

LONE STAR MUSLIMS

INSTRUCTOR'S GUIDE

Lone Star Muslims

Transnational Lives and
the South Asian Experience in Texas

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Lone Star Muslims is a community-centered ethnographic study of Pakistani Americans and Pakistani immigrants in Houston. The book employs a multi-sited and interdisciplinary approach to examine diasporic public cultures and everyday life. Drawing on archival data, interviews, and participant observation at Pakistani festivals and parades, radio programs, and ethnic businesses, the book develops the concept of a transnational Muslim heritage economy, specifically, the increasingly central role of Islam in shaping Pakistani consumer cultures and ethnic enterprises.

Lone Star Muslims incorporates a range of narratives, including stories from the Pakistani corporate workforce; Pakistani ethnic entrepreneurs, the working class and the working poor; Muslim gay men of Pakistani descent; Pakistani community activists; and radio program hosts and producers.

Critiquing dominant understandings of Muslim Americans such as "terrorist" on the one hand and "model minority" on the other, *Lone Star Muslims* offers a glimpse into a variety of lived experiences that belie generalizations and stereotypes. It shows how specificities of class, sectarian affiliation, citizenship status, gender, and sexuality shape transnational identities and mediate racism, abjection and marginalities.

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INTRODUCTION

SUMMARY

The Introduction serves as a foundation for the book, introducing the reader to the broader geo-political contexts that have shaped the Muslim American experience in the post-9/11 period, and the book's main themes, which include:

- Historical and political contexts, notably racism and violence towards Muslim Americans and Muslim immigrants following 9/11
- The heterogeneity of the Muslim American experience
- South Asian Muslim diasporic public cultures, notably ethnic festivals and parades, and radio programming

The Introduction outlines the theoretical contributions to scholarly studies of transnationalism by analyzing the intersections of diaspora, transnational Islam, and the neoliberal economy. The book develops the concept of transnational Muslim heritage economy. The book also contributes to this scholarship by critiquing the presumed heteronormativity assumed in most studies of transnational communities illuminating the experiences of Muslim American gay men of Pakistani descent. The book further develops the theoretical discussions presented in the Introduction in each chapter of the book, relating theorizing around transnationalism to the specific ethnographic case study covered in each subsequent chapter.

The Introduction also provides a discussion of the methodologies employed in collecting data, and the issue of self-reflexivity on the part of the ethnographer-researcher.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- What is meant by “transnationalism”? What are some examples of transnationalism? Examine the concept of transnationalism with reference to the Muslim American experience.
- According to the Introduction, 9/11 scholarship has contributed to the “flattening of the Muslim American experience” (page 6). What does the author mean by this? How can this issue be addressed through ethnography?
- Why is 9/11 an important lens for understanding Muslim American experiences? What are the disadvantages to using 9/11 as the sole broader context for understanding Muslim American experiences?

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

APPLIED RESEARCH ASSIGNMENTS

- Visit the website of a local newspaper, and search its archives for articles on “Muslim Americans” or “Pakistani Americans” or “Pakistani immigrants.” What are some of the stories and reports that come up in your search? Based on your research of a local newspaper’s archives, what aspect of Muslim American experiences receives the most coverage? Is there a specific topic that shows up again and again in several of the news reports? What does this tell us about how mainstream American media represents Muslim Americans and Pakistani Americans?
- What are some examples of transnational communities that live in the city where you were raised? Referring to a specific ethnic community, discuss what makes it a transnational community.

RACE, CLASS, OIL, AND THE MAKING OF “AMERICA’S MOST DIVERSE CITY”

SUMMARY

Chapter 1 provides the geographic context for this book by focusing on the development of Houston over the course of the twentieth century and the early twenty-first century. The survey of Houston’s growth and development into a global city emphasizes the centrality of the energy sector in shaping the city’s geography, and in creating racialized settlement patterns and a labor force within which Pakistanis are embedded.

Although Houston has been characterized as “America’s most diverse city,” race continues to segregate the city geographically. The energy (oil and gas) sector, the mainstay of Houston’s economy, has played a major role in racializing the workforce historically. Public involvement in urban development historically privileged the white elite and corporate interests and marginalized the interests of ethnic minorities in Houston.

The chapter examines the emergence of the energy sector, in relation to diasporic Pakistani, and transnational Islamic place making in Houston. Pakistanis are relatively new entrants to Houston, arriving in large numbers in the decades following the changes in U.S. immigration policies and laws in 1965. As new immigrant communities, Pakistanis have had to negotiate racialized and classed neighborhoods and localities in Houston in practices of place making. Although Pakistanis reside throughout the greater Houston metropolitan area, Pakistanis are a distinctly visible presence in sections of southwest Houston where they have created infrastructure and institutions to support their working, religious, public and private lives. The survey of two major localities, Hillcroft Avenue and Sugar Land, shows the centrality of Islam in practices of Pakistani place making and constructions of identity and community as Houstonians.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- How have urban renewal projects impacted communities in Houston? In what ways have industries in Houston, including oil, gas and NASA, racialized the city’s workforce?
- What are some of the reasons why Houston might be ideally suited for research on Muslim American communities?
- How did Sugarland and Hillcroft Avenue emerge as centers for residential and commercial life among new immigrant communities of color such as Pakistanis?
- Critically examine the findings of the Rice University Survey that found Houston to be the most diverse city in the United States. In what ways is Houston diverse? What are the limitations of Houston’s diversity?

RACE, CLASS, OIL, AND THE MAKING OF “AMERICA’S MOST DIVERSE CITY”

CHAPTER 1

APPLIED RESEARCH ASSIGNMENTS

- Explain the concepts of “ethnoburbs” and “edge city”. Based on the city where you were raised, can you think of examples of “ethnoburbs” and/or “edge cities”?
- How have urban renewal projects impacted socio-economic life in a city with which you are familiar?

“A DREAM COME TRUE”: SHIA ISMAILI EXPERIENCES IN CORPORATE AMERICA

SUMMARY

Chapter 2 focuses on the case study of Shia Ismaili Muslims who were employed in energy companies in Houston. Lay-offs in the corporate sector, including those from energy giants like Enron Corporation in the fall of 2001, provide a starting point to tell the story of the Pakistani community from the Ismaili perspective.

This chapter refers to and critiques the concept of the model minority through this ethnographic research. The model minority concept posits innate cultural values that predispose some minority communities toward education and professional success and achievements. Such conceptions render invisible the role of U.S. racial regimes in creating hierarchies in transnational labor flows along the axis of education, class, gender, religion, and nationality. Certainly, Shia Ismaili Muslims, whose experiences appear in this chapter, demonstrate resilience and self-reliance that is used to substantiate the success of Asian immigrants. South Asian professionals assert model-minority status, as evidenced in Ismaili approaches to education and career in corporate America, and patterns of residential settlement.

Yet, a significant part of the story is the central role of transnational religious ideologies and networks in mediating periods of risk, crisis, and uncertainty. Even as Enron became an important case study in the failure of corporate governance, it did not disrupt the belief in the American dream, in part because of mediation by professionally based transnational religious networks and affiliations. The narratives included in this chapter illustrate Ismaili religious edict and morality as forms of cultural capital in making meaning of professional life and experiences in corporate America.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Discuss Shia Ismaili ideologies about assimilation, work and education. What is the significance of these ideologies and religious beliefs in shaping the professional choices and community activism among Ismaili professionals?
- What is meant by the concept of the model minority? What was the historical time period during which this concept emerged, and why is the historical context relevant?
- What are some of the reasons why Shia Ismailis might be characterized as the model minority? How do their experiences also help us to critique the concept of the model minority?

APPLIED RESEARCH ASSIGNMENTS

- Can you think of examples of how the model minority concept persists today? Do you think there are any benefits and disadvantages for a specific ethnic and racial community to appropriate this concept in characterizing themselves?

“IT’S ALLAH’S WILL”: THE TRANSNATIONAL MUSLIM HERITAGE ECONOMY

SUMMARY

Chapter 3 focuses on the everyday life of Pakistani entrepreneurs, the working class, and the working poor who own or work in South Asian ethnic businesses in Houston. There are two main areas of inquiry pursued in the chapter. First, the chapter provides a historical analysis of the development of a South Asian ethnic economy in Houston and the factors that have contributed to the splintering of the South Asian ethnic economy on the basis of religion. Second, the chapter elaborates the lived experiences within the transnational Muslim heritage economy through detailed biographies and narratives of entrepreneurs who provide the capital for starting and managing ethnic businesses and the working class and working poor who provide the labor for these businesses.

The individual life histories and biographies in this chapter reveal a unique set of challenges that include the experience of poverty, marginality, racism, and various forms of violence and abjection. These cases highlight the issue of classed identities and belie homogenizing discourses that flatten the heterogeneity of experiences within Pakistani Muslim communities in Houston.

The individual life experiences discussed in this chapter also highlight the importance of religion in mediating multiple marginalities and forms of oppression under the U.S. regimes of surveillance as well as within ethnic spaces of commerce. As gleaned from the biographies and narratives, racial inequalities and advancement are not mutually exclusive. Rather, the pursuit of the American dream, reworked as individual effort and success in the service of family rather than the self, reveals agency and resilience that coexist with experiences of racism, marginality, discrimination, and abjection.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- What does the author mean by “transnational Muslim heritage economy”? What are some of the specific examples discussed in the chapter that illustrate the development of such an economy?
- What are the factors that have contributed to the splintering of the South Asian ethnic economy in Houston?
- What role has religion played in the lives of Pakistani entrepreneurs, the working class, and the working poor?
- What are the concerns that emerge among these groups through the ethnographic research presented in this chapter?

“IT’S ALLAH’S WILL”: THE TRANSNATIONAL MUSLIM HERITAGE ECONOMY

APPLIED RESEARCH ASSIGNMENTS

- ▶ Transnational religious economies discussed in the chapter are not limited to consumer cultures found among South Asian Muslim communities in the United States. Religion also shapes consumption and consumer cultures in other religious communities. What are some other communities that also restrict their consumption of goods and products based on their religious beliefs?
- ▶ Visit a local super market or strip mall. Can you find examples of products, goods, services and businesses that cater to specific religious and ethnic communities?

“I HAVE A VERY GOOD RELATIONSHIP WITH ALLAH”: PAKISTANI GAY MEN AND TRANSNATIONAL BELONGING

SUMMARY

Chapter 4 focuses on the case study of Muslim gay men of Pakistani descent. The chapter employs ethnography to explore the construction of transnational identity among Muslim gay men in Houston by elaborating on three issues: one, invocation of scripts and traditions of homosociality and same-sex eroticism and relationships found in South Asia; two, affirmation of religious belonging to a transnational Muslim *ummah*; and three, the appropriation of Western terminologies and categories of sexuality such as gay and bisexual in constructing a queer identity. In this chapter, these registers foreground a cultural analysis of everyday negotiations of religion, race, sexuality, and transnationalism among Muslim American gay men.

The analysis presented in the chapter is a corrective to the exclusively heterosexual focus of research on transnational Muslim communities in the United States. Decentering notions of Islam as a militantly heteronormative religious tradition that criminalizes same-sex sexual eroticism and relationships, the experiences of gay Muslims discussed in this chapter emphasize spaces of accommodation and negotiations of belonging within a global Muslim *ummah*.

Even though Muslim American gay men appropriate and mobilize Western notions of sexuality in constructions of identity, these notions do not represent a totalizing discourse of selfhood. These appropriations take place within a larger geopolitical context marked by the rise of U.S. nationalism and nationhood that realigns queer Americans with projects of U.S. imperialism and military engagements in the Muslim world. These realignments present a conundrum for Pakistani Muslim gay men, for whom Islam remains important.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- The chapter begins with this assertion: “The Pakistani Muslim American gay male represents a multiply hyphenated and complex figure, confounding easy categorizations in classificatory schemes of subjectification” (page 124). What does the author mean by this?
- How is the invocation of South Asian narrative traditions such as the telling of personal experience tales similar to “coming out” narratives in the West? How are these traditions different? How do South Asian traditions of homosociality and same-sex eroticism and relationships complicate dominant understandings of homosexuality in the West?
- The author refers to the concept of “homonationalism” in understanding the exclusion and marginality experienced by Muslim gay men residing in the United States during the post 9/11 period. Homonationalism as a concept shows the limits of U.S. nationalism and its projects of creating an inclusive society. Critically discuss this concept.

“I HAVE A VERY GOOD RELATIONSHIP WITH ALLAH”: PAKISTANI GAY MEN AND TRANSNATIONAL BELONGING

APPLIED RESEARCH ASSIGNMENTS

- ▶ The chapter shows how identity construction among gay Muslim men utilizes idioms and narrative traditions from the homeland. What are some examples of other transnational communities whose ideas about gender and sexuality are shaped by reference to concepts and traditions found in the homeland?
- ▶ What are other examples of gay communities in the U.S. for whom religion is an important part of their identity? How are the life experiences and sources of conflict for Muslim gay men similar to gay communities found in other faiths? How are they different?

THE PAKISTAN INDEPENDENCE DAY FESTIVAL: THE MAKING OF A “HOUSTON TRADITION”

SUMMARY

Chapter 5 provides an ethnographic analysis of the Pakistan Independence Day Festival. The Festival celebrates Pakistan’s formation as a nation-state in 1947, and takes place in Pakistan as well as globally in major cities with substantial Pakistani populations. This chapter illuminates the diasporic public cultures within which segments of the Pakistani community discussed in preceding chapters are embedded.

There are four key points made in the chapter. One, the chapter shows the transformations and changes in conceptualizing the Festival over time from a small, informal community affair to an elaborate public celebration.

Two, the chapter also shows the importance of Islam in Pakistani diasporic public cultures. Since the late 1990s, the Festival has transformed into a transnational Muslim festive culture that is inclusive of Muslims with ancestral affiliations to South Asian nations. These transformations occurred in concert with the emergence of the transnational Muslim heritage economy in Houston that provides much of the financing for the Festival.

Three, the Festival is a practice of cultural citizenship. Conceptualized through this lens, the Pakistan Day Festival is an affirmation of the empowered role of Pakistanis in defining their interests as a racially marked ethnoreligious minority group.

Finally, the chapter provides insights into the cultural politics of the Festival through the detailed narrative and biography of Omar, a community activist and one of the organizers of the Festival. The biography also provides important insights regarding the role played by community activists in organizing interfaith activities, and in defusing popular perceptions of Pakistanis and Muslims as anti-American terrorists and militants following 9/11.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- This chapter demonstrates how the Festival can be variously characterized — as a practice of diasporic nationalism, as an affirmation of belonging to Islam, and as a practice for asserting claims to space as Houstonians. What makes the Festival into a practice of diasporic nationalism? What makes it an Islamic festival? What makes it into a practice of cultural citizenship?
- How is the transnational Muslim heritage economy intertwined with the Festival?
- In what ways have Pakistani Americans transformed the festival since 9/11? What does the narrative and biography of Omar, one of the organizers of the Festival and a community activist, tell us about the fears and vulnerabilities experienced by Muslims following 9/11?

THE PAKISTAN INDEPENDENCE DAY FESTIVAL: THE MAKING OF A “HOUSTON TRADITION”

APPLIED RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT

- ▶ Ethnic festivals and parades are organized throughout the year in the United States. What is an ethnic festival or parade with which you are familiar or may have attended? Thinking about the sights, smells, and sounds at a specific festival or parade, and in light of the discussions in the chapter, critically discuss whether and how the festival or parade is a practice of diasporic nationalism, transnational religious belonging, and cultural citizenship.

“PAKISTANIS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN RADIO PEOPLE”: TRANSNATIONAL MEDIA, BUSINESS IMPERATIVES, AND HOMELAND POLITICS

SUMMARY

Chapter 6 covers the case study of Pakistani radio programming in Houston. This chapter focuses on the complex intertwining of transnational religious belonging with long-distance nationalism, diasporic nationhood, and neoliberalism. Non-English language radio programming in the United States is an understudied facet of transnationality and represents an important space through which identities and a sense of diasporic nationhood and transnational belonging are produced among new immigrant communities in the United States in the early twenty-first century.

There are four key points made in this chapter. One, the chapter provides a historical survey of Pakistani radio from its emergence in the 1970s as a community-based initiative on a nonprofit radio station to its transformation into a business enterprise by the late 1990s. Two, it elaborates on the cultural politics of Pakistani radio programs, examining the role of radio in building community. The narrative and biography of the hosts of the first and longest running Pakistani program provide valuable insights into cultural politics of radio programming. Three, the chapter analyzes the conflicts and the airing of grievances among radio hosts, which represent competition for sponsorship as well as the desire for agency in response to the experience of Muslim marginality, alienation, and racism in mainstream U.S. society. Finally, it examines radio coverage of politics and current affairs in South Asia. The on-air discussion of political tensions and militaristic conflicts between India and Pakistan since the 1990s offers an exemplary case study of diasporic engagements with Islam and Pakistani nationhood.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- According to the chapter, there is a significant difference between the cultural politics and mission of the first Pakistani radio program and the more recent radio programs. Why? What was the mission of the first program? What are the goals of the programs today?
- How are transnational religious belonging, diasporic nationalism, and the economy reflected in Pakistani radio in Houston?
- What are some of the reasons for the on-air fighting and arguments between program hosts?
- What does the biography and the narrative of Suriya and Saleem, the co-hosts of the first Pakistani program in the 1970s, tell us about the lives of Pakistani immigrants in the 1970s in Houston?

“PAKISTANIS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN RADIO PEOPLE”: TRANSNATIONAL MEDIA, BUSINESS IMPERATIVES, AND HOMELAND POLITICS

IN-CLASS DEBATE TOPICS

- ▶ Non-English ethnic radio programming has the potential to emerge as a major media industry.
- ▶ Radio, an over a hundred years old technology, is an antiquated form of communication and public discourse, and is no longer relevant in the early twenty-first century.

MEDIA RESOURCES

The following documentary and feature films can be used as educational tools that will enhance student learning and appreciation of the case studies covered in the book. While the following do not focus on Pakistani Americans and Pakistani immigrants in Texas, they provide important insights about the discussion of the issues and topics covered in the book. The focus on Muslim, Arab, and South Asian communities also provides a valuable comparative lens for understanding the experiences described in *Lone Star Muslims*.

MAN PUSH CART

2006, 87 minutes, in English and Urdu with English subtitles,
Director: Ramin Behrani

A critically acclaimed feature film that captures the life and struggles of a working class Pakistani who runs a bagel wagon in Manhattan, New York. The film complements the discussions of the corporate labor force in Chapter 2, and the working class and the working poor in Chapter 3.

A JIHAD FOR LOVE

2007, 81 minutes, in English and Arabic, Farsi, Urdu, Hindi, Turkish, French with English subtitles

A documentary featuring stories of Muslim gay men who reside in Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Egypt, Bangladesh, Turkey, France, India, South Africa, the United States and the United Kingdom. The film complements the discussions of Muslim gay men of Pakistani descent in Chapter 4.

THE DAY INDIA BURNED: PARTITION

2007, 89 minutes, in English and Hindi with English subtitles

A documentary about the Partition of British colonial India into India and Pakistan in 1947. The documentary provides a useful and important information about the history of the country of origin for Pakistani immigrants in the United States. It will be especially beneficial in understanding the historical contexts that shape festive cultures like the Pakistan Independence Day Festival in Chapter 5, and the discussions about radio broadcasts on Pakistan-India relationship in Chapters 5 and 6.

MEDIA RESOURCES

A RELUCTANT FUNDAMENTALIST

2013, 128 minutes, Director: Mira Nair

A feature film based on a novel by Pakistani author, Mohsin Hamid, provides an engaging look at the post-9/11 predicament of Muslim Americans of Pakistani descent, and the U.S. led war on terrorism. The film complements the discussions of 9/11 throughout the book.

NEW YORK

2009, 153 minutes, Hindi with English subtitles, Director: Kabir Khan

A critically acclaimed and commercially successful Bollywood feature film that presents the aftermath of the attacks of 9/11, as it is experienced by South Asian Muslim American college students. The film complements the discussion of 9/11 throughout the book. While students might be familiar with Hollywood's representation of 9/11 and Muslim Americans, this film presents a unique opportunity for student exposure to depictions of the aftermath of 9/11 from the perspective of Indian cinema.

INSIDE ISLAM: WHAT A BILLION MUSLIMS THINK

2010, 58 minutes

A documentary based on a major Gallup poll of Muslims around the world that asks: Why is there so much anti-Americanism in the Muslim world? Who are the extremists and how do Muslims feel about them? What do Muslims like and dislike about the West? What do Muslim women really want? The documentary complements the discussion of 9/11 throughout the book, and especially in the Introduction.

KHUDA KE LIYE (FOR GOD'S SAKE)

2007, 167 minutes, Urdu and English with English subtitles, Director: Shoaib Mansoor

A critically acclaimed Pakistani feature film that tells the story of a Pakistani family caught up in the rise of Islamic revivalist movement and threat to secularism in Pakistan, and the surveillance and persecution of Muslims in post-9/11 United States. The film traverses Afghanistan, Pakistan, the United Kingdom, and the United States to illuminate the complexities of the Pakistani experience in multiple geographical locations, and the variously constructed relationships to the homeland and to Islam. The film complements the discussion of 9/11, and the Pakistani diasporic experience throughout the book.

MEDIA RESOURCES

WITHOUT SHEPHERDS

2014, 89 minutes

This documentary looks beyond the headlines and breaks open the stereotypes of “the most dangerous country in the world.” An American filmmaker partners with leaders of an emerging Pakistani film community and travels across the country to learn what life is like at the heart of the war on terror. They find a cricket star building a new political movement, a trucker far from his family working to get by, a supermodel launching the country’s first fashion channel, a subversive Sufi rocker, an ex-mujahid without a home and a female journalist working behind Taliban lines. Visually dazzling and hauntingly intimate, this film looks head-on at the problems of Pakistan through the eyes of these six people and creates a space for Pakistan to speak to its own experience. The documentary provides important insights into contemporary Pakistan and complements the discussion of the war on terrorism, and Pakistan throughout the book.