, media, and participant reactions were to these events. Then, to show the contrast in the level of reaction, I will discuss how the U.S. society and the immigrants themselves responded to the ISIS attacks in the Middle East.

Paris, France

As news broke out online and across television screens that ISIS had killed 130 people and injured 413 more in November 2015 in Paris, tensions on the ground in the U.S. were palpable—as if the attacks had taken place not in France thousands of miles away, but here in America. Global and national public response was almost immediate. World leaders, including American politicians and media personalities, swiftly condemned the attacks and expressed solidarity with France. Facebook users worldwide changed their profile pictures to the French flag or to the phrase “*Je suis Paris*”—a direct reference to “*Je suis Charlie*,” the slogan widely shared after the Charlie Hebdo attacks in January of that same year. Many others, including several participants, posted photos of themselves in front of the Eiffel Tower taken at the time of their own earlier visits to France.

The attacks revitalized political debates in America about Muslims being national security threats (The Economist 2015). National political figures asserted that if Islamist attacks could take place in France, they could also happen again in the United States. Ted Cruz, for instance, had proposed religious tests for incoming Syrian refugees, showing a willingness to grant asylum to those who were Christian, but not to those who were Muslim. And, most famously, Donald Trump called for a “total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States” (Healy and Barbaro 2015), and proposed to register those already within the country (Haberman and Pérez-Peña 2015). These platforms were met with widespread public support from many segments of the U.S. society. Reports showed a spike in the number of anti-Muslim threats and hate crimes across America after the attacks in Paris (Levin 2016).

After the attacks, fears and tensions within the Muslim American community were particularly high. Reports showed a spike in the number of anti-Muslim threats and hate crimes across America after news broke that ISIS had struck Paris (Levin 2016; Southern Poverty Law Center 2016). In fact, just such a backlash from at least some segments of the American society was precisely what study participants had expected. For instance, as soon as Tasneem, a journalist born

to a Pakistani mother and an Indian father, learned about the breaking news at work, she texted her “Desi” Muslim friends, “Oh god. Get ready for a worse or an equivalent Muslim backlash since 9/11.” Even though the identities of the attackers were not yet released, Tasneem claimed to instinctively know that the perpetrators were Muslim, specifically ISIS:

Because it was all coming in slowly right? We knew there was some shootings at restaurants and some explosions outside of the stage...then we found out about all the hostages at the concert hall and the next thing you know are these numbers and you are like...And even before they said anything I kind of knew it was ISIS because it was France, because of everything...So wasn't surprised when I found that out.

Although Tasneem anticipated but did not directly encounter Islamophobic interactions, Ahmed, a first generation Pakistani immigrant directly felt the impact of the Paris attacks. He, too, instinctively anticipated that the attackers would be Muslim when the news first broke out. Yet, Ahmed had waited apprehensively in front of his television for the confirmation, all the while hoping, “Please don't let it be Muslim.” Ahmed's apprehensions were confirmed when a few days after the Paris attacks a white male customer walked into his restaurant and, while placing the order, asked where he was from. Ahmed replied that he was an American. “No, where are you originally from, like what's your real country?” the customer had asked. Given the multicultural backdrop of Los Angeles, these questions are quite common and generally reflect a cosmopolitan curiosity of Angelenos about each other's diverse backgrounds. However, in light of another mass-scale Islamist terrorist attack in the West at a time when anti-Muslim sentiments in America were already on the rise, this seemingly innocuous question posed by a white customer to a brown, bearded man with a foreign accent carried latent connotations of “us” and “them.” Ahmed seemed to understand these nuances as he replied, “I was born in Pakistan but I have been here for the last forty years.” The customer responded, “Oh. So you are also like one of those immigrants who did that in Paris.” Ahmed responded that he was from Pakistan whereas the attackers had come from Syria, referring to the news of Syrian passports being found at the scene of the attacks. “But even then,” Ahmed

added, “that doesn’t mean all Syrians are bad.” “But you are Muslim?” the customer asked. Ahmed then replied in a way that many Muslim Americans tend to do when associated with terrorism (discussed in chapter 4)—he distanced Islam and “moderate” Muslims from “extremists”—“What they [the attackers] did is not real Islam. They are extremists. Real Muslims do not condone any kind of violence. We are moderate. Peaceful.”

Another example was offered by Shehnaz, a first generation immigrant from Pakistan who wears the *hijab*. A week after the Paris attacks, I had asked Shehnaz about her experiences as a “Muslim-looking” woman in the then tense environment. As she described her experiences, I noticed she did so with some degree of normalization, as if she had taken for granted that such interactions are “normal” for someone like her in that context. She said:

- Shehnaz: There has been an uptick in people approaching me with questions. You know, the general same kind of thing that happened after 9/11.
- Me: Such as?
- Shehnaz: Questions like why Muslims hate us [meaning Americans but also Westerners in general], what my opinions of ISIS and the attacks are, and so on.
- Me: Can you walk me through such an interaction? Like, what happened, where you were etc.
- Shehnaz: Yeah so for example, I was just standing at a traffic light waiting to cross over and there is this car full of guys but there may have been girls there too. They were acting a little rowdy and I saw someone throwing trash out on to the street. And I didn’t actually say anything but something might have shown on my expression in the way like, ‘Why are you throwing trash in the middle of the street?’ Because they noticed me standing there and then felt necessary to shout out to me calling, “Osama! Osama!”
- Me: And how did you react to that?
- Shehnaz: I reacted as I did before [referring to 9/11]—I calmly walked away.

Even though the harassers themselves made no explicit mention of the Paris attacks, Shehnaz concluded that this harassment was part of the reaction to those attacks and compared it to her experiences following 9/11. Concerned by the overwhelming public response to the Paris attacks, South Asian Muslim parents, many of whom, like Shehnaz, vividly recall the backlash towards Muslims that immediately followed 9/11, reiterated instructions to their children to not

respond to any comments about Islam that they might encounter. Some participants who usually wore markers associated with Islam in public chose not to do so in the days that followed. For instance, on Wednesdays, Nargis, a Pakistani American graduate student and a BDS activist wears a *keffiyeh*—a chequered black and white scarf symbolizing Palestinian solidarity but which is often mischaracterized as an expression of sympathy for terrorism—when she goes to attend organizational meetings on campus. However, she observed that tensions were “running pretty high” on campus in the week following the Paris attacks when students in her Arabic and ethnic studies classes had arguments about the situation of Muslims in France. On one side, students argued that “there are ghettos in France and all the Muslims are in there” whereas the other side protested the French *laïcité* laws that banned Muslim women from wearing the *hijab* and practicing their faith. Based on her classmates’ conversations and the public response she saw on social media, Nargis decided to leave her *keffiyeh* at home because she felt it would explicitly mark her as a “Muslim” as would the *hijab*.

Speakers at public forums and vigils also advised women who wear the headscarf to be strategic in their clothing as a safety precaution. For example, at a campus vigil, a South Asian Muslim speaker instructed, “To my *hijabi* sisters, this is not the time to show resistance, but to be safe.” This advice echoed those of Muslim American leaders that were widely shared among participants on Facebook. One such post read: “To all my Muslim sisters who wear *hijab*, if you feel your life or safety is threatened in any way because of your dress, you have an Islamic allowance (*darura*/necessity) to adjust your clothing accordingly. Your life is more important than your dress.” Indeed, some *hijabi* college students wore caps instead of their headscarves in the week after the Paris attacks. Many strategically travelled in groups, coordinating with friends who were either male or non-*hijabi* female to walk home together after dark. Some others did not attend classes on religious or political topics in order to avoid being put on the spot.

San Bernardino, California

In December 2015, less than one month following the Paris attacks, two Muslim Americans of Pakistani background conducted a mass shooting in San Bernardino, California, killing 14 people and injuring 22 others. The shooters were a married couple and were self-radicalized. Prior to the attacks, they had jointly pledged allegiance to ISIS on Facebook. The couple was reportedly in the last stages of planning an even bigger assault and had a stockpile of ammunitions in their home. What was even more shocking to the American public, the shooters had been living in the United States for years, with the husband being a U.S. citizen without any prior criminal record.

So soon after attacks in France, the media reported news of the San Bernardino and Paris attacks together for months (Temple-Raston 2016). With anti-Muslim right-wing support already gaining momentum during the 2016 U.S. presidential election, these back-to-back attacks reshaped the political debate about Muslims in America as well as the overall election cycle (Lauter and Halper 2015). Several high-profile politicians, including Trump, and many segments of the U.S. population held Muslim Americans collectively accountable for not reporting the shooters' suspicious behavior, renewing calls for profiling Muslims (Wilkie 2016). Later that same month, as Trump proposed to shut down mosques, anti-Muslim attacks tripled in the United States, with nearly half of those being targeted against mosques (The Bridge Initiative 2016; CAIR and UC Berkeley Center for Race and Gender 2016). Anti-Muslim sentiments in America overall soared, reaching their highest levels since the aftermath of 9/11 (Lichtblau 2016; Stack 2016; The Bridge Initiative 2016).

On the ground, the atmosphere within the South Asian Muslim community was fraught with tension, especially given the proximity of the shooting. In the week that followed after the attacks, several participants said they did not go out of their homes needed. Even Hashem, a Bangladeshi American college student who identifies himself as agnostic was cognizant about his "Muslim-looking" appearance and how that might affect his public interactions. His parents, after having

watched the news on San Bernardino with both disbelief and resignation, called and reiterated their instructions “to never get in fights” and “just walk away” when questioned about his religion. Many others continued the same precautionary measures they had taken after the Paris attacks. Some left their explicit markers of faith at home, while those who wore the *hijab* travelled in groups for protection, especially after dark. Families and friends called or messaged each other to check in. I too received messages from people I had become close to during fieldwork, asking if I was safe and offering support. On such message read: “How are you? Stay Safe! Making *dua* [prayer] for you and your family!” Curiously, I noticed that some of the participants who tend to be vocal about Muslim-related issues on social media, and who had changed their profile pictures to the French flag after the Paris attacks, were relatively quiet. Their few posts were somber in tone, usually about making prayers for the victims and their families.

Brussels, Belgium

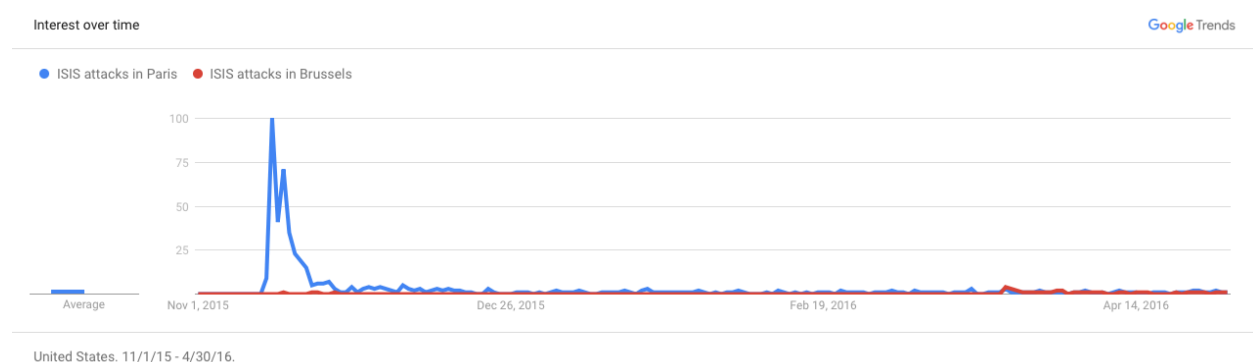
In March 2016, ISIS conducted coordinated suicide bombings in Brussels, killing 31 people and injuring 300 others. By that time, although the heightened tensions in response to the Paris and San Bernardino attacks had waned, they had left lasting effects on the sociopolitics surrounding Islam and Muslims in the West, including the United States. Political commentators, and even the former F.B.I. director James Comey, noted that ISIS attacks across the world have created “the new normal” in which Western societies have to cope with the presence of Islamic terrorism on one hand, and Muslims have to find ways to live within an Islamophobic atmosphere on the other (Sussman 2015; Semple 2015; Gonzalez Jr. 2015; The Economist 2016b; Mudde 2016; Pape 2016). After ISIS struck Brussels, an article published in the Economist (2016b) summarized the now “normal” stages of Europe coming to terms with yet another Islamic terrorist attack:

Over the next few days Europe will once again pass through terrorism’s stages of grief: despair over innocent lives cut short; anger towards the young men and women (some of them citizens) who will kill in the name of *jihad*; questions about

the grip of the police and intelligence services; and eventually, as news bulletins and headlines subside, a weary resignation.

In the United States, too, the Brussels bombings appeared to be part of “the new normal.” Although the event seemingly provided yet more evidence of Islam’s, more accurately, ISIS’s growing threat in the West, it did not produce the same level of national shock, emotional impact, or anti-Muslim backlash among the American public as the Paris attacks. For instance, going back to Figure 1.1, although Islamophobic sentiments in the United States spiked in response to the Brussels bombings, the spike was not as high as that which occurred after the Paris massacre. Even the overall U.S. public interest on the Brussels attacks was arguably lower compared to the Paris attacks, as indicated in the Google Trends graph in Figure 6.2. Although the American news media covered the bombings and their aftermath in detail, the coverage was not as extensive as the weeks-long wall-to-wall coverage after the Paris attacks. Moreover, whereas many political commentators, bloggers, news personnel, and even the participants themselves had drawn parallels between the Paris attacks and 9/11, these comparisons were notably missing in the public discourse after the Brussels bombings.

Figure 6.2: U.S. Public Interest on the Paris and Brussels ISIS Attacks (Google Trends 2018d)



The “normalization of fear” discourse appeared to explain the participants’ reactions as well. In my interviews and conversations soon after the Brussels bombings, some participants sounded resigned rather than anxious like they had after Paris. “It feels so numbing now,” said Hamid, the

Indian Muslim college student from chapter 3 in describing his reactions to the Brussels attack—“Whenever we hear something now, it’s like oh no not this again.” Similarly, Soraya, a Pakistani American elementary school teacher said, “It’s just the way it is now. And sadly, we just have to find ways to live with it.” Indeed, I did not find people within the South Asian Muslim communities anxiously taking extra precautionary measures as they had after the Paris and San Bernardino attacks. While the day-to-day impression management described in chapter 4 remained, I did not find South Asians leaving their religious markers at home in fear of an Islamophobic encounter. On social media platforms, which often allowed me to observe the participants’ almost immediate reactions after exogenous shocks, I did not find participants changing their profile pictures to the Belgian flag.

Orlando, Florida

How just three months after the Brussels bombings, Omar Mateen, an Afghan American Muslim, conducted a mass shooting at a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida, killing 50 people and injuring 53 others. At the time, the attack was the largest loss of life in the United States after 9/11. Mateen was reported to have pledged allegiance to ISIS while conducting the attack (Perez et al. 2016). In the so-called “new normal” where Islamist terrorist attacks are supposedly a part of life, the nation-wide response to the attack, and the anti-Muslim backlash that ensued could hardly be characterized as “normal.” Anti-Muslim sentiments spiked in levels much higher than the Brussels attacks, although still not to the same level as those after the Paris and San Bernardino massacres (Figure 1.1).

Unlike the other ISIS terror attacks, the Orlando shooting had an added layer of connotations. In addition to being viewed as further proof of the presence of ISIS in America, the Orlando attack was largely deemed as a targeted hate crime against the LGBT community, with Mateen reportedly expressing outrage after seeing two men kissing in Miami prior to the attacks (Ellis et al. 2016).

These contexts are relevant for analyzing the participants' response given that homosexuality is a taboo topic within the South Asian and Muslim communities. The younger generation is relatively more open to the LGBTQ community than the older South Asian Muslims, who would have considered it an affront had I asked them about their views towards gay rights during interviews. This contrast is reflected in the participants' reactions to the Orlando shooting. In the case of the older participants, while I did not hear them condemn the attack as a hate crime against the LGBTQ community, they were nonetheless aghast at another violent attack in their homeland misrepresenting their religion and giving Muslims a "bad name." However, the Orlando shooting particularly affected the younger generation participants who were largely supportive of the LGBTQ community. Yet, the participants—even the few who were members of the LGBT community themselves—questioned Omar Mateen's ties to ISIS. Rather than a self-radicalized member of a terrorist organization, several participants viewed Mateen to be "homophobic" and "mentally unstable," referring to his ex-wife's description of his emotional instability and volatile temper (see Goldman, Warrick and Bearak 2016 for the news story). They also criticized the American news media for its coverage of the attack. They argued that the media highlighted Mateen's connection to ISIS rather than him being first and foremost a mentally unstable individual. Some viewed the incident as the result of flawed gun control laws in America. Wasim, the Bangladeshi college student from chapter 3 who identifies as bisexual, reflects these views in a social media post, which received a hundred 'likes' from his friends, many of whom participants in this study. An excerpt is as follows.

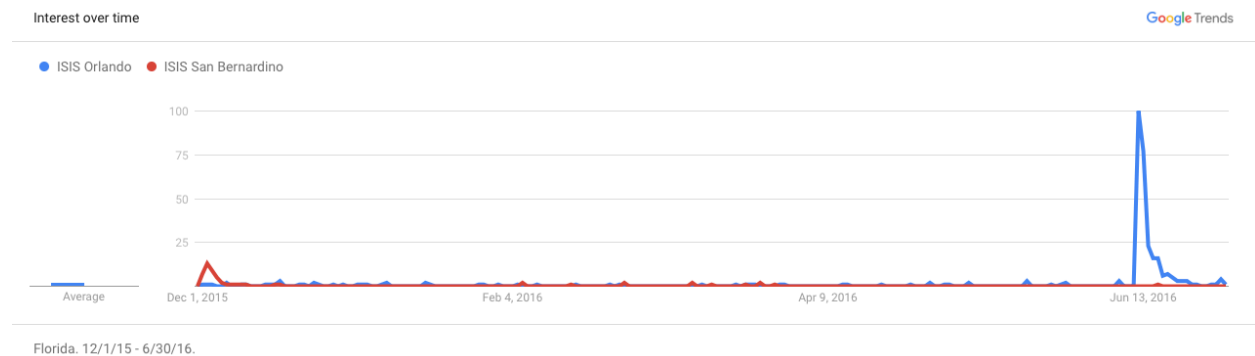
...Radical Islam undoubtedly played a role in this massacre—the monster pledged allegiance to IS. Make no mistake, though, the gun laws of this country played a much larger role. WHY does a civilian have access to artillery, and extra bullets to spare? HOW is someone that has no ties to the police, military, any form of national defense organization, have access to enough ammo to hit more than a hundred people, and have more to be able to hold them hostage?
...My religion condemns murder. It says that murdering an innocent human is a murder of humankind itself. Why are we hearing about him [Mateen]? Because he fits the media and the US political institutions' definition of a 'terrorist'. Born to Afghan parents, raised Muslim—so easy to rally the masses against him. Nothing

that hasn't been done before. What about James Wesley Howell, the white man who had a collection of guns and was headed for LA Pride? Why do I have to scroll down 5 paragraphs to read 'the police have identified the potential shooter as James Wesley Howell' when every single article about Orlando starts by reading 'Omar Mateen, the Orlando shooter...'

These were also some of the key themes addressed in the vigil organized by Muslim students at a college campus. Interestingly, in contrast to the vigils held after the San Bernardino attacks, there was no mention of *darura* or safety concerns about wearing the *hijab* in fear of encountering anti-Muslim backlash. Overall, the Orlando example illustrates variations in the levels of salience among different "elsewhere" places (such as, Paris and Brussels), between the "elsewhere" and hostland centers (Europe and the U.S.), and that between different places inside the hostland (such as, San Bernardino and Orlando) for the South Asian Muslim American participants. In these hierarchies of salience, while European places, such as Belgium, are deemed important, what goes on in the United States matters the most both for the general American public and for the immigrants. As such, whereas the Orlando shooting had evoked national outcry and renewed hostility against Muslims, both the participants and the general U.S. society reacted to the Brussels bombings with some emotional dissonance. Paris was more salient to the participants and the American public at large than Brussels, possibly because France shares a longer and more intimate relationship with the United States historically, politically, and culturally than Belgium. Moreover, Paris, as a center of world culture, is arguably a much bigger and more important city than Brussels. As such, attacks in Paris unleashed an anti-Muslim backlash in the United States as if the attacks had taken place in America. With regard to the variations of salience between different hostland places, a possible explanation could be proximity of the participants to the attacks. Whereas Orlando, Florida was on the other side of the country, San Bernardino was within driving distance of where the participants lived in California. As such, while the Orlando attacks did produce reactions among the South Asian Muslim participants, they did not respond with the same level of intensity or fear for

their immediate safety as they had after the San Bernardino attacks. Conversely, in Florida, levels of public interest in the San Bernardino attacks far away in California was much lower than their interest in the Orlando attacks close to home (indicated in Figure 6.3).

Figure 6.3: Public Interest in the Orlando and San Bernardino Attacks in Florida (Google Trends 2018e)



Beirut, Lebanon

In exploring the variations in the reactions of the South Asian Muslim participants and the larger US society to different homeland and ‘elsewhere’ attacks, it was important for me as a researcher to observe not only what took place on the ground, but also what had *not* taken place. On November 12th, 2015, just one day before the Paris attacks, ISIS had also claimed responsibility for two coordinated suicide bombings in a Shia-majority neighborhood in Beirut that killed 43 people and injured over 200 others. Yet, in sharp contrast to the attacks in Paris, the bombings inspired little sympathy among Americans. Nor was there the same level of outpouring of sympathy and condemnation of the attacks from either the global public or world leaders. Facebook users, for instance, did not change their profile pictures en masse to the Lebanese flag in a show of solidarity. Although the major U.S. newspapers and news networks reported the incident, the coverage was not nearly as extensive as the weeklong wall-to-wall analysis of the Paris attacks and their aftermath (Phillips 2015; Sullivan 2016). In further contrast to the ISIS attacks in Europe and the United States, spikes in anti-Muslim sentiments in response to the Beirut bombings were notable absent.

Overall, as Figure 6.4 indicates, the level of the American public’s interest regarding the Beirut bombings was negligible compared to the Paris attacks. It was notably lower than that of even the Brussels bombings, which had generated a much less intense response from the U.S. society compared to the Paris massacre (see Figure 6.5). With regard to the immigrants’ identification by others in relation to “elsewhere,” these indicators reflect a hierarchy in which the salience of exogenous shocks in the Middle East has a lower level of salience than European “elsewhere” places.

Figure 6.4: U.S. Public Interest on the Beirut and Paris ISIS Attacks (Google Trends 2018f)

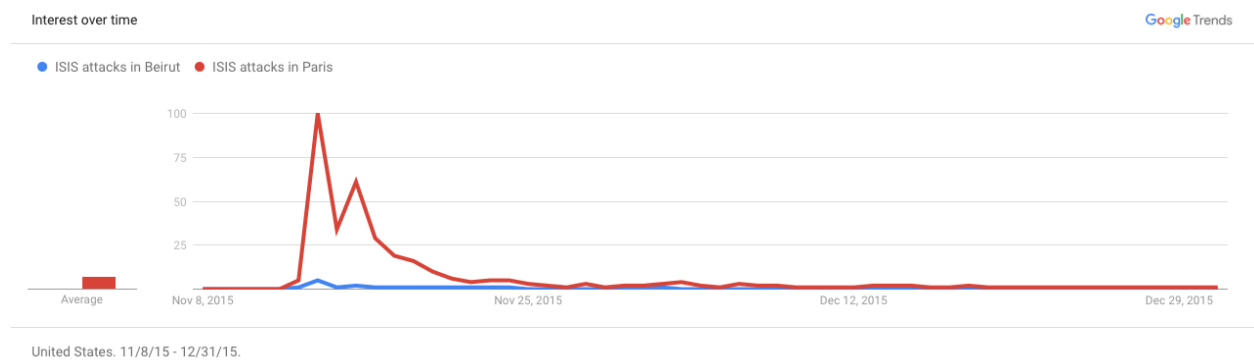
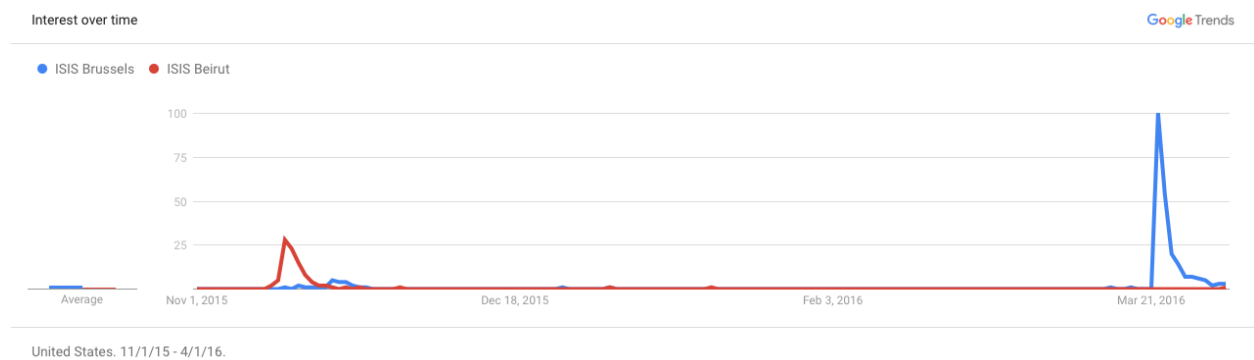


Figure 6.5: U.S. Public Interest on the Brussels and Beirut ISIS Attacks (Google Trends 2018g)



Curiously, even from the South Asian Muslim participants for whom the Middle East seemed to be salient responded with silence. I initially thought the participants were unaware about the attacks given the absence of their response on social media. Yet, interviews later revealed that many of them were indeed informed of the bombings as they had tuned in to alternative news

outlets, namely Al Jazeera and BBC, which they claim provide more in-depth and “less biased” coverage of Muslim-related events than American news channels. Moreover, many participants noticed the sharp contrast in the American media and general public’s level of interest between the Beirut bombings and the Paris attacks. They interpreted this contrast as America’s general anti-Muslim bias and overall indifference towards the plight of Muslims. Rashed, a Shia Muslim from Pakistan and a recent college graduate expressed his bitterness and frustration in the excerpt below.

I actually got angry at the fact that everyone was like ‘Paris attack! Paris attack!’ as if nothing happened before that. *Beirut* happened before Paris! It bothered. Again, Beirut was also Shia. The suburb belonged to Hezbollah, which is listed as a terrorist organization. Anyways, so I guess it was then, you just saw the biased nature of reporting, you know? Nobody wants to talk about it because it’s [Beirut] a war zone whereas Paris is a “civilized” [used hand quotes] city because it belongs to the Western world. Yes, but people are still trying to be normal in that war zone...Paris was an unfortunate event—don’t get me wrong. It was the way we [Americans] reacted to it [the Paris attacks]. Like, Donald Trump comes on the news and says Muslim people should have an emblem to identify as Muslims. Is this a post-WWII world or not? Are we turning the wheel back on itself?

Although Rashed’s frustration stems from his identity as a Shia Muslim, in the above quote he nonetheless identifies himself as an American, as indicated by his use of “we” when referring to Americans. This reflects how he, like many of my other participants, finds himself at a crossroads between his “American” and “Muslim” identities that often seem as odds with one another.

Istanbul, Turkey

It could be argued that the reactions to the Beirut bombings was subsumed by the overwhelming response to the Paris massacre just the day after. However, that does not explain the similar low level of response to yet another terrorist attack in the Middle East in June 2016 when ISIS was suspected to have conducted mass shooting and explosions in the Istanbul Ataturk Airport in Turkey. Although there was some coverage of the events on the major U.S. news outlets, the attacks did not generate any public outpouring of sympathy for the Turkish victims or any anti-Muslim backlash. I also did not observe much reaction from the South Asian Muslim participants in

terms of taking anticipatory precautions, showing solidarity with Turkey, or condemning the attacks on social media. However, some participants mentioned the Istanbul attacks in passing during interviews, indicating that they were aware of the event despite not being vocal about it in public. Moreover, some had 'liked' posts from other Muslim public figures and commentators on Facebook. These posts admonished ISIS to have carried out a terror attack against Muslims during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan on the one hand, and criticized the mainstream news media for associating the terrorist group with Islam on the other. One such post read:

The fact that ISIS would carry out terror attacks in Turkey during the Holy Month of Ramadan reveals just how pointedly sacrilege their motives are, and how profusely anti-Muslim their mission is.

The overwhelming majority of their victims are Muslims. Both in terms of fatalities (90%), and the millions more victimized by the displacement, stereotyping, surveillance and xenophobia their monstrous actions encourage.

The mainstream media's incessant association of ISIS with Islam obscures this - and adding great insult to grave injury - erases the recurring realities of mass Muslim tragedy and victimhood.

Prayers with Turkey.

The Salience of Europe as an “Elsewhere” for Muslim’ Identification by Others

So why are “elsewhere” places in Europe more salient for the participants’ identification by their hostland than those in the Middle East? And, despite being emotionally affected, why did none of the participants engage with the Middle East attacks on social media or in their community and organizational spaces like they had after Paris? It could be because despite sharing a sense of groupness with fellow Muslims in the Middle East, the participants reside in the United States and are thus directly exposed to the sociopolitical contexts within it. The embeddedness of the participants in the U.S. society is often reflected by many of them viewing themselves as “Americans”—as being part of the “we” or “us”—just as did Rashed in the quote above. However, the heightened Islamophobic context in the U.S. society puts the identity categories “Americans”—“us”—and “Muslims”—“them”—at odds with each other, with the participants having to prioritize or balance their seemingly bifurcated sense of selves as “Americans” and “Muslims” in moments of crises. This is

evidenced by Rashed's explanation below on why he and the Muslim community at large remained silent on social media about the Beirut bombings.

In our [Muslim] community, there is a sense of paranoia so we [Muslims] don't actually talk about politics very much. We are very...it [politics] only stays in your [Muslims'] home, when you are sipping on your cup of tea and you're talking to your family members, which is basically preaching to the choir. How much difference of opinion can you have in a family? And even if you do, how much would it matter, it's just gonna stay there.

I inferred from this conversation that given the highly charged sentiments at the time, explicitly associating themselves to an ISIS-related conflict in the Middle East by showing solidarity with Beirut or publicly critiquing the American media as biased against Muslims on social media would have highlighted the participants' "Muslim-ness" and thus potentially have exposed them to Islamophobic backlash. Yet, as Muslims are collectively held responsible and called to account for the actions of their co-religionists, many participants feel "forced" to talk about their religion in moments of Muslim-related crises in the United States and Europe, despite their usual reluctance to do so with their non-Desi and non-Muslim friends. Muslim individuals' choice to remain out of the public spotlight by remaining silent in these tense situations could be misperceived as silently supporting and enabling Islamist terrorism. In the words of Tabassum, a young Pakistani American non-profit employee:

If we [Muslims] don't, if we just keep quiet then people [non-Muslims] are like 'Oh you are quiet because you agree with what they [Islamist terrorists] are doing.' Then we [Muslims] have to be like, 'No, no that's not true! What they are doing is not real Islam. We are just like you [Americans]. We hate what they are doing!'

Social media gives the participants an outlet to vocally condemn Islamist attacks and highlight their "Americans-ness" as these platforms are publicly accessible while still being within the user's control. Participants can thus selectively and strategically voice their opinions on various Muslim-related issues when needed, possibly explaining why many of the participants were highly vocal in their condemnation of the attacks and sympathy for the victims when ISIS struck Paris, but

not when it exacted similar attacks in Beirut or Istanbul. With the Beirut and Istanbul attacks having taken place in the Middle East, the participants did not feel the need to vocally condemn the attacks on social media, most likely because Muslims were not collectively called upon to account for the attacks. Thus, the participants' relative inactivity on Facebook after the Beirut attacks as compared to their response provoked by those in Paris suggests that that they might be using social media activities as yet another form of precaution against the stigma attached to their "Muslim" identity.

These sociopolitical contexts of the hostland make Europe another "elsewhere" center in the identification processes of South Asian Muslim Americans. The participants do not necessarily think of European places as their homes, nor do they feel any diasporic affinity to their co-ethnics and co-religionists who are living there. Rather, the South Asian Muslim Americans feel tied to Europe because the prevailing public imaginary places it within the West, the sphere which also encompasses their homeland, the United States. In that imaginary, Europe is not a foreign place, but part of the "we" as broadly defined—a "we" that is presumably different from the seemingly homogenous Muslim "outsiders." Thus, the U.S. public generally sees an Islamist attack in Europe as an attack against "us" by "them"—a perception that comes to shape how Muslims are identified by others in the United States in the events of Muslim-related conflicts in Europe.

In contrast, a similar Islamist attack in the predominantly Muslim Middle East does not invoke the feeling of "us" being attacked by "them." This is evidenced by the participants not preparing any safety precautions after the Beirut and Istanbul attacks, indicating that they did not anticipate this event to trigger any anti-Muslim backlash. In this worldview, Paris is not considered a foreign city but a familiar place in the West that Americans like to visit; by contrast, places in the Middle East, such as Beirut is largely viewed as "war zones," far away from the United States (Barnard 2015). Tasneem, for instance, did not send her Desi Muslim friends a text anticipating another 9/11-like backlash after the Beirut bombings like she did after the Paris attacks. When I had

asked her why not, she replied that Beirut was “far away in the Middle East.” “And,” she added, “it was kind of like Muslims killing Muslims.”

Some of these arguments are reflected in how many of the participants themselves made sense of global geopolitics and how it comes to shape their hostland’s perception of them as “Muslims.” Hashem, the Bangladeshi American who identifies himself as agnostic, speaks to this vein in the following excerpt.

When a terrorist act happens outside the U.S. by a Muslim person, I think it somehow affects all Muslims in the U.S. But I also think it depends on how much exposure it gets, and the amount of exposure it gets depends on how Europeanized the place has been. So something like Paris got 24/7 media coverage but not Beirut, not Baghdad where there was also an attack two days before Paris, or the thing that happened in Turkey—that is not getting any media coverage...I think attacks in the non-European countries like in the Middle East add to the bigger picture but it doesn’t stir up as much as say an attack in an European country or like a global power. [‘What is this bigger picture?’ I asked.] You know, of Islam and terrorism or Muslim countries being volatile and dangerous.

Conclusion

Based on an analysis of global, national, and participant reactions to six ISIS attacks conducted in the United States, the Middle East, and Europe during fieldwork, this chapter has shown that when it comes to South Asian Muslim Americans being identified by their larger hostland society as “Muslims,” it is the exogenous shocks in “elsewhere” Europe that are more salient than those in the Middle East. Whereas Islamist attacks in Europe generated a global outpouring of support and spikes in anti-Muslim sentiments in the United States, those in the Middle East were largely overlooked.

The contrast in global public reactions towards attacks in Western societies and those in the Middle East could in part be a reflection of the hierarchical distribution of power across different regions of the world. Because of America’s position as a core country in the global political order, its domestic issues tend to impact the rest of the world. As such, people in the periphery regions pay attention to the ongoing events in the United States, as indicated by Indian Hindus closely following

the outcome of the 2016 U.S. Presidential election (discussed in chapter 3) or people in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Iran evaluating the American presidential candidates based on their Middle East policy platforms (Parvaz 2016; The Guardian 2016). Again, a Gallup poll on whether the rights of Muslims in the West are important for Muslims globally showed that 6 in 10 respondents said it is “very important” to them that “the West treated Muslims fairly in the policies that affect them, protect the rights of Muslim minorities in these societies, accurately portray Muslims in the Western media, and work with Muslim societies as equal partners on issues of mutual interest” (Gallup n.d.). Conversely, internal conflicts in developing, non-Western countries seldom affect the global political order. Relatedly, the general public in the West seem little concerned about conflicts ensuing in the far away peripheral outskirts. For instance, whereas many Facebook users in Bangladesh had changed their profile pictures to the French flag in a show of solidarity after the 2015 ISIS attacks in Paris, Westerners were largely indifferent to the ISIS attacks that had taken place in Dhaka, Bangladesh a few months later (Barnard 2016). As was mentioned in chapter 3, even the Bangladeshis who are usually vocal about Muslim-related issues on social media were relatively silent after the Dhaka attacks.

In fact, despite the salience of the Middle East as a religious-political center in the South Asian Muslim immigrants’ self-identification, the participants remained largely silent after the ISIS attacks in the Middle East. In sharp contrast, they vocally condemned Islamist attacks and expressed solidarity with the victims after the Paris attacks. I argued that this contrast is based on various hostland-centric factors, which are shaped by global geopolitical dynamics between the so-called “West” and “the Muslim world.” In the general U.S. society, whereas Islamist terror attacks in the Europe invokes feelings of “us” being attacked by “them,” similar attacks are viewed as “Muslims killing Muslims” in a far away “war zone” in the Middle East. As the South Asian Muslim immigrants are located within the United States, and are directly exposed to anti-Muslim backlash at

the event of ISIS attacks, they aim to distance from their “Muslim-ness” and highlight their embeddedness as “Americans” by vocally condemning Islamist terrorism after Muslim-related conflicts in “elsewhere” Europe. In contrast, they remain silent after Islamist terror attacks in the Middle East because engaging with those issues in public forums, such as social media, may highlight their “Muslim-ness” during times of heightened Islamophobic tensions.

CHAPTER SEVEN: HERE, THERE, AND “ELSEWHERE”

This dissertation addresses a theoretical gap in the scholarship of international migration. It argued that although devoted to studying the processes of cross-national connections through migrants and their offspring, migration scholars have largely studied immigrants largely within a dyadic framework in which the sending society stands on one end and the receiving society on the other. The literature contends that as immigrants leave their homeland to settle in a new society, they bring with them the values, practices, and societal boundaries of the sending country that continue to shape their lives in the hostland. Inversely, these ties to their homeland and to the people they have left behind motivate immigrants to stay informed about ongoing developments and remit resources back to the sending country from the hostland. Moreover, where and how these immigrants have come from are consequential in determining the kinds of opportunities these immigrants and their children will have in the receiving country.

However, challenging this dyadic homeland-hostland framework, I argue that immigrants’ lives are often influenced by events ongoing in places that are neither of their homeland nor hostland. Epidemics arising from specific African and South American countries, for instance, have produced nativist backlash in the U.S. society against entire immigrant communities, regardless of their point of origin. Again, Muslim and “Muslim-looking” immigrants post-9/11 provide a particularly illustrative example especially in light of the unfolding Trump presidency and the spread of Islamist terrorism around the world. For example, although the post-9/11 U.S. surveillance and security atmosphere, which has heightened recently because of ISIS, is in response to conflicts stemming from the Middle East, it nonetheless constrains the lives of immigrants from not just that part of the world but also of those from others, such as South Asia. While immigrants like Vasudev Patel, Waqar Hasan, Rais Bhuiyan, Srinivas Kuchibhotla, and Alok Madasani—all South Asians fatally attacked over the years for being misidentified as Arabs and Middle Easterners—stand as

particularly stark examples, even on an everyday basis, South Asian immigrants find themselves having to strategically navigate their interactions to avoid being categorized into racialized “Muslim” stereotypes. Conversely, many South Asian Muslim immigrants, in their religious-political *self*-identification, are oriented towards various places in the Middle East, which is arguably the heartland of the Islamic world. I have called these places that are beyond the sending and receiving countries but are nonetheless salient to the immigrants’ sense of self “elsewhere.”

In the preceding five chapters, I analyzed how different “elsewhere” places interact with immigrants’ homeland and hostland to shape not just how the immigrants view themselves but also how they are viewed by others. I have done so using the case of South Asian Muslim Americans and data derived from in-depth interviews, participant observation, and content analysis of the immigrants’ social media activities, Muslim-related news in major national news outlets, and Muslim American community newsletters and organizational documents. In chapter 2, I introduced a new, more comprehensive analytical framework, which I call the multicentered relational framework, which can encompass not just the sending and receiving countries but also “elsewhere.” In so doing, I located immigrants in a dynamic, global context in which the homeland, hostland, and the ways in which immigrants and natives view themselves and each other are revealed to often be shaped by geopolitics “elsewhere.”

Using the multicentered relational framework, chapter 3 showed how the South Asian homelands have historic and ongoing ties with the “elsewhere” Middle East and Europe, the effects of which color the immigrants’ worldviews and national identities. Moreover, these homeland-“elsewhere” interactions not only shape the boundary-work within and between the three South Asian immigrant groups, but also how they are viewed by the U.S. society at large, especially in light of Islamist terrorist attacks. Chapter 4 showed how global politics and discourses about Muslims shape the immigrants’ everyday interactions in the hostland, particularly with regard to how they

present themselves as “good” “moderate” Muslims, “*hijabis*,” and as “Muslim Americans.” I showed that at the individual level some strategies deployed in order to appear “moderate” often involve avoiding politics in public for creating distance from one’s “Muslim-ness.” In contrast, at the organizational level, while Muslim leaders also emphasize a “moderate” Muslim identity, they do so to create a specific “Muslim American” identity that would enable Muslims to advocate for their co-religionists both at home and abroad through active engagement in mainstream U.S. politics.

Chapter 5 continued this story but in a global setting. I showed how many South Asian Muslim Americans are politically oriented towards different places in the Middle East, and how they engage with Muslim-related politics in those “elsewhere” places by participating in American politics. But chapter 6 showed that how the participants self-identify with the Middle East matter little in how they are identified by the larger host society. Rather, it is the Muslim-related conflicts in “elsewhere” Europe that produce anti-Muslim backlash in the U.S. society. I argue this reaction to the backlash results from a number of hostland and global factors, such as the prevailing public imaginary of “the West” and “the Muslim world,” cultural and geographical proximity of the “elsewhere” place to the hostland, and unequal distribution of power across different regions of the world.

But is the multicentered relational framework generalizable? “Elsewhere” is not always salient to the immigrants’ identities—its salience is based on larger sociopolitical contexts including the presence of exogenous shocks, homeland-hostland relations, and the collective position of a particular immigrant group in the global and hostland social hierarchies. But, thus far, this dissertation is the only study I know to have explored “elsewhere” effects on immigrant identity formation. Future research projects would need to test the scope and limitations of this framework across other immigrant groups and nation-state contexts. For one thing, the concept of “elsewhere”

may prove useful for analyzing Muslim immigrants' identity and community building in other Western countries.

For example, studies conducted by Canadian sociologists showed that South Asian Muslim immigrants had experienced Islamophobia in their local communities in response to 9/11 in the United States (Jamil and Rousseau 2012). Moreover, in recent years, during 2012-2015, anti-Muslim hate crimes more than tripled in Canada—a rise that mirrors the increase of Islamophobic hate crimes in the U.S. around the same time (Statistics Canada 2017). These findings suggest that contexts emanating from “elsewhere”—in this case the United States—shapes immigrant identities in Canada as well. However, despite both being neighbors in the West, the United States and Canada have wide differences in immigrant integration, Muslim incorporation, racial dynamics, and sociopolitics that can shape how they respond to global geopolitics. For example, although both countries are responding to the same global crisis—the Syrian refugee crisis—they are doing so in diverging ways. Whereas the United States is enacting a “Muslim ban,” Canada is seemingly embracing Syrian refugees. Just how these diverging reactions to the same global conflict shape the identity formation of the same immigrant group—South Asian Muslims—in two different nation-state contexts would need to be addressed in future research.

A possible limitation of the multicentered relational framework—but one that is also a reflection of the existing global hierarchy among different parts of the world—is that the framework may be useful for analyzing immigrant identities in Western societies, but not necessarily in other societies. As the developed, geopolitically powerful, core nations of the world, people from different corners of the globe pay attention to what is going on in these countries. Muslims from all over the world, for instance, pay attention to how Muslims are treated in Western societies (Gallup n.d.). However, as this dissertation has shown, ongoing developments within the non-Western developing nations tend to matter little to the general Western public, unless exogenous shocks in those far-off

places affect the global political order or produce domino effects in their own societies. In short, whereas the United States and European countries are “elsewhere” centers to many, far away peripheral places like Nigeria and Myanmar arguably matter to relatively few.

Again, one could argue that whereas the Middle East, as the religious and political center of a seemingly unified “Muslim world,” is an “elsewhere” for the South Asian Muslim Americans, Arab and Middle Eastern Muslims would care little about their co-religionists in South Asia. Indeed, the absence of panethnic identity formations among Muslim immigrants in the United States has long puzzled scholars of panethnicity (Bozorgmehr, Ong and Tosh 2016). However, as this dissertation has shown, there appears to be some forms of panethnic coalitions among South Asians and Middle Easterners based on “elsewhere” politics in places like Palestine and Turkey. Whether these coalitions reciprocate support for Muslim-related issues in South Asia would need to be explored. This dissertation also introduces new questions about immigrant and Muslim identification. For instance, the concept of “elsewhere” may not travel to non-immigrant Muslim groups such as Black Muslims for whom the racialized religious experience has been largely bound within the U.S. context. In other words, “elsewhere” could be particularly as immigrant phenomenon.

Nonetheless, the multicentered relational framework allows one to trace the different ways in which global politics in and between multiple varied places becomes salient to immigrants’ identity-making processes in the hostland. Immigrants embody the interconnectedness of societies through their various ties to places across the globe. Scholars of transnationalism have particularly argued that immigrants—also conceptualized as “transnational migrants” (Levitt 2004) and “transmigrants” (Glick-Schiller, Basch, and Blanc 1995: 48)—build and maintain multiple networks of connection to their country of origin while simultaneously settling in a new country (Glick-Schiller and Fouron 2001). Peggy Levitt goes further, saying that, “studies of the South Asian experience in the United States cannot look only at the immigrant experience in America. The

American experience is also a product of what goes on in India, the United Kingdom, South Africa, and other countries where South Asian immigrants live” (2004: n.d.).

Yet, as I have shown, South Asian immigrants are also connected to places and contexts that are not part of the South Asian diaspora. Rather, reflecting the geopolitical interplay of states at the global level, immigrants are connected to places that extend beyond the borders of societies of origin and reception, or “elsewhere.” The South Asian immigrants in this study do not necessarily think of “elsewhere” places in Europe and the Middle East as their “homes.” Nor do they feel any particular sense of diasporic connection to these places. Nonetheless, these societies are salient in the ways in which South Asians both self-identify and are identified by others in the hostland as Muslims. Moreover, the participants’ sense of solidarity with their co-religionists from other ethnic/national backgrounds sometimes gains priority over their membership to their co-ethnics back home and abroad. Yet, despite this sense of a unified global Muslim community, Muslims from all places do not attract the same level of solidarity from the participants. Where these Muslims are located, the geopolitical relationship of that place with the hostland, and relevant homeland orientations together determine the level of salience of that “elsewhere” place in the immigrants’ identity formation.

Thus, by breaking away from a dyadic homeland-hostland paradigm and introducing a new “multicentered relational framework,” this article highlights the truly trans-national aspect of these “transmigrants” (Glick-Schiller, Basch, and Blanc 1995: 48) while simultaneously considering the limitations imposed on transnational social fields by nation-state borders—it is because the South Asian Muslim immigrants are located within the United States and are thus subject to the sociopolitical dynamics within its territories that various places around the world become relevant to their identification processes.

APPENDIX

This dissertation is a multi-sited qualitative research project, which is based on observations on first, 1.5, and second generation South Asian Muslim immigrants from a Bangladeshi ethnic enclave, a Bangla language school, a homeland charity organization, South Asian cultural student associations, college campuses, participants' homes, dorm rooms, and other hang-out places. The table and site descriptions in this appendix chapter aim to give an overview of the various settings in which I conducted interviews, interacted with South Asian Muslim Americans at length, and conducted participant observation.

List of Participants and Description

The following table lists, though not exhaustively, participants who I formally interviewed and/or with whom I had repeated contact and extended informal conversations relevant to this research.

Figure 8.1: List and Brief Description of the Participants

Name	Gender	Nationality	Generation	Occupation during fieldwork	Neighborhood from	Organizations	Fieldwork Location
Zinat	F	Bangladeshi	1.5	College Student	Hawthorne	MSA, BSA	Dorms
Jenny	M	Bangladeshi	1.5	Graduate Student	North Hollywood		Facebook/ Little Bangladesh
Asma	F	Bangladeshi	1.5	Public Service Employee	Simi Valley		Simi Valley
Daliah	F	Bangladeshi	2	College Student; Engineer	Santa Clarita	MSA, BSA, ASA, PRO*	Campus/ Dorms/ Other
Sifat	F	Pakistani	2	College Graduate; Unemployed	Torrance	MSA, PSA	Skype
Naser	M	Pakistani	1	College Student; Accountant	Campus Dorms	PSA	Campus
Alisha	F	Pakistani	1.5	Public Health Employee	Irvine; Arizona	MSA, PRO*	Skype
Atif	M	Pakistani	1	College Student	Westwood	PSA,	Campus

Bushra	F	Pakistani	2	College Student; Marketing Consultant	Anaheim	PSA, MSA	Campus
Alam	M	Pakistani	1	College Student	Westwood	MSA, PSA	Campus
Arifa	F	Pakistani	1.5	College Student; Graduate; Unemployed	Granada Hills	MSA, PSA, PRO*	Campus/ Other
Farhana	F	Bangladeshi	1.5	College Student	Ontario	BSA, ISA	Campus/ Dorms/ Other
Liana	F	Bangladeshi	1.5	College Student	Torrance	MSA	Campus
Umaila	F	Bangladeshi	1	Graduate Student	Culver City		Campus
Farida	F	Bangladeshi	1	Mother	Redondo Beach		Bangla School/ Other
Raima	F	Bangladeshi	1	College Student; Pharmacy Student	San Diego	MSA, BSA, PSA	Campus/ Dorms/ Other
Shopna	F	Bangladeshi	1.5	College Student; Graduate Student	Torrance	MSA, BSA	Campus/ Dorms/ Other
Hamid	M	Indian	2	College Graduate; Clinical Researcher	Fresno	MSA, ISA	Campus
Ajay	M	Indian	2	Fire Fighter	Irvine; Arizona	MSA	Skype
Ayesha	F	Pakistani	2	Graduate Student	Torrance	College Newspaper	Skype
Anwar	M	Pakistani	1.5	College Graduate; High School Teacher	Torrance		Campus/ Other
Wasim	M	Bangladeshi	1	College Student; Students Programs Coordinator	Westwood	BSA	Campus/ Other
Hasnat	M	Bangladeshi	1	Fast food Restaurant Owner	Simi Valley		Little Bangladesh
Taher	M	Bangladeshi	1	Gas Station Worker	Little Bangladesh		Little Bangladesh

Saleh	M	Pakistani	2	College Graduate; Medical Student	Santa Clarita	MSA	Campus
Tabassum	F	Pakistani	1.5	College Graduate; Environmental Project Outreach Manager	Orange County	MSA, PSA	Other
Lamia	F	Bangladeshi	1.5	College Graduate; High School Teacher	Glendora		Campus
Rashed	M	Pakistani	1	Freelance Filmmaker	San Francisco Bay Area	PSA, Film Society	Skype
Nazia	F	Indian	1	College Student	La Crescenta	Muslim News Magazine	Campus
Tahira	F	Bangladeshi	1.5	College Student	San Francisco Bay Area	BSA	Campus/ Dorms/ Other
Amir	M	Pakistani	2	College Graduate; Medical Student	Santa Clarita	MSA, PSA	Campus
Faizah	F	Bangladeshi	2	College Student; Graduate Student	Walnut	MSA, BSA	Campus/ Dorms/ Other
Rahila	F	Bangladeshi	1	Mother	Little Bangladesh		Little Bangladesh
Dina	F	Bangladeshi	1.5	College Student	Hawthorne	MSA, BSA	Campus
Shehnaz	F	Pakistani	1	Non-Profit Organization Founder/ Director	Culver City		Culver City
Hasna	F	Bangladeshi	1	Unemployed	Torrance		Torrance
Haleema	F	Bangladeshi	1	Unemployed	Torrance		Torrance
Jahan	F	Bangladeshi	2	College Student; Graduate Student	Walnut	BSA	Campus/ Dorms/ Other
Rahim	M	Bangladeshi	1	Retired; Unemployed	Little Bangladesh		Little Bangladesh
Afroza	F	Pakistani	2	College Student; Dentistry Student	Rancho Cucamonga	PSA, MSA	Campus

Nilufer	F	Indian	2	College Student; Medical Assistant	Santa Clarita	Student Govt.*, PRO*	Campus
Taslima	F	Bangladeshi	2	College Student; Drugstore Pharmacy Assistant	North Hollywood	BSA, PSA	Campus/ Dorms/ Other
Yunus	M	Bangladeshi	1.5	College Student	Westwood; Florida	Student Govt.*, BSA, MSA	Campus/ Other
Tasneem	F	Pakistani Indian	2	Journalist	Fresno		Skype
Ahmed	M	Pakistani	1	Fast food Restaurant Owner	Torrance		Skype
Nargis	F	Pakistani	2	Graduate Student	Riverside	PRO*	Skype
Hashem	M	Bangladeshi	2	College Student	Granada Hills	BSA	Campus/ Other
Soraya	F	Pakistani	1.5	Elementary School Teacher	Culver City; Arizona		Skype
Beena	F	Bangladeshi	2	Graduate Student	Koreatown/ Little Bangladesh		Campus
Nabila	F	Bangladeshi	1.5	College Graduate	Simi Valley		Simi Valley
Sabina	F	Bangladeshi	1	Mother	Simi Valley		Simi Valley
Ria	F	Bangladeshi	2	College Student; Graduate Student	Torrance	BSA	Campus/ Other
Aziz	M	Bangladeshi	1	Real Estate Agent	Torrance		Torrance
Sumaiya	F	Pakistani	2	Graduate Student	Palos Verdes		Campus
Kader	M	Bangladeshi	1	College Student	Little Bangladesh	BSA	Campus
Tasmia	F	Pakistani	1	Interfaith Coordinator	Culver City		Culver City
Zabina	F	Pakistani	2	Development Manager at an Education Non Profit	Culver City		Skype
Nusrat	F	Indian	2	Public Health Employee	San Diego	MSA	Skype
Salman	Male	Bangladeshi	1	Engineer	Koreatown/ Little Bangladesh		Bangla School
Zara	F	Bangladeshi	1	Mother	Little Bangladesh		Little Bangladesh
Tauqir	Male	Pakistani	1	Accountant	Westwood		Campus

Nazma	F	Bangladeshi	1	Statistical Analyst	Woodland Hills		Bangla School/ Charity Org./ Other
Azhar	Male	Bangladeshi	1	Engineer	Cerritos		Bangla School/ Charity Org.
Noor	F	Bangladeshi	2	College Graduate; Unemployed	Torrance		Westwood/ Other

In the above table, an asterisk (*) indicates political organizations either in terms of student government or human rights/social justice groups. The column “fieldwork location” refers to the sites where I had the most contact with the participants. In cases of formal interviews, I asked the interviewees to select the location. “Other” indicates locations beyond college campus, such as participants’ homes, restaurants, and shopping malls. The abbreviations refer to: male (M); female (F); Muslim Students Association (MSA); Pakistani Students Association (PSA); Bangladeshi Students Association (BSA), Indian Students Association (ISA); Armenian Students Association (ASA); and Palestinian Rights Organization (PRO).

Figure 8.2: Summary of Participants’ On and Off Campus Presence Based on Immigrant Generation

Immigrant Generation	Present On-Campus	Present Off-Campus
1 st	9	20
1.5	11	13
2 nd	14	14

The above table summarizes the data in Figure 8.1 with regard to the presence of first, 1.5, and second-generation participants’ presence on and of campus. There is some overlap between several participants’ on and off campus presence as I have interacted with them in multiple fieldsites. Overall, the participants reflected the selectivity of South Asians in the United States as a relatively recent immigrant group with high levels of formal education.

Little Bangladesh—First Generation Immigrants’ Self-Identification with “Elsewhere”

Located in what is popularly called the heart of Koreatown in Los Angeles, Little Bangladesh is a small, mostly residential, neighborhood with only around twenty thousand Bangladeshi residents and fewer than ten Bangladeshi owned businesses. Although called Little Bangladesh, there are more Korean and Mexican businesses than Bangladeshi. Nonetheless, this area has been officially recognized almost ten years as the physical space for the Bangladeshi community in Los Angeles. The Bangladeshi immigrant residents here are working class—most of them Muslim. On Fridays, Bangladeshi Muslim men congregate in a small room alongside a Bangladeshi grocery store to offer prayers in unison. Given the very limited space, women are not allowed. However, just on the other side of the street is a prominent Islamic center where Muslims from diverse ethnic backgrounds congregate for prayers. Very early morning on *Eid* days, the men—at least the ones who can afford or manage to take the day off from work, which for some is at gas stations and liquor stores—dress up in their traditional *kurta* suits or *payjama-panjabi*, and the women in colorful (often new) saris, with the drapes (called *anchol* in Bangla) covering their hair, to go to the Islamic Center before coming home for an elaborate *Eid* breakfast with families and friends. And, on the nights before *Eid*, which is usually scheduled according to the Saudi Lunar calendar, there is usually a fair to celebrate *chaand raat* (night of the moon) where makeshift stalls selling *saris*, *salwar kamiz*, *kurta*, henna designs, *deshi* (the Bangla word for “Desi”) snacks, and jewelry crop up on the grounds of a nearby community center. There are also dance and music performances by Bangladeshi residents in the area.

March or April usually marks another occasion for celebration for the residents of this enclave. To commemorate Bangladesh’s independence from Pakistan back in 1971, every year, the Bangladesh Day Parade takes place in which the Los Angeles Bangladeshi organizations pay the city to block off the streets for the parade to march through the neighborhood. People wear traditional clothes in red and green—the colors of the Bangladesh flag. And, Bangladeshi patriotic songs are played loudly through speakers. The participants of the parade carry their organizational banners,

with the names often written in both English and Bangla. Many carry tiny Bangladeshi flags—sometimes American flags as well—as the whole neighborhood seems to transform into a space for celebrating Bangladeshi-ness. Many of the non-Bangladeshis seem to find the parade amusing too, with employees from the Mexican and Korean shops along the sidewalks coming out to watch the parade. There is also an award ceremony at the end of the parade recognizing the organizers. The Los Angeles city mayor Eric Garcetti usually comes to give a brief greeting. And almost always, there is a long line of people, many of who are board members of the organizations, who want to take a picture with him.

Figure 8.3: Bangladesh Day Parade (Bufla 2012)



My visits to Little Bangladesh usually took place on the mundane, regular days when I either went to pay house calls to a few families I knew in the neighborhood or to have lunch at a *deshi*

grocery store/ restaurant. The front of the restaurant looks a little run down with litter strewn here and there on the pavement and on the small parking area in front of the store. As soon as I would walk in, I would face the check out counter, which is laden with chutneys and fruits for sale. On the left of the counter is a hot plate bar with different Bangladeshi curries lined up. On the right is a glass showcase with different Bangladeshi sweets, such as *doi* (yogurt), *chom chom*, *golap jaam*, *rosbogolla*, and *shondesb*. The yogurt, I have been told are both made here at the store and shipped in from New York, like some of the other dessert items. The storeowner—a balding, middle aged man who greets customers with a nod asking, “*bhalo asen?*” (Are you good?)—has a stack of Styrofoam boxes behind the counter. I would point out the items I want and he would pile them on into the box. I would then walk over the right side of the store, which has six booths, three on each side and 2-3 tables in the middle for diners. A TV, which almost always plays a Bangladeshi channel, is placed high up on the back wall. I usually sat at the very back of the room so that I would have full vision of the place. In front me, past the booths is the grocery store with isles of Bangladeshi and Indian products.

As a young woman by myself, my presence at the restaurant always seemed to invite curious looks and questions from the diners. The questions I usually received are if I lived in the area, what my father’s profession is, where my home is in Bangladesh where I live in Los Angeles, and for how long I have lived in the United States. Most of the diners were usually men. In fact, I could probably count on one hand the times I have seen women sit and dine by themselves at the grocery store. The women diners were almost always accompanied by their husbands, although a few times I have seen women from the enclave come in to do some quick grocery shopping and then promptly leave. It was by and large a male—and Muslim—space. The store has a big sign on the wall saying “Halal Meat” in English, with a smaller sign in Bangla informing that the store takes orders for meat shares for *Eid* celebrations. The customers and staff are co-ethnics—Bangladeshi Muslim. Usually women who come in for grocery shopping or dining with their families wear a *hijab*, a *burkha*, or a shawl

covering their hair, indicating their Islamic belief. In my several visits to the restaurant, I only once saw a Hindu couple—identifiable as Hindu from the vermilion on the wife’s hair – enter the store. The couple did not dine, but left after purchasing their groceries. By contrast, it was easy to tell when customers in the dining area were Muslim (as in most cases) because of the frequent references to Islam in their conversations with one another. For example, customers and the storeowner usually exchanged *salaam* upon entering the store. Even casual day-to-day interactions had Islamic connotations. For example, when the storeowner asked his helper to carry a hot tray to the kitchen he jokingly said, “If you are a true Muslim, you have no fear! You will not burn!” implying that Allah will protect him.

The apartments of the families I visited were cramped, usually studio-sized, with a sliver of a balcony that served as a kind of storeroom. From one of the balconies, I could see the white Hollywood sign far across the distance. My interactions in these spaces were mostly with the women, usually keeping them company in the kitchen, which always smelled of oil and spices, with the men (if they were present) either watching TV in the small living area or taking an afternoon nap. My conversations with the women, usually involved community gossip—such as the young wife of a much older Bangladeshi man who ran away with a younger Bangladeshi taxi driver, frustrations about the monotony of daily life, the difficulties of raising children, news of other aunties who have gone to stay at a hotel with their husbands for a weekend, and much to my discomfort, concerns about my unmarried relationship status and advice on how to quickly change that. I almost never heard the women talk about politics either in the U.S. context or back home in Bangladesh. The few times I have heard them talk about sociopolitical problems was once when Zara, a young Bangladeshi mother, told me about her husband who works at a grocery/liquor store having problems with a black customer (who she believes was a gang member) who called him a terrorist. In another instance, Zara and another older woman who had come to visit her while I was

there talk about the difficulty Zara's young nephew in Bangladesh was having about being admitted to a good school. According to them, one would need either wealth or strong connections to get into good schools now in Bangladesh.

Most of the Bangladeshis I interacted with in Little Bangladesh are first generation immigrants who were not fluent in English, and do not have U.S. education, although I had met a *deshi* restaurant worker—a quiet and dignified middle aged man—who proudly told me that his daughter is attending Brown upon learning I was a doctoral student at UCLA. With regard to Bangla, most of the people I met in the enclave spoke in nonstandard dialects. During introductions, people, such as the diners at the store, would hear my dialect and ask if I was from Dhaka (Bangladesh's capital).

Overall, this predominantly first generation and working class setting set a contrast to the more U.S.-educated and financially well-off sites I visited during fieldwork, such as neighborhoods in West Los Angeles, and the middle class suburbs in Torrance and Culver City. This was particularly so when compared to the college campuses, which were much more politicized and in tune with the overall sociopolitical climate during 2015-2016. For instance, whereas they were candle-lit vigils and discussion forums in reaction to the ISIS attacks in Paris and San Bernardino, I did not sense the same level of insecurity and urgency among my acquaintances within the enclave. For instance, the phone conversations I had with Zara during fieldwork or even my interview with Rahila, an elderly woman who lived with her retired husband and adult son in the enclave suggested that life for them went on as usual. This could be because unlike the young, U.S.-educated, participants who were attending or had already graduated from college, Zara and Rahila did not have to venture out of the enclave and become exposed to potentially hostile situations with non-Muslims.

This is not to say, however, that the first generation participants living within ethnic enclaves do not have “elsewhere” affinities. For example, although spiritual or political orientations to “elsewhere” almost never came up as a topic of discussion among the participants in Little Bangladesh, they nonetheless emerged in spontaneous interactions that show how despite the lack of U.S. education and campus exposure, the Middle East is also salient for these first generation working class immigrants. In a previous ethnographic study on Little Bangladesh (Shams 2017a), I found that although Bangladeshi generally implies Muslim, the category of Bangladeshi Muslim implies having less religious knowledge and authority than Muslims from Saudi Arabia. Throughout my fieldwork for that study, interactions with Bangladeshi Muslims revealed an underlying sense of religious hierarchy based on nationality within the “Muslim” identity category wherein Bangladeshis placed Arab Muslims at a higher rank.

A conversation I had with Nazma, a woman actively involved in the Bangladeshi community for almost three decades, while shopping for a *salwar kamiz* in Artesia gave me more insight into this nationality-based religious hierarchy. I had come to know Nazma from a Bangla language school to which I volunteered as a teacher on weekends. An end-of-the-year celebration was coming up in a few weeks at the school, and everyone was asked to wear traditional clothes, meaning *shari* (Bangla word for *sari*) or *salwar kamiz* for the women and *payjama panjabi* for the men. I had informed Nazma that I did not have any *salwar kamiz* to wear, at least not that still fit as I had brought the ones I had with me from Bangladesh many years ago. Nazma, who had a no-nonsense but motherly personality, had offered to drive me to Artesia to find me a *salwar kamiz*. Nazma’s younger high-school aged daughter had accompanied us because she had to have her blouse for her *sari* fitted by a *desi* tailor. Artesia was the location of Little India, which is a busy, vibrant, commercial neighborhood with Indian clothing stores, salons, traditional snack and dessert shops, and grocery stores. This is the place that South Asians from LA County came to do their traditional shopping,

from wedding dresses to new *Eid* outfits. I had also visited a traditional snack and dessert shop here with college students from the campus associations when they needed to order traditional clothes for a cultural event. However, I most of the clothing there to be expensive, especially when compared to the material and the price range from back in the homelands. For instance, the *salwar kameez* that I bought during my trip with Nazma (a simple dress in green and gold) cost over \$100. When Nazma had seen my alarmed expression, she laughed and said that the price was reasonable and on the cheaper end here. As Nazma was driving us from Artesia, she asked me how my study was going. As I was describing to her some of my observations in Little Bangladesh—a neighborhood she was also very familiar with—I asked her why most Bangladeshis tend to celebrate Islamic occasions mostly amongst themselves. She replied, “Because they [Bangladeshi men] can’t boss around in the Muslim community! There are Muslims from Arab countries—really learned Muslims. Who among them would listen to a Bangladeshi *Bhai*?” The word *bhai* means brother in Bangla, but in this context, it carried belittling connotations. Similarly, despite the *Eid* dates in Bangladesh and America being different from Saudi Arab, as I mentioned briefly earlier, many of the Bangladeshi immigrants celebrated *Eid* on the day the Saudis observed it. *Eid* is the main religious festival for Muslims scheduled based on new moon sightings supervised by religious authorities in each country. However, these Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants viewed the Saudi lunar calendar to be the most “authentic.”

Another example from that study shows how the “elsewhere” Middle East is also salient in Little Bangladesh’s first generation immigrants’ self-identification as “Muslims.” I was waiting one day for my order at the *deshi* restaurant when a family of seven entered. The family looked religious. The father had a long beard and wore clothes traditional for Muslim men. The mother wore a *burkha*. Even though the restaurant was almost empty and had several booths unoccupied, the mother went all the way to the end of the store and sat at the last booth with her back to the

entrance, completely hidden from view. The three sons and two daughters sat with her. The father sat on the next booth all by himself. Although there was plenty of room for people to sit in his booth, one of the sons borrowed an extra chair from another table to join the mother. The older daughter sat with her, facing the back wall, and the youngest daughter sat at the corner with only her head showing. Both daughters wore *burkha*. The three sons were wearing the same kind of clothes as the father who had an air of authority—he was clearly the head of the family. He placed orders for the whole family and had to pass by me several times to get napkins and ketchup. I noticed he never looked at me directly. When he did look at me to exchange pleasantries, he looked at my right arm.

I had to go check on my food and by the time I came back, I saw that the father was having a lively conversation in a heavily accented English with a young man who was having lunch by himself on the other side of the restaurant. I understood from their conversation that the young man was from Saudi Arabia. He too spoke with a heavy accent. Based on what I overheard from their conversation, the young man has been in the America for four months and was then attending a university in California. After complimenting the young man's English, the father told him that his oldest son was a Quran Hafiz (one who has memorized the Quran). He then turned towards his son telling him to go sit next to the young man. "He is from Medina! Allah has truly graced us," the father told his son in Bangla to his son. The father notably did not ask whether the young man was religious, but upon hearing that the young man was from Medina, the father assumed the man was an Arab Muslim whom he and his family were "graced" by Allah to have met. The son, looking excited, did as told. The father told the young Arab to ask his son to recite his favorite verses from the Quran. The Arab asked the boy to recite anything. The boy started to recite the Quranic verses loudly. Everyone in the restaurant stopped talking and turned to listen. They were all smiling. After the boy was done, the Arab turned to look at the father and said "*MashaAllah*." One of the customers in the restaurant exclaimed "Thank you!" The Bangladeshi boy smiled widely and even

wider when the young Arab man told him that he could go to a famous Medina school for higher Islamic studies. The boy replied that he had heard about this school and that he wanted to go there to study.

The Role of Campus Organizations in Shaping South Asian Youth's "Muslim" Identity

When I began fieldwork on the effects of "elsewhere" on immigrant identities, campus organizations promised both the opportunity to meet South Asian Muslims from diverse locations in California as well as a methodological trap of collecting data from individuals who were arguably predisposed to "elsewhere" affinities. In order to avoid sampling from the dependent variable and at the same time understand when and how religion and politics come up in these young immigrants' lives, I made the strategic decision to collect data exclusively from South Asian organizations that were explicitly founded upon secular, cultural platforms, namely the Bangladeshi Students Association, the Pakistani Students Association, and the Indian Students' Association. Conversely, I strategically did not participate or recruit participants from political and religious organizations, namely the Muslim Students Association, and the Palestinian Rights Organization.

The main aim of the cultural organizations, as declared by their mission statement, is to increase awareness of their respective national group's culture and history on campus through events. None of the organizations addressed "elsewhere" issues, such as the Palestinian struggle at these events. The organizations were run by a group of 5-6 board members who applied and were then selected through an interviewing process. The board members met once a week on campus to organize cultural events, which to some extent were funded by the campus community office and the rest by the students' fundraising bake sales. In a few instances, the organizations collected donations from the larger *desi* community in Los Angeles for homeland-oriented charities. My entrée into these associations, particularly with regard to the Bangladeshi student organization, was to some extent a stroke of good fortune. The Bangladeshi association needed a cultural adviser, and none of

the founding board members, who were mostly 1.5 and second generations, felt they were well informed about Bangladesh's history, they invited me to fill that role. In this advisory capacity, I was eventually able to branch out and recruit participants from the other South Asian cultural associations as well.

After I entered into my selected organizations, I learned that campus organizations comprise a complex network or reciprocity with students have overlapping—and sometimes what I initially thought conflicting—memberships. For instance, some students equally participated in both Pakistani and Bangladeshi organizations despite being very vocal about the need for the second generation to learn about the 1971 Bangladesh-Pakistan war. I later learned that while these dual memberships reflect an emerging panethnic Desi identity, they also served to keep up the membership count for the respective organizations. In other words, there is an unspoken understanding that if a member of an association helps out by attending, supporting, or organizing another association's activity, that organization's members will reciprocate by doing the same. However, sometimes this expectation of reciprocity was not met, leading to tensions among board members from different associations.

Moreover, several members of the cultural organizations were also members of the Muslim students association, which supported and often collaborated with the Palestinian rights organization. A few of the participants in this study were active in both these religious- and political-oriented associations as well as in some of the cultural organizations. These overlapping memberships became particularly important during student government elections when the overall campus environment grew explicitly polarized, especially with regard to candidates' stances towards boycotting Israel. In these situations, the participants who had overlapping memberships in the Palestinian rights organizations informed the board members of the different candidates positions. I discovered that these South Asian organizations, especially the Pakistani and Bangladeshi

associations, overwhelmingly supported the boycott. This was particularly clear when candidates came to speak with board members and ask for their organizations' endorsement. One of the recurring questions asked by the president to these candidates was about their views on the boycott movement. However, other than the elections cycles, these cultural organizations did not collaborate with the Palestinian rights association, although some members went to the BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) town hall meetings on campus.

Nonetheless, it was clear that the college environment presented a much more exposed and explicitly politicized environment than Little Bangladesh. Whereas politics in the ethnic enclave was more geared towards the homeland (Shams 2017a), political awareness among the 1.5 and second generation was more oriented towards the United State and "elsewhere." As mentioned briefly in chapter 5, the younger participants' exposure to the Middle East, at least in terms of their political awareness, is shaped by the people they meet at college organizations, classrooms, parties, and dorms. However, this is not to say that these young South Asians' awareness towards the Middle East as a Muslim-related conflict zone or an area associated with their "Muslim" identity begins at these organizations. On the contrary, these young participants having grown up in a post-9/11 U.S. context where conflicts stemming from the Middle East tend to be associated with Muslims and Islamists terrorists, I found that some of them have experienced instances of being teased, bullied, or "othered" as "terrorists" by peers during their middle and high school years. Moreover, growing up, a few of the young Bangladeshi participants like Jahan, Arifa, and Daliah, have heard their parents sporadically comment on outbreaks of violence in Gaza. As such, although not politically aware, some of the young participants seemed to know of the Israel-Palestine conflict prior to attending college. However, their political orientation towards "elsewhere," seemed to become more intense and organized through their exposure to news of the Palestinian struggle at campus

organizations, in turn shaping the sense of self as “Muslims.” The following interview excerpt with Faizah highlights this point.

Me: What are some new items that are on your mind?

Faizah: Currently definitely the refugee crisis has been on my mind for a while. Also Facebook. Like people will share articles and I will read those and get a lot of insight on current events that I care about, that I have educated myself on. So refugee crisis...Palestine has always been, you know for a couple of years now I have always been following what's going on in Gaza.

Me: Why?

Faizah: When I first came to college. I actually didn't know too much about the Palestine humanitarian crisis. So what happened was I joined the MSA and one of the biggest things that the MSA cares about is that.

Me: Why did you join the MSA?

Faizah: I joined the MSA to network, to initially make a couple of friends and to go to social events. And also because I am Muslim and I identify as Muslim. So [I joined] to go to the Jummah, to go to their *Eid* prayers. I always like surrounding myself with a group of Muslims as well as my outside friends. Coz it's different when you have your non-Muslim friends. You are close to them and everything and that's fine. You hang out with them and everything but your Muslim friends are always the ones who you can relate to the most in my opinion—your Muslim friends, your Bangali friends. So I always like to have different friend groups and have one of at least my set group of Muslim friends as well. Also the MSA has a lot of mentorship programs. Once you make connections with the older kids at MSA, they are really really good about helping you get through classes, sharing their books with you, letting you borrow their iclickers and their lab manuals and lab coats. So it was really really nice to have a bunch of older friends through the MSA. Because it is much easier to meet older people through organizations like that. So yeah, when I came to college and joined the MSA, I started hearing about this issue called divestment, which was to divest from companies that contribute to, that we are currently invested in, that contribute to what's happening in Gaza right now. So I had no idea about what any of that was or what that meant. I honestly was pretty ignorant about what was happening in Gaza but by going to the divestment hearings because it's such a big deal and learning more and more about what it was and hearing people's personal anecdotes, Palestinians or Muslim people, people who cared in general, hearing their anecdotes about how what's happening in Gaza was so unacceptable and how we are all complicit in it by not acting on it or trying to stop it, I became very very guilty and so I started looking into it more and more. And then now its just something that I care a lot about.

In addition to the role of college organizations, the level of education also play a role in shaping South Asian American youth's “elsewhere” affinities. An excerpt from Sifat's interview

particularly sheds light to this point. To provide some context, I had previously asked Sifat (when not interviewing) if I could interview her uncle and father, as I wanted more presence of first generation Pakistani immigrants in my sample. She looked a bit uncomfortable but replied that she will ask if they would be willing. In her interview, however, she spoke about the patriarchal nature of her household, especially with regard to her uncle's views towards women and his belief that a Muslim man should be allowed to have four wives. I got the impression then that I would most likely not have access to interview her male relatives. As such, I instead asked Sifat about her family members' views of the Palestinian struggle—an issue she deeply cared about. Her response, as follows, shows not only variations in Muslim immigrants' reactions towards “elsewhere” based on level of education but also variations based on first and second generations.

- Me: When you are in not on campus, just a casual Pakistani setting, just older Pakistani men and women, a family gathering, hanging out, does the conflict in Gaza you just talked about come up in conversations?
- Sifat: These topics come up more in an educated setting I would say. If you are with a group of people who haven't been to school, who haven't been to college, their main arguments would be either something that they have personally experienced or something they learned as they grew up. I have been in both kinds of settings and when it's a setting with just a group of old people, just talking, sipping tea, its always that the Jews hate us and it sort of...the topic sort of begins and ends there. But when you go to a more educated setting, if you go to where people sort of our age Pakistani talking then they would go more into...they will bring up things that are happening in Palestine. They [the more educated individuals] will pull up things and show us look this is what—not Jews, they wouldn't say Jews—they would probably say this is what Israel is doing in Palestine. This is what's happening, this house was blown up, this person was shot for no reason. But you will definitely feel in that room the vibe that everyone is really anti-Israel and very pro-Palestine in any Pakistani Muslim household across the board, I would say 100% of them. Some might be a little more aggressive about it, some might not want to give a straight answer but majority believe that what's going on in Palestine is wrong. But unfortunately, 50-60% of them will say it just because its Muslims vs. Jews but the other 40% will give you a proper reasoning behind it. They will tell you this is happening here and here and here, and that is why I believe what I believe [pro-Palestine].

Sifat's candid response gave me a glimpse into first generation immigrants' political opinions towards Palestine—a topic they were very reluctant to discuss during recorded interviews. In fact,

this reluctance presented one of the prominent contrasts in the first and 1.5/second generation immigrants' reactions to "elsewhere" in my study. Whereas the younger generation was vocal about these issues—during interviews, at town hall meetings, and on social media—as “Muslims” and as “Americans,” their parents' generation not only were less willing to discuss these issues but forbade them to engage in these political activities and conversations. This is not to say, however, that they disagree with the young South Asians' viewpoint. On the contrary, as I discussed in chapter 5, both generations evaluate mainstream U.S. politicians based on their positions towards Palestine amongst other issues. Rather, the first generation seems to fear negative repercussions of engaging with this politically-charged issue. For example, both Arifa and Daliah's parents feared while they were active in the Palestinian rights organization in college that their names will be blacklisted, and that that would prevent them from getting jobs after graduation.

Moreover, the first generation overall was less active on Facebook than the younger 1.5 and second generations. This is particularly consequential given that social media trends and smartphone news apps are the main ways in which the young South Asian Muslims subscribed to news of “elsewhere” events, such as the ISIS terror attacks in Paris and outbreaks of violence in Gaza, and then engaged in the relevant discourses by reading posts and comments, sharing links, changing their profile pictures to slogans, and posting statuses with hashtags like #freepalestine and #divest. The Muslim students organizations and the Palestinian rights associations also advertised their events through social media. Furthermore, it is through social media that participants who deemed mainstream American news sources to be biased against Muslims sought out alternative news outlets like Al Jazeera, BBC, and Middle East Monitor. Instead of engaging with “elsewhere”-oriented political discourses, the few first generation participants who did have Facebook accounts, tended to post pictures of themselves and their families, such as their children's graduation, family vacations,

visits to their homeland, and old throwback pictures from their wedding, anniversaries, and university days.

Off-Campus Organizations

Bangla Language School

Located in a middle-class residential area in Santa Monica, the Bangla language school—a weekend language school run by a group of educated and financially well-off Bangali families—provided a glimpse into the off-campus organizations within the larger South Asian ethnic community in Los Angeles. Most of these families were Bangladeshi, the parents being first generation immigrants who had been living in the city for decades. Although most of them were Muslim, one family was Bangladeshi Hindu and another was an interracial family with the mother from West Bengal in India and the father from Poland. Only one of the mothers in the family wore a *hijab*, and so did her older daughter who was attending community college the first time I met them. However, the mother did not come to the school regularly. The women usually wore *salwar kameez* to come to the school; a few wore loose *kurtas* and trousers as well. The men did not wear traditional clothes unless it was an end-of-the-year celebration. The children wore jeans and t-shirts. Most of the children were young, the youngest ones going to kindergarten and the oldest ones to high school, preparing to go to college. From what I have been told by the parents, they were concerned that their children would not know how to speak Bangla and that they would become detached from the Bangali community as they head off to college and beyond, and thus set up this school more than ten years ago. At first, the “school” used to rotate among their houses, but a few years ago, they were able to register the school as a non-profit and rent the premises of an Arab language preschool for every other weekend. The Bangla language classes were about two hours long, with lunch on the playground afterwards. The families, most of whom lived in affluent neighborhoods spread across LA, drive over to this school, often offering to pick or drop me off.

For someone passing by the front of the school, the inside premises was difficult to see because of the ivy and plants that grew densely on the wired walls. It was even more difficult to figure out where the entrance was. On my first day, I had arrived at the school location an hour early, but was five minutes late because I could not locate the entrance into the school grounds. One of the families saw me (I was wearing a traditional short *kurta*) standing in front of the ivy-covered walls while getting out of their car, and asked in Bangla if I was the new teacher. When I replied I was, they took me to the entrance, for which we had to walk around the building, past a narrow ally (but wide enough for a car to squeeze through) to the very back where there was a small blue colored door. The father of the family had to crouch his head to go through the door. The first sight of the school premises that would greet someone entering through the gate is the playground with a few colorful slides and swings. At the back of the playground, towards the ivy-covered wall, were a long table and a few benches under a shade. On the left stood a one-story building that houses the classrooms. The Bangla school took place in one of these classrooms, which we had to set up and clean before exiting the premises. The walls of the classroom had colorful posters with Arabic alphabets and craftworks of the children who attended the preschool.

I had started coming to this weekend school as a volunteer Bangla teacher since 2012. By the time the school closed in early 2015, with several of the children graduating high school and going off to college, I had become familiar with these families and was able to branch out into other spaces to which they attended. For instance, most of the parents and children are linked to UCLA, with either them working as high-ranking staff members, or their children going or preparing to attend college there. As such, even beyond the Bangla school, these families were familiar faces even within the UCLA campus, with them coming to various cultural events set up by the student associations or going to the same *dawats* to which I was also invited.

Setting a contrast to the on-campus organizations run mostly by 1.5 and second generations, I rarely observed “elsewhere”-related issues come up at the language school. However, as the following set of fieldnotes will show, my presence at the school was limited because of my gender positionality. As mentioned both in the dissertation chapters and in these passages, politics is a topic that I found to usually come up among the men. However, the school was gender segregated—even if informally—in that the men talked amongst themselves outside on the playground, whereas the women were inside the classroom teaching the children. The only time during school hours that there was gender socializing was after class was over and the families sat together on the tables and benches by the playground to have lunch, which was catered on a rotating basis by the families. As such, I was unable to capture if politics concerning here, there or “elsewhere” ever came up spontaneously in the men’s conversations. However, this is not to say “elsewhere” places, such as those in the Middle East, never came up in my conversations with the women. The excerpts from a day at the Bangla language school below provide a glimpse into the kinds of interactions that occurred at this fieldsite.

Nazma called the “teachers and students” to “start the class.” It was almost 11.40. The women and the children went to the lunch area under the shade (the classroom lock was changed so we couldn’t get in. So the class was talking place in the playground today). As I followed them to the lunch area, I asked Shopna if she hangs out with the kids from the Bangla school outside of the school. She said no “because everyone is so busy.” As usual, the students were carefully assigned so that their teachers were not their own mothers. Today, I was assigned Monica. Some of the mothers were assigned two kids because the number of teachers was short that day. I looked around to see where the men were. And as usual, they were grouped together talking amongst themselves. Six of them were gathered near the swings in the middle of the playground. Karim and Mobarak’s dad was carrying Motiya [a two year old] and stood a little further away from the group. I sat at one of the picnic tables. A couple of dads were sitting on the bench at the other end but left when we all arrived for class.

By the time I was done teaching Monica for the day, I noticed that the other kids were still revising for the Bangla test scheduled for next class. I looked around to see what everyone else was doing. All the women were still teaching the kids except Nazma who was working on the school schedule on her iPad. The dads were still on the other side of the playground. But I noticed that they were not all grouped together like before. They were broken up into smaller groups of twos and threes.

Rumpa was setting up the dishes. There was a variety of Bangladeshi food made of vegetables and chicken. Irene was helping her set up the table. I was looking around to see what the men were doing and if anyone came to help. I noticed that although two men were at arms reach standing next to the lunch area talking to each other, yet they did not offer to help. I stood close to them and pretended to drink water from a cup with my back to them to hear what they were talking about. They were talking about their experiences in Singapore where they both worked as engineers. Based on their conversation, I gathered that they both faced problems with their visas while working there. I saw a couple of men talking at the other end of shade. I walked over there looking down on my phone. I sat on the bench closest to where they were standing. They were talking about an engineer they both know in Bangladesh. I found it strange that so far I have not heard the women talk about their professional lives even though several of them have their own professional careers. Their conversations always seemed to be about their children and their households.

I went over to where the food was in the lunch area. Irene and Rumpa were putting food on people's plates. The men did not sit down with the women and the children. But as I was putting food on my plate, Jamal and Ulaf [two of the fathers] asked me where I live. Ulaf asked me how I come to the Bangla School. I told them by bus. Ulaf said, "Oh you come by bus! Why do you go through so much trouble? We can pick you up and drop you off when we come. Of course it means my "*gin-ni*" [literal meaning in Bangla: someone who cooks; usually means housewife] will have to hurry up a bit!" I found it strange that he called Nazma [his wife] *ginni* because she was a statistical analyst. But I saw Nazma was close by that she heard our conversation. She didn't seem to mind.

I sat around the table with Jamila, Lara and Hamida. Jamila was telling the others that her daughter was applying to different colleges and fellowships. She was asking Hamida what colleges her kids had applied to. Jamila's daughter was interested in literature. "A soft subject," Jamila's said with an exasperated sigh. Jamila was worried that her daughter will not be able to do anything with a degree in literature after she graduates. She is pushing her daughter to study medicine or engineering. Jamila asked me what I was doing my PhD in. Upon learning that I was doing my PhD in sociology—which is considered another "soft subject"—Jamila said that I am "fine" because I am at the "top university in my field". "It's hard for us to be successful in those [liberal arts] fields but if my daughter can get into the best place in her field, I have no complaints...I want her to be successful, be Bangladeshi but at the same time be able to hang out with her American friends, be able to speak a little Bangla, be a little religious, dress modestly—I want everything for her," she laughed.

[Notes from much later that day. We were getting ready to leave. Nazma and Ulaf were dropping me off after Bangla school.] I got into the car. Nazma asked me how my classes were going. I told her they were good and that I was reading a book on third-world feminism. Nazma then said that she is not sure about using the word, "third-world." She said Western feminists look at women from "Eastern" cultures as oppressed and without rights. Nazma said, "Western world thinks that their women have no discrimination because they have so many rights. But, there is discrimination in every society-in different forms." Ulaf then said, "You can tell that there is no discrimination in Eastern cultures because the use of language is not

differentiated for men and women. There is no he/she in Bangla.” Nazma, however, immediately replied, “There are gender differences in Hindi and other languages.” Nazma said, “Of course there is discrimination in eastern cultures [against women]. Western feminists have a point. Women are forced to wear hijab. They are not allowed to go outside without their husband’s permission in Saudi Arab. These people who claim to carry the bastions of Islam want to control women in the name of Islam. [Turns her head and looks at me at the backseat.] Women are controlled for other reasons. For political reasons. Islam has nothing to do with this. This is what you have to say in your study.” I nodded. I observed that Ulaf did not speak for the rest of the ride. But, Nazma continued to talk about how she thinks that people are talking about honor killing in Islam. “Sikhs are honor killing too but why don’t they talk about the Sikhs?” She said that in Eastern cultures whenever a woman is attacked or raped at night, the first question one asks is what was the woman doing outside the house at night. “No one asks what the man was doing at night. It is an accepted fact that men can stay out at night. But women can’t. And, even the women have started to think like this,” Nazma said.

Homeland Charity Organization

Many of the families at the Bangla school were also involved in an exclusive homeland charity organization that collected donations to be sent to various development causes in Bangladeshi rural areas every year. The charity was run by first generation Bangladeshi immigrants. Every year, the organization arranged charity balls at a community center located in an affluent area in Rancho Cucamonga. Throughout the year, the organization periodically sends a newsletter outlining the causes it funded and the developments made back in Bangladesh. Jamal, one of the board members of the organization and father at the Bangla language school, said that the charity sends almost \$45,000 every year to Bangladeshi rural areas. According to Jamal, he and some other engineers in LA manage this organization. He said, “There are many NRBs [non-returning Bangladeshis] who contribute to this to help out the nation. Because no one [in Bangladesh] does anything, you know? So, someone has to start somewhere.” Membership to the organization and its annual balls was invitation-only. Board members send an invitation email. Jamal had emailed me mine. I had to pay \$45 for the ticket to the annual ball. But when I arrived at the ball, I learned at the counter in front of the entrance that I had to pay a donation of \$50 or upwards to enter the event.

Some of the members of the on-campus student associations also knew about this charity, and raised funds for it by selling Krispy Kreme donuts in the college dorms.

Notably, the organization rigorously screens potential projects to ensure that they do not have any connections to religious causes. This organization emphasizes secularism. For instance, according to one of the board member's presentation of the organization's history and mission at an invitation-only annual charity dinner back in 2012, the United States identifies the Bangladeshi immigrant community as Muslim. He had said in his presentation, "We Bangladeshis have to remember that this is a post 9/11 world and that we are Muslims," and that "Bangladesh is an Islamic country" (Shams 2017a, 720) As such, the board members explained how they vet the project to carefully trace where their donation money goes because they could be under surveillance as Muslims. Their fear and suspicion were not without cause given that Bangladesh had been one of the twenty-six Muslim-majority sending countries in the U.S. government's "special registration" program for ensuring national security after 9/11. These precautions taken by the homeland charity presented a contrast to both the South Asian ethnic community spaces in Little Bangladesh and the student organizations in that it actively strived to avoid association with any form of "Muslim-ness" in response to Muslim-related conflicts stemming from the "elsewhere" Middle East.

Dawats

One of the main ways I found Bangladeshi families to socialize, whether in Little Bangladesh or Culver City or Torrance, is through *dawats*, which is a Bangla word referring to the gathering of friends as their families at people's homes. *Dawats* are intimate affairs in the sense that it marks the host's willingness to include someone in their private personal lives, show them where they live, feed them their home-cooked *deshi* food, introduce them to their families, and exchange news and gossip about each other's lives. At the same time, *dawats* produce opportunities to establish connections and expand one's social network, make a good impression, cajole someone to find more in-depth news

about business affairs, and bring up discussions about sensitive topics (such as children's marriage prospects and matchmaking) in a delicate way. In these aims, *dawats* serve a similar purpose as they do back in the homeland. But for immigrants, many of who remain strangers in a strange land long after arriving in the hostland, these *dawats* provide an avenue to meet people from back home and create a support group to provide a break or escape from the pressures of work and the seemingly continuing process of settling in to the host society. This explains why *dawats* are predominantly a first generation affair, with the families, usually married couples with children, inviting guests from the same ethnic/national group.

However, once at a *dawat* in Culver City, a young interracial couple was invited. The husband was from Bangladesh, specifically Sylhet, and the wife was Caucasian and British. The husband knew the host, who was a graduate student with a young wife and newborn daughter. The couple was visiting Los Angeles from London that week, so the host had invited them over for lunch. However, I observed the flow of conversation—which was exclusively in Bangla—faltering after the couple came. The wife went over to sit with the women—most of whom were first generation immigrants and housewives residing in Little Bangladesh—and the husband with the men at the other end of the room. The women have been gossiping about recipes, recent trips to buy saris in Artesia, the latest instance of a hilarious conversation they had with a mutual friend, and an upcoming concert in Little Bangladesh showcasing a Bangladeshi musician who was being flown in for the event. However, when the British woman came to sit with the women, they grew silent. Although they were smiling politely, the air grew a little awkward, with them nudging each other and muttering in Bangla to talk to the wife. I got the sense that they did not know what to talk about and at the same time were feeling embarrassed to talk to the woman in their not-so-fluent English. Indeed, one of the women turned to me and said in Bangla, “*Tumi English e tak e kichhu jigasha korô*” [Ask her something in English.] I asked her where in London she lived, breaking the awkward silence.

Although the *dawat* in the previous example was for lunch, they usually take place for dinner during the weekend. There could be a special occasion for the *dawat*, such as *Eid*, the Bangla New Year, anniversary, birthday etc., or no reason at all other than socializing with friends. In most cases, however, both the host and the guests usually wear traditional clothes. While the *dawats* I attended have been all at Bangladeshi households, this tradition exists for Pakistani and Indian households as well. Moreover, based on my conversations with Pakistani and Indian immigrants, the format of the *dawat* in their respective ethnic groups tends to look similar. Indeed, although usually informal and relaxed, there is also a pattern of events with regard to how a *dawat* generally unfolds in a *deshi* household. The invitation is usually extended a week beforehand over the phone with a time, although a running joke within the South Asian community is that “*Desi* people run on *desi* time” (implying that they are late, and never on time). As such, it is expected that the guests would arrive about half an hour late (although, once when I had a *dawat* in my place, I had a family who came in almost 5 hours past the time I had mentioned). It is customary for the guests to take sweets or some food items for the host. Upon arrival, one would be greeted at the door by the host or his/her family member. Usually, it is polite to ask if one should leave their shoes at the doorstep. Once inside in the house, one would then hand over the sweets to the host or to his/her family members as one is asked to sit in the living room. In most cases, after the greetings and introductions are over, the guest is asked if they would like some soft drinks and snacks.

Dawats are also highly gender segregated with the men and women in the household having distinct sets of responsibilities and expectations, although these norms are unspoken and mostly taken for granted. For instance, if the guest were a woman, she would sit separately from the men, either at a distance in the same living room or in a separate room altogether with the other women in the household. The tasks of setting the menu, preparing the dishes, cleaning and decorating the house also are chores that the women, sometimes with the help of their children, are expected to do.

Sometimes the female guests join the wife in the kitchen to warm up the food, prepare some last minute side dishes or put on the garnishes. The men sometimes help with cleaning the dishes after the guests have left, but that is not the case in all *desi* households. Women, in most cases the wife, also decide when to ask the guests to come over to kitchen or the dining table for the food.

Approximately an hour after the guests have arrived and settled into a flow of conversation, the wife goes over to the men to tell them the food is ready. They then head over to the kitchen or dining area as do the female guests. However, after they have taken food on their plates, they go back to their segregated spaces to eat amongst their gender group. This gender segregation introduced a significant obstacle during my fieldwork as I had limited to no access to the men's conversations. Once, at a Bangladeshi *dawat* when I went to join the men in their conversation about politics, a male acquaintance politely but firmly instructed me to go "sit with the women." Nonetheless, these *dawats* have been very useful spaces to look beyond some of my participants' more public presentations of self. It is in these spaces I was able to gain insight into what kinds of conversations my participants had among their own ethnic and religious group as opposed to when they are in more mixed and exposed environments.

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