Introduction

I had been in Houston for less than a week when I realized the difficulty in figuring out where cultural life took place for the interlocutors for my research: Pakistani Americans and Pakistani immigrants. Like many new immigrants in Houston, Pakistanis reside throughout Greater Houston. Even in the sections of southwest Houston along Hillcroft Avenue, Harwin Drive, and Bissonnet Street where Pakistani businesses and residential enclaves predominate, Pakistanis are a part of an ethnically and racially diverse landscape that also includes, among others, Afghani, Bangladeshi, Chinese, Ecuadorian, Indian, Japanese, Korean, Mexican, Nigerian, Palestinian, and Vietnamese businesses and residential communities. During this initial period of research, I could not discern a recognizable South Asian ethnic center that would not only anchor my research but also provide me with a sense of ethnic rootedness and belonging in an as yet unfamiliar city.

On one of my first exploratory visits, when I was wondering how, in a city as vast and populous as Houston, I would ever locate Pakistani interlocutors, I got into a cab to explore Hillcroft Avenue. The cab driver turned out to be a middle-aged Pakistani man named Wasim. As I learned during the ride, he had relocated with his family from New York City to Houston a few years earlier. “I wanted to be closer to my brother who lives here,” he told me. “Besides, it’s tough to raise a family in New York—life is so fast there. Houston is better that way.”

While we continued our conversation, Wasim headed south on Hillcroft Avenue. I looked out the window and saw storefronts advertising Middle Eastern businesses in English and Arabic. Passing Harwin Drive, Arabic-language storefronts are replaced by South Asian and Latino businesses with storefronts in Urdu, Hindi, and Spanish. The blazing late summer sun and the oppressive humidity gave sidewalks
and strip malls a deserted look. Commercial high-rises, large nondescript parking lots occupied by car dealerships, and roadways leading into gated communities gave way to open fields and prairie.

I was taking in the sights when Wasim asked me, “So, what brings you to Houston?”

“My research is on Pakistanis in Houston; you know, their cultural life here,” I began to explain.

“You must listen to the radio then,” he said as he turned up the volume of the car radio. A Pakistani folk song permeated the cab. A male radio programmer, speaking in Urdu, introduced the next song. Wasim continued: “There are so many Pakistani radio programs on 1150 AM—it is basically a Pakistani radio station. I always listen to it whenever I am driving—the programs are on all the time. You’ll learn much about Pakistanis from listening to radio.”

Wandering in a taxicab, on a quest to find interlocutors for my research, I was, thus, first introduced to Pakistani radio programs in Houston. Importantly, Wasim had not taken me to a spatially bound ethnic enclave or neighborhood, or pointed me to the institutional space of a mosque or a Pakistani or South Asian community-based organization. Instead, he had directed me to look for the Pakistani community through its participation in the airwaves of commercial radio. What is significant in Wasim’s observation is the connection he made between radio and the production of a diasporic community in Houston. Indeed, during the course of my research, radio developed into an important field site for exploring mass mediated South Asian diasporic public cultures.

The multidimensional texture of diasporic public cultures such as radio represents an important facet of the Pakistani American experience that is often marginalized and only cursorily explored in scholarly studies of South Asians and Muslim Americans in the post-9/11 epoch. Certainly 9/11 is an integral part of the story told in this book. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, took place when I was only a couple of months into my fieldwork in Houston. As the United States government quickly identified Osama bin Laden as the mastermind behind the attacks and began to characterize Pakistan as a “frontline state” in the U.S.-led global war against terrorism, Muslim Americans began to draw the sharp attention of law enforcement and intelligence services.
Several thousand Muslim men of South Asian and Middle Eastern descent were detained for months without being charged with crimes; many were deported for minor infractions. U.S. government agencies began targeting mosques, as well as South Asian and Middle Eastern charities, community centers and businesses based on the perception that these places propagate and nurture Islamic militancy, terrorism and anti-Americanism.

Much exemplary research has highlighted the damage to Muslim Americans in the context of post-9/11 government surveillance, Islamophobia, and racism, and rightly so.¹ Nonetheless, there remain other dimensions of people’s lives within this broader context that call for further elaboration. This book argues that the everyday struggles Muslim Americans face are critical in shaping their ideas about identity, community, and citizenship. For some, these struggles take the form of living far from family or taking care of family responsibilities. Others are struggling to find and maintain employment. Still others are struggling to come to terms with their sexuality. They are not generally focused on the events of 9/11, but on more mundane everyday challenges relating to crafting their identities as Pakistani Muslim Americans. Indeed, in my interviews with Pakistani Muslims and during participant observation in Houston, 9/11 came up frequently in the months that followed, but then less so except when discussing particular issues such as the government surveillance of, or racism toward, Muslim Americans. Even though 9/11 provides one of the central lenses for understanding the Pakistani Muslim American and immigrant experience, I soon realized that this experience could not be reduced to or explained solely with reference to 9/11. In order to understand everyday life experiences of Pakistani Muslims in the United States, this book, therefore, examines a range of contexts, including Houston’s South Asian ethnic economy, homeland politics and festive celebrations, ethnic media, transnational revivalist Islamic movements, and Muslim sectarian community formations, in addition to and in relation to the aftermath of 9/11.

To be sure, the events of September 11, 2001, had a profound influence on the lives of Muslim Americans. On the government level, the passage of the USA Patriot Act in the fall of 2001 expanded the authority of U.S. law enforcement agencies for the stated purpose of combating terrorism in the United States and abroad.² The Act also expanded the
definition of terrorism to include domestic terrorism, thereby enlarging the number of activities to which the Act’s expanded law enforcement powers could be applied. More than a decade later, these practices of surveillance, governmentality, and control are now entrenched in U.S. statecraft and sustained by the ongoing U.S. geopolitical and militaristic engagements in the Gulf States, the Middle East and South Asia. Representatives of the U.S. government argue that these laws and policies form an integral part of the U.S.-led global war on terrorism and are intended to keep the United States “safe.” From the perspective of Muslim Americans, these laws and policies represent a state-sanctioned racism and criminalization of U.S. citizens and resident noncitizens on the basis of religion and country of origin. Moreover, post 9/11 policies homogenize Muslim populations as well as Islam itself, and render invisible the vociferous protests within Muslim American communities against religious militancy and terrorism—protests that, in fact, long preceded the attacks of 9/11.

On the everyday level, Muslim Americans throughout the United States became targets of nativist American attacks following 9/11 (Skitka 2006). The violence directed at Muslim Americans, especially Muslim men, was rationalized as falling into the category of “crimes of passion” committed in defense of the nation and as expressions of U.S. patriotism (M. Ahmed 2002). Indeed, the post-9/11 epoch has been marked by moments when it was deemed permissible to “say or do anything to Arabs and Muslims in the United States” (Cainkar 2009: 4). In Texas, where I carried out the research for this book, reports of harassment, arson attacks, and bias crimes appeared with regularity in the mainstream press. In Denton, for example, a mosque was firebombed. In Austin, an incendiary device was thrown at a Pakistani-owned gasoline station. Six bullets were fired through windows of a Dallas-area mosque. In Carrollton, a mosque had its windows shattered. In the border town of McAllen, the Muslim owner of a delicatessen reported that the phrase “Go Home” had been twice spray-painted on the main door of his Al-Madinah Market before an arson attack gutted the shop. In Houston’s Montgomery County, the Ku Klux Klan sponsored a demonstration in front of a Pakistani-owned convenience store after an email circulated that employees at the store had allegedly ripped down American flags. The protest was eventually halted after the storeowner
explained to the organizers that teenagers had removed the flags after being refused permission to purchase cigarettes without proper ID to verify their age. As recently as the autumn of 2012, to protest the construction of mosques across the country, vandals left a slain pig in front of a mosque near Houston, indicating sustained hostility toward Muslim Americans that has persisted over a decade after 9/11.

The fear of violent backlash and everyday hostility toward Muslim Americans has played a central role in the crisis over public self-presentations in Muslim communities. In Houston, several Muslim-owned businesses found it prudent to display the American flag and post large signs that read “God Bless America” and “We Support America” on storefronts and glass windows. A number of Muslim Americans began to display stickers of the American flag on cars and American flag pins on clothing. These symbolic gestures were intended to mediate the vulnerabilities resulting from government surveillance and the racializing of Muslims as foreigners at best and as anti-American Islamic militants and would-be terrorists at worst. One might read these acts as an affirmation of allegiance to the United States of America and inclusion in projects of U.S. nationalism, if they were not taking place in a climate of a pervasive and coercive state surveillance of Muslim citizens and resident noncitizens and thus motivated at least in part by fears of violence. The frustration and anger some of my interlocutors felt became evident when Sara, a young Pakistani American woman, a teacher at a public middle school in Houston, and a cohost of an arts-centered radio program on Pacifica Radio, remarked as we passed a patriotic sign on the glass window of a Pakistani restaurant, “I can’t even look at these signs anymore. It makes me so angry that we are now obligated to display our American-ness. Does a sign make us more American? Will these signs change the way others think about us?”

The notion that Muslim individuals and business owners felt the need to publicly demonstrate their patriotism illustrates how emergent forms of U.S. nationalism are exacerbating vulnerabilities and marginalizing, if not entirely excluding, Muslim communities from an American imagined community. Writing about the vulnerabilities experienced by Detroit’s Arab communities following 9/11, historian Sally Howell and cultural anthropologist Andrew Shryock note:
In the aftermath of 9/11, Arab and Muslim Americans have been compelled, time and again, to apologize for acts they did not commit, to condemn acts they never condoned, and to openly profess loyalties that, for most U.S. citizens, are merely assumed. Moreover, Arabs in Detroit have been forced to distance themselves from Arab political movements, ideologies, causes, religious organizations, and points of view that are currently at odds with U.S. policy. (Howell and Shryock 2003: 444)

While the proliferation of literature on Muslim Americans has greatly expanded our knowledge of the Muslim American experience, as well as the myriad responses to 9/11, the scholarship has also, as sociologist Nazli Kibria argues, “flattened” understandings of Muslims, obscuring the raced, classed and gendered heterogeneity of the Muslim American experience. According to Kibria, “there has been a tendency to homogenize Muslims, to present one-dimensional views of who they are and how they organize and understand their place in the world and the role of religion within it” (Kibria 2011: 3). Moreover, as Kibria states:

Much post-9/11 scholarship on Muslims has taken a top-down approach toward its subject matter. Texts, official discourses, and the views of Islamic leaders and elites have framed the dominant investigative window into the Muslim experience. Even when researchers have, in fact, taken a broader and more inclusive approach, it has often been to study those Muslims who are active participants in Islamic groups and organizations. The perspectives and experiences of those Muslims who are marginal to these organized forums have received little attention. If only in indirect ways, this too has nurtured the image of homogeneity. (Ibid.: 3)

The flattening of the Muslim American experience has meant a relative absence of in-depth community-centered ethnographic analyses of the Pakistani Muslim experience, especially those residing in southern states. Anthropologist Junaid Rana’s (2011) examination of South Asian labor flows and international studies scholar Adil Najam’s (2006) survey-based exploration of philanthropy in Pakistani American communities are among the few in-depth studies that explore the lives of Pakistanis in the United States. This book contributes to the scholarship
on Muslim Americans through a community-centered ethnographic study of the Pakistani experience in Houston, tracking the community over a ten-year period, from 2001 to 2011.

Given the heightened U.S.-government surveillance and the racializing of Muslim Americans during the last decade, this book challenges commonly held perceptions regarding the complicity of Islam with global terrorism. Decentering dominant framings, such as “terrorist” on the one hand, or “model minority” on the other, that flatten understandings of Islam and Muslim Americans, it employs a cultural analysis to document the heterogeneity of the Pakistani American and the Pakistani immigrant experience. This book includes narratives that reflect the internal diversity of the Pakistani population and includes members of the highly skilled Shia Ismaili Muslim labor force employed in corporate America; Pakistani ethnic entrepreneurs, and the working class and the working poor employed in Pakistani ethnic businesses; gay Muslim American men of Pakistani descent; community activists; and radio program hosts. These narratives provide glimpses into the variety of lived experiences of Pakistani Americans and show how specificities of class, profession, religious sectarian affiliation, citizenship status, gender, and sexuality shape transnational identities, and mediate racism, marginalities and abjection.

Using a multisited approach (Marcus 1995) as a theoretical, in addition to a methodological, tool enabled me to dismantle the homogenizing impulse that characterizes most research on Muslim American communities. This book examines three different groups of people and two place-making processes in order to illuminate the complexity of the Muslim American experience and the category of “the Muslim.” Chapters devoted to each of three groups—Shia Ismailis; gay Muslims; and entrepreneurs, working-class, and working-poor Muslims—demonstrate both broader patterns as well as specificities of experience in Pakistani Muslim communities in Houston. The focus on religious sectarianism, class, and sexuality emerged organically during the process of fieldwork and writing, and, under other circumstances, could well have included a range of other groupings. Indeed, more research is required, and future studies will further explore and document this heterogeneity, for example, through a greater consideration of the lives of women, especially lesbian Muslim Americans; Pakistani
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religious minority populations, notably, Hindu, Christian, Zoroastrian, and Ahmadiya communities; and activists involved in multiethnic and multireligious alliance and community building. The two place-making processes that are examined in detail, the Pakistani Independence Day Festival and the airwaves of a vibrant Pakistani radio programming landscape in Houston, demonstrate the diasporic public cultures within which Pakistanis are embedded in Houston.

This book argues that the homogeneity attributed to Muslim Americans and South Asians has obscured the increasingly important role of Islamic sectarian ideologies in shaping community formations in the West. Scholarly studies of Muslim Americans have focused primarily on Sunni Muslims and only tangentially explored other Muslim sectarian communities such as the Sufi orders, Shia, Ismaili, Druze, Ansaru Allah, and Ahmadiya communities, among others. The homogenization of Muslim Americans obscures these variations in Islamic practice (Osella and Osella 2008). The professional life experiences of the highly skilled Shia Ismaili Muslims discussed in chapter 2 show appropriations of Ismaili forms of knowledge and transnational cultural histories during periods of crises such as unexpected unemployment in corporate America. An ethnographic analysis of Shia Ismaili Muslims employed in corporate America recasts educational achievement and professional success—commonly viewed as facets of American values in the model minority concept—as religious imperatives. Complicating the analysis further, the emphasis on education and professional success represents established strategies for negotiating racism, marginality, and discrimination experienced by Ismailis as minorities in several countries during the course of the twentieth century. The case of Shia Ismaili Muslim Americans in Houston therefore illustrates the complex alignment of the American dream, transnational sectarian ideologies, and broader historical experience that is obscured in conceptions of the Muslim American experience as a monolith without due consideration of sectarian specificities.

This book also argues against the presumed heterosexuality in South Asian and Muslim American population movements to the United States that renders invisible the experiences of gay and lesbian South Asian Muslim Americans. The construction of transnational identity among Muslim American gay men of Pakistani descent discussed in
chapter 4 indicates complex negotiations of belonging to a transnational Muslim ummah, that is, “a transnational supra-geographical community of fellow Muslims that transcends nationality and other bases of community” (Kibria 2011: 4). These emergent transnational Muslim American same-sex sexual cultural formations disrupt hegemonic discourses in Islam that are centered on the criminalization of same-sex sexual love and relationships and instead reveal spaces of accommodation and inclusion.

Moreover, this book intervenes in the intellectual project that examines the intersections between Asian American, South Asian American, and Muslim American fields of study. As we will see, Pakistanis in the United States are well situated within genealogies of post-1965 Asian labor flows. As such, Pakistani Americans and immigrants may well be conceptualized within the rubric of Asian America. Historical and cultural convergences between Pakistanis and other South Asian nationality groups also enable a conception of Pakistanis within the analytical category of “South Asian diaspora.” Indeed, I employ “South Asian” and “diaspora” to discuss the invocations of cultural epistemologies, idioms, and colonial, postcolonial and diasporic histories that transcend the boundaries of the South Asian nation-state and variously include nationality groups from all countries in the South Asian region.

At the same time, Pakistani Americans and immigrants also exceed Asian American or South Asian categorizations. For example, the central position of Islam in dominant Pakistani state ideologies of nationhood distinguishes Pakistani Americans from other Asian nationality groups. Pakistan is one of only two modern nation-states (the other being Israel) where religion was complexly the raison d’être in the creation of the nation and a critical component of ideologies of nationhood and community. The remapping of Pakistan within the Muslim world and the Greater Middle East in U.S. foreign policy and in post-9/11 practices of surveillance and U.S. imperialism racialized Pakistani Americans and immigrants in terms of religion (Rana 2011). The centrality of Islam in the everyday life of Pakistanis featured in this book draws attention to religious identifications. The alliances and sociality between Pakistani Muslims and Muslims from Asia, the Gulf States, the Middle East, Africa, and beyond further characterize reconfigurations of community within the rubric of Muslim America. This book
explores the complexities and overlaps in Asian American, South Asian American, and Muslim American fields of study through the following set of interrelated questions: How and to what effect do Islam and South Asian diasporic histories shape the everyday life of Pakistanis in Houston? What explains the increasing centrality of Islam in mediating individual experiences of racism, marginality, and abjection on the one hand, and patterns of consumption and practices of capitalist production, such as within the South Asian ethnic economy, festive cultures, and mass media, on the other? And finally, how is Islam discursively produced in, and intertwined with, practices of diasporic nationhood and community formation?

The title of this book, _Lone Star Muslims_, acknowledges these complexities in categorizing Pakistani Americans and Pakistani immigrants. The multiple contextual categorizations of Texas, much like the varied contexts and the layers of identification that characterize the Pakistani experience in Houston—as new immigrants, as Houstonians, as Muslims, as Pakistanis, as Asians, and as South Asians and as variously classed, gendered, and racialized groups—exceed any singular heuristic and require multiple interpretive lenses. “Lone Star State,” the nickname of the state of Texas, references the construction of an alleged statehood outside of the U.S. nation formed out of notions of conquest, manifest destiny, and white supremacy. Also, while Texas is geographically situated between the southern and southwestern United States and conceptualized as such in American area studies, it is also distinct from these categories because of specificities of historical experience.

On another level, the cojoining of the Lone Star State and Muslims highlights the embeddness of my interlocutors in raced, classed, and gendered genealogies of labor flows, and place-making practices in Houston. While most studies of transnational communities emphasize the transnational registers of identification, this book also explores the ways in which Pakistanis have claimed, and continue to claim, space as Houstonians. These claims are apparent in the establishment of residences and businesses in southwest Houston examined in chapter 1 as well as in discussions of the employment of Pakistani highly skilled labor in corporate America in chapter 2, and the transnational Muslim heritage economy in chapter 3. These claims are also evident in the reconfigurations of the Pakistan Independence Day celebrations as a
practice of cultural citizenship and as a “Houston tradition” discussed in chapter 5. Finally, the involvement of Pakistanis in radio that is documented in chapter 6 also speaks to the specificities of local geographies, especially the significance of the car culture and automobile travel in a highway-dominated city, that make radio a vital space of connectivity for a community that is dispersed throughout the greater Houston metropolitan area. The Lone Star State is central in unpacking these myriad layers of Pakistani everyday life and experience in Houston.

Theorizing Transnationalism

The ethnographic study of the Pakistani American and the Pakistani immigrant experience provides a context for reexamining cultural analyses of globalization and transnationalism that emphasize porous and fluid national and cultural borders and “flexible” notions of citizenship and belonging (Ong 1996). Theorizing around globalization and transnationalism emphasizes the accelerated movement of people and goods across national borders, facilitated by global neoliberalism (Harvey 2005). Citizenship, nationhood, and cultural belonging, in the contemporary period of globalization, are no longer bound within the territorial boundaries of the nation-state. Theorists of globalization emphasize time-space compression characterized by increased flexibility in labor processes and markets, geographic mobility and shifts in consumption patterns (Harvey 1989). In his seminal work on globalization, anthropologist Arjun Appadurai argues that “global cultural flows” have replaced a single “imagined community” with “imagined worlds,” that is, the “multiple worlds that are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups” that transcend the borders of the nation-state (1996: 33). These theoretical interventions illuminate the formation of transnational belonging within shifting fields of power that link the local to the global and reconfigure notions such as race, ethnicity, class, gender and sexuality.

Beginning in the early 1990s, scholars working with recent immigrant groups, noting the inadequacy of dominant conceptualizations of nationhood and belonging, offered “transnationalism” as a more appropriate conceptual framework for examining “the multiplicity of migrants’ involvements in both the home and host societies” (Glick
Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton 1992: ix). In the 1990s and 2000s, anthropologists further developed the framework of transnationalism to examine negotiations of belonging to multiple nation-states and deterritorialized sources of power and authority in the context of new immigrant groups or transmigrants in the United States. These studies reveal the institutional structures, and every day practices and rituals through which transmigrants build financial and intellectual support for transnational projects and highlight the intersection of U.S.-based immigrant groups with individuals, infrastructure and institutions outside the geographical borders of the United States. Immigrant communities living thousands of miles from their homeland are increasingly implicated in a wide range of cultural projects and practices that reconfigure their relationship with their homeland. Ethnographic studies have examined the familial, socioeconomic, political, and communication networks and associations maintained by transmigrants in multiple nation-states. They have also examined how certain “groups of immigrants fight against multiple techniques of subordination through claims that do not rely on citizenship” (Das Gupta 2006: 12) and instead use transnational institutional structures such as international human rights regimes, to claim rights, benefits, and privileges.

As demonstrated in this book, countervailing trends, notably U.S. national security and global terrorism following 9/11, undermine transnational practices. Moreover, the racialization of Muslim Americans following 9/11 shows how citizenship alone does not confer inclusion and belonging in projects of U.S. nationalism. The differential in access to citizenship-based civil, political, social, and economic rights is tied to schemes of classifying immigrants as illegal, legal but nonresident, legal and resident but noncitizens, naturalized citizens, and native born. These schemes are important, as sociologist Monisha Das Gupta notes: “The legal nature of these distinctions normalizes the hierarchy, thereby making common sense the differential treatment of immigrants in these categories” (2006: 13). As is increasingly evident in the experiences of Muslim Americans documented in this book, U.S. government agencies deploy surveillance and the rhetoric of global security to discipline, criminalize, and persecute individuals whose engagements transcend national borders in diverse, multilayered patterns.
Cognizant of the tensions between the nation-state and transnationalism (Appadurai 1996), this book intervenes in the theorizing around transnationalism through greater consideration of the intertwining of Islam with diasporic nationhood and belonging.\textsuperscript{18} In spite of the proliferation of scholarly research on transnationalism, the intersection of transnationalism with religion begs greater analytical consideration. Indeed, as anthropologist Steven Vertovec has stated, “while attempts to theorize and topologize diaspora are certainly beginning to clarify a number of significant dimensions and developments surrounding today’s globally dispersed populations, it is clear that their religious elements have received relatively far less attention” (2009: 133). Religious studies scholar Martin Baumann similarly argues that studies of transnational communities have “marginalized the factor of religion and relegated it to second place in favor of ethnicity and nationality” (1998: 95). Most scholarly analyses of religious transnationalism focus on a congregational model. These studies examine religious institutions established by Muslim immigrants in the United States and in the homeland, religious nationalism among diasporic communities, and alliance building centered on a global Muslim ummah.

This book examines Pakistani American and immigrant everyday life to illustrate how transnational religious revivalist movements intersect with practices of diasporic cultural production. In the case of Islam, transnational revivalist movements such as Wahhabism and the Jamaat-al-Tabligh emphasize the significance of Islam in all aspects of life.\textsuperscript{19} These movements strive to “revive an original Islam based on literalist interpretations of the Qur’an as well as emulation of the recorded life of the Prophet and his Companions” (Kibria 2011: 3). They have found committed interlocutors among South Asian diasporic communities in the West, including the United States.

Religious orthodoxy in South Asian Hindu communities in the United States is similarly tied to “the politics of Hindu fundamentalism at home” (Appadurai 1996: 38) and is facilitated through the transnational flows of religious ideologies, personnel and capital.\textsuperscript{20} In the case of right-wing Hindu revivalist movements, historian Vijay Prashad argues that “by the late 1980s organizations from South Asia were entering the United States to authorize syndicated forms of religiosity”
(Prashad 2000: 143). The ideologies of these revivalist movements are also contested by diasporic communities, notably gay and lesbian South Asians, as discussed in chapter 4.

Transnational revivalist movements in Islam have contributed to the formation of alliances and networks among Muslims from different countries of origin that transcend ethnicity and diaspora. Universalizing Islam is mobilized to forge transnational protest movements to claim rights and entitlements locally and to mediate the relationship between the American state’s regimes of control and surveillance and Muslim immigrant communities across race and country of origin. These new alliances also reshape religious practice and, in the case of Muslim immigrant communities in the West, create a universalizing consciousness about practice in Islam. Such developments are expressions of transnational public cultures—such as the Muslim World Day Parade and the Muslim Youth Day—and take place in major cities throughout the United States, creating space for building a pan-racial and pan-national religious community.

Greater attention to the place of transnational Islam in shaping the Pakistani Muslim American experience opens up the analysis to examining how transnational flows of religious ideologies reshape diasporic public cultures, notably festive celebrations and mass media, both undertheorized in studies of South Asian American and Muslim American experiences. In this book, the case study of the Pakistan Independence Day Festival in Houston illuminates the multiple and intersecting registers for making meaning of the Pakistani experience in the United States during the contemporary period of globalization and transnationalism. The Festival is a performance of long-distance Pakistani nationalism. It celebrates independence from Great Britain and the formation of a sovereign nation for Muslims of South Asia. The Festival also demonstrates a capacity to expand the parameters of community and long-distance nationalism through the inclusion of Muslim communities with ancestral affiliations to any country in South Asia. In recent years, Festival organizers have made concerted efforts to include Afghani, Indian, and Bangladeshi Muslims and reframed the Festival as a transnational Muslim celebration. This reframing suggests a creative deployment of festivals as practices to work through universalizing Islam, as well as colonial and postcolonial histories and experiences.
of war, religious disharmony, and national tensions among the various South Asian nationality groups.

The reframing of the Festival as a transnational Muslim celebration and public culture is further intertwined with and shaped by geopolitical contexts of subjectification. The recent reinvention of the Festival from an indoor event into a parade that is held at a venue associated with multicultural events situates the Festival and the Pakistani communities within specificities of the local milieu. This reinvention also exemplifies a second framing of the Festival: as a “Houston tradition.” As a parade, the celebration mediates post-9/11 anxieties and vulnerability around racial hostilities toward Muslim Americans. These transformations recast the Festival as a practice of cultural citizenship and as a practice for making claims, rights, and entitlements as a racialized minority community.

Advances in global media and communication technologies have created, and intensified the speed at which transnational Muslim communities can be forged. Like the Pakistan Independence Day Festival, non-English language Pakistani radio programming also exemplifies a largely uncharted ethnographic register for documenting the Pakistani American and immigrant experience. Indeed, non-English language media production in the United States has been explored rather narrowly in theories of globalization and transnationalism. Analysts of transnationalism typically focus on the role of media produced in the homeland in the creation of “imaginary homelands” for diasporic communities and the formation of diasporic public spheres. Recent literature also illuminates the role of transnational media, mostly movies and television programs produced in the homeland, in representing the relation between the diaspora and the homeland to people in both sites (Mankekar 1999).

Building on this scholarship, this book examines Pakistani radio in Houston as a historical and cultural product, a communicative and social practice, and an aesthetic form that participates in reconfigurations of transnational and cultural belonging. Much like the Pakistan Day Festival, the Pakistani radio programs discussed in chapter 6 are important public cultural formations for examining negotiations between transnational Islam, diasporic nationhood, and the global market economy. Pakistani radio provides a case study of the diversity
of media practices that are only now beginning to be charted ethno-
graphically (Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod, and Larkin 2002). Following re-
cent scholarship in anthropology of mass media, this book similarly
conceives of media production as well as reception in the context of
its embeddness in everyday life (Silverstone 1994). The circulation of
non-English language radio programming in the contemporary United
States presents an understudied aspect of transnational cultural flows
that has been largely ignored in recent ethnographic studies of new
immigrant communities in general and Asian Americans and Muslim
Americans in particular.

Where the social importance of radio has been documented, as in
Erik Barnouw’s classic study of broadcasting in the United States (Bar-
nouw 1968), or the more recent study of radio programming and genres
in the United States during the twentieth century (Douglas 2004), scant
attention has been paid to the role of Latinos, African Americans, and
Asian Americans in the enterprise. Recent scholarship on radio has
shown the centrality of radio in transnational flows that draw attention
to the “urgent as well as the ordinary, the mundane alongside the meta-
physical” (Bessire and Fisher 2012: 4). Scholarship has also explored
the relationship between sound, technology, and power. In spite of
the growing scholarship on radio in the last one decade, there is an
absence of ethnographic research, especially reception studies, exam-
ining the relationship between radio, transnationalism, and racialized
community formations in the United States.

The literature on South Asian Americans and Muslim Americans has
similarly largely ignored radio. In studies where radio is discussed, it is
either in passing or as a descriptive fact of South Asian transnational life
without any ethnographic richness. Historian Madhulika Khandelwal’s
(2002) ethnographic study of Indian immigrants in New York City, for
example, provides a brief discussion of the first Indian radio program
in New York, which began in 1975, in the context of her discussion of
the Indian media environment in New York. Historian Padma Ranga-
swamy’s (2000) discussion of Indian radio in Chicago follows a similar
representational trajectory, which has the effect of relegating radio to
the margins of critical analysis without due consideration of its emer-
gence as a historically situated development and as a meaningful cul-
tural product, social and leisure activity, and communicative practice.
This book brings radio to the forefront of analysis of diasporic public cultures in the early twentieth century. The emphasis on radio is significant because it shows the tremendous enduring capacity of radio, a technology that is over a century old, in structuring cultural practices and everyday modes of leisure, sociality, and communication in Asian American and Muslim American communities. This is especially significant in Houston, where the Pakistani population is dispersed throughout Greater Houston, and automobiles are the principle mode of transport. In such spatialized geographies, radio provides a virtual medium for creating community that transcends boundaries of class, gender, generation and geography.

Pakistani radio programming in Houston locates listeners in wider constituencies such as national and religious communities and provides an important site for the discursive circulation of religion in transnational soundscapes and practices of “electronic” place-making (Browne 2008). In the case of Pakistani radio in Houston, radio is entangled with the everyday life, concerns, and aspirations of Pakistani Americans and Pakistani immigrants and intertwined with the transnational Muslim heritage economy in Houston. Instances of infighting among radio hosts, while a reflection of intense competition for sponsorship money, also index the loss of masculinity in the United States. The airing of grievances creates a space for Muslim Americans to recuperate their voice that has been increasingly marginalized in mainstream public spheres in the United States.

The case studies of the Pakistan Independence Day Festival and Pakistani radio programming in Houston also exemplify practices of place making in Asian American and Muslim American communities in the United States. Research on place making and transnationality has examined the formation of religious institutions and infrastructure; the performance and observance of rituals such as funeral processions; congregational gatherings during Ashura among Shia communities (Fischer and Abedi 2002); religious festivals like Eid celebrations; the use of language to sacralize space and social interactions as religious (Metcalf 1996) and create a “global sacred geography” (Werbner 1996). The remaking of spaces of commerce by selling religious commodities and displaying religious symbols also indicates the intertwining of transnational religious place making with neoliberal capitalist economy.
These practices of place making in ethnic businesses such as restaurants serve to produce authenticity, invoke nostalgia, and create familiarity in ways that are distinctly different from “the anonymity of an ordinary restaurant” (Fischer and Mehdi 2002: 263).

The work presented in this book expands the scope of inquiry into place making by exploring everyday life at the intersection of transnational Islam, diasporic nationhood, and neoliberal capitalism in three sites. In the first site, the narratives of Shia Ismaili professionals offer an important corrective to the often-presumed incompatibility of Muslim lifestyle and the inapplicability of ethno-religious subjectifications with material pursuits and professional settings that are closely identified with the neoliberal capitalist economy (Deleuze and Guattari 1980). As evidenced from the experiences of Ismailis discussed in chapter 2, transnational religious forms of knowledge and authority not only structure spirituality but also provide the governing principles for professional life, achievements, and success in corporate America and in the pursuit of the American dream.

Ongoing transformations in the South Asian ethnic economies provide a second site for examining the intersections between transnational Islam, diasporic nationhood, and neoliberal capitalism. I argue that Pakistani ethnic enterprises are embedded in local, national, and transnational webs of financial and business networks and capital that are increasingly organized by Islamic values and beliefs. Indeed, the globalization of the halal food market showcases the growth of the transnational Muslim heritage economy as it intersects with a growing critical mass of Muslim communities in the west (I. A. Adams 2011). These ongoing transformations are situated between the globalization of Islamic revivalism, neoliberal capitalism, and consumer culture and illustrate the emergence of “alternatives to what are seen as Western values, ideologies, and lifestyles” (J. Fischer 2005: 280) for Muslim communities residing in the West.

The narratives and everyday life experiences of Pakistani ethnic entrepreneurs, the working class, and the working poor provide a third site for exploring the intersections between transnational Islam, diasporic nationhood, and neoliberal capitalism. In spite of a considerable body of research on ethnic entrepreneurs, the working class, and
the working poor in new immigrant communities, few studies have focused on these demographics in Muslim American or South Asian American communities. Such narratives are typically perceived as an inevitable rite of passage to “becoming American” and the attainment of the American dream that is commonly characterized as the seductive, relentless, and inspiring quest for success, prestige, and economic security in the United States. The American dream is premised on individualism and the achievement of upward mobility, assimilation, and success. An analytical consideration of the everyday life of Pakistani entrepreneurs, and the working class and the working poor who provide much of the labor for businesses in the transnational Muslim heritage economy problematizes the discourses around the American dream and raises several questions: How, for example, do Pakistani Muslim entrepreneurs and the working class negotiate U.S. regimes of surveillance of Muslims as they build lives in the United States? What are the sources of social capital deployed by these men and women to make meaning of their lives, struggles, and everyday experiences in Houston? What does an ethnographic focus on individual life experiences and biography of this grouping of Pakistani immigrants (ethnic entrepreneurs, the working class, and the working poor) tell us about the intersections of race, class, religion, and gender in shaping the experience of transnationality, diasporic belonging, and place making in spaces of commerce and economic activity? And finally, how are transnational Islamic ideologies implicated in practices of place making, consumption patterns and material life?

The book also explores the centrality of Islam in the formation of transnational Muslim American sexual cultures. In spite of the proliferation of ethnographic studies of transnational communities in the United States, there has been relatively little research on the gay and lesbian Muslim American experience. Indeed, as anthropologist Junaid Rana states, “queer sexual migration from Pakistan, a significant subculture, has mostly gone unstudied” (Rana 2011). Most of the “post-9/11 ethnographies” (Maira 2009) document the everyday life of gay and lesbian Muslim Americans only cursorily if at all. The relative absence of scholarship perpetuates erroneous understandings of the intenability of non-heteronormative accommodation in Islam and
in Muslim communities, which are “teleologically read through the fanatic lens of Islamic fundamentalism” (Puar 2007: 16) and leave intact an assumed heterosexuality in Muslim American and South Asian population movements.

A few post-9/11 cultural analyses have addressed the topic of gay Muslims in the United States through the lens of regimes of governmentality and surveillance of Muslim Americans and immigrants in the country. For example, in an important analysis of race, sexuality, and American citizenship, cultural theorist Chandan Reddy (2011) examines the contradictions of U.S. immigration law, which privilege heteronormative family structures and render queer sexuality subordinate to this heteronormativity. These regimes of oppression ironically coexist with “the liberal state's ideology of universal sexual freedom” (Reddy 2011: 164) at home for all subordinate groups including sexual minorities. In this contradictory location, “the figure of the gay Pakistani immigrant is both a symptom of globalization and the transnationalization of U.S. capital and a new formation developed in the interstices of the nation-state. This figure emerges in the breach between the nation-state and the political economy” (ibid.: 164).

The rise of U.S. homonationalism (Puar 2007) provides another lens for examining LGBTQIA (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and asexual) Muslim Americans. In Jasbir Puar’s astute analysis, the inclusion of some homosexualities within U.S. patriotism and nationalism is premised on the pacification and sanctioning of homosexuals, whereby “homosexuals embrace the us-versus-them rhetoric of U.S. patriotism and thus align themselves with this racist and homophobic production” (Puar 2007: 46). The confluence of U.S. nationalism and gendered, classed, and racialized homosexuality, or what historian Lisa Duggan has termed “homonormativity,” creates a “demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” and embroiled in “a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative forms but upholds and sustains them” (Duggan 2002: 179).

Building on this scholarship, I challenge Western epistemologies of monolithic gay identities and disrupt the assumed heteronormativity in international population movements. As feminist and queer theorist Gayatri Gopinath notes,
The cartography of a queer diaspora tells a different story of how global capitalism impacts local sites by articulating other forms of subjectivity, culture, affect, kinship, and community that may not be visible or audible within standard mappings of nation, diaspora, or globalization. What emerges within this alternative cartography are subjects, communities, and practices that bear little resemblance to the universalized “gay” identity within a Eurocentric gay imaginary. (Gopinath 2005: 12)

The inquiry into Pakistani Muslim American gay men in this book follows scholarship that has examined the accommodation of vernacular cultures, group membership, and allegiances in transnational lives that traverse multiple geopolitical and epistemological systems. Following anthropologist Richard Parker, such border crossings provide a starting point to grasp the “often messy reality of life in the contemporary, globalized or globalizing, late-modern or postmodern world—a world in which things often fail to fit neatly or hold coherently together, but in which a set of complex relationships does in fact exist and is marked by processes of social, cultural, economic, and political change that ultimately link both the West and the Rest as part of an interacting system” (Parker 1999: 7). Locating South Asian Muslim gay lives at the intersection of multiple geopolitical and epistemological systems provides insights into the changes taking place in the articulation of diverse sexualities in the contemporary epoch.

Methodologies, Data Collection, and Self-Reflexivity

I selected Houston, Texas, as the field site for this ethnographic study of Pakistani Americans and immigrants for several reasons. One, Houston is home to the fourth-largest and one of the most internally diverse South Asian Muslim populations of any major city in the United States. In recent decades, it has emerged as a primary gateway city for immigrants from South Asia. Two, South Asian cultural, religious, professional, and communication networks and infrastructure are particularly well established in Houston, in part due to the large number of Pakistani and Indian immigrants who have settled in Houston since the 1960s. And three, the presence of South Asian Muslims in all major occupational and professional categories and income levels, and from
all major South Asian ethno-linguistic and Islamic religious sects (Williams 1988), provided an unparalleled opportunity to examine transnational identities at the intersection of race, religious sect, class and professional affiliations, and gender and sexuality.

The data for this study was collected during fifteen months of qualitative and archival research in Houston from July 2001 until September 2002, and then shorter follow-up research visits to Houston from 2003 until 2011. There were three key target areas for data collection: Pakistani immigrants and their families and relatives; Pakistani religious, civic, cultural, and media-based organizations; and Pakistani hosts and sponsors of Pakistani radio programs in Houston. I began the research process guided by the narratives, experiences, and suggestions of my interlocutors. For example, as I mention in the opening paragraphs of this introduction, only a few weeks into my research, as I rode in a cab driven by a Pakistani American, the cab driver started telling me about radio, and suggested that I listen to radio, which I did. Radio stations provided a vital field site to document mass mediations of transnationality. Listening to the radio also enabled me to build relationships with interlocutors—radio hosts/programmers, sponsors, and invited panelists—who are otherwise dispersed throughout the greater Houston area. Likewise, it was through a series of serendipitous encounters at a DVD and video store where I was carrying out participant observation that I was able to learn of social networks composed of highly skilled labor force members employed in the energy sector and engage them in my research. Finally, during the initial period of my research, when I wondered aloud what brought Pakistanis together in a city as large as Houston, a young Pakistani American student at the University of Houston, pointed me toward the Pakistan Independence Day Festival. These serendipitous encounters provided me with the starting points for research, but over time, these sites proved to be important spaces for charting the heterogeneity of practices and experiences that guided my research.

Ethnographic studies of new immigrants to the United States have shown the importance of individual narratives in understanding the specificities of homeland, immigration and migration, and multiple conceptions of identity and subjectification. In following such research approaches, I conducted in-depth interviews with approximately two
hundred men and women to document individual life histories, experiences of migration and immigration, and engagements with social, cultural, religious, and professional networks in Houston and globally.

Ethnographic research and qualitative interviews were combined with archival research to document the changes in the everyday religious, cultural, and social activities of Pakistanis in Houston over time. Recent ethnographic research on South Asian immigrants in the United States has utilized ethnic print media as an important source of historical data. I similarly carried out research at the archives of Pakistani newspapers, along with documents available at Houston's city hall to chart a formal social history of Pakistani immigration to Houston and to situate the research historically within local and regional racial, socioeconomic, and political contexts.

During the entire duration of fieldwork, I resided in Hillcroft, the name of both a street and an area in southwest Houston that has a concentration of Pakistani retail outlets, restaurants, mosques, and residential settlements. This location provided an unparalleled opportunity to conduct ethnographic research at Pakistani organizations, form close relationships with Pakistani Americans and immigrants, and participate in their daily activities and engagements. It also enabled me to more fully understand the texture of Pakistani daily life and the range of religious, cultural, social, and professional relationships and networks within which Pakistanis are embedded in Houston.

Critiques of ethnography have raised profound and still relevant questions regarding the predicament of cultural representations and the importance of increased self-reflexivity and experimentation in the project of writing culture. As a foreign anthropologist carrying out ethnographic research among his own nationality group in the United States, I was cognizant of the complex ways in which power relations shaped textual representations, and the situatedness of the anthropologist in the production of knowledge. In spite of my position as a Muslim, born and raised in an upper-middle-class family in Pakistan, the period of research was characterized by shifting positions—sometimes an outsider, and at other moments, as an insider.

As a Pakistani Muslim with complicated relationships to diasporic nationalist projects and transnational revivalist Islamic movements premised on literalist interpretations of the Qur'an, I had approached my
fieldwork with some trepidation. I was overwhelmed by the generosity and candor of my interlocutors and the surprising ease with which I was able to enter the social scene and be included in the everyday and formal lives of Pakistani men and women from a wide range of professional, class, ethnolinguistic, and religious sectarian affiliations. Elders in the Pakistani community referred to me as beta (son), and younger male and female Pakistani interlocutors called me bhai (brother), inscribing me within the fabric of established Pakistani linguistic terminologies of kin relations. Shared ethnicity, national origin, and religion allowed ready access to a myriad of religious and Pakistani ethnic networks. For example, in a car-centered city like Houston, where I lived without a car, interlocutors and friends readily agreed to drive me to and from cultural events and gatherings and made sure to include me in wedding celebrations, birthday parties, family outings and picnics, and religious congregations.

This is not to state that the research that follows is a totalizing “insider’s account.” For one, as a single Pakistani male, I had greater access to men because of cultural and religious prohibitions regarding the interaction between sexes within certain segments of the Pakistani population in Houston. Having arrived in the United States as an undergraduate student in the late 1980s and having lived primarily on the East Coast, I lacked kinship relationships within the Pakistani communities in Houston that would have endowed me with status locally and, at least to a degree, mitigated gendered exclusions. I trained two female research assistants who helped collect oral life histories of Pakistani women and facilitated initial contact between Pakistani female interlocutors who observed the purdah (veil) and myself. When I first asked Amber, a young Pakistani American woman and subsequently one of the research assistants, about her interest in helping me collect data, she deferred making a final decision until after I had met with her father. Amber arranged for me to meet her father for lunch at a Lebanese restaurant. He agreed only after being satisfied with the authenticity of my research intentions.

Second, while my native fluency in Urdu and Punjabi greatly facilitated the fieldwork, it also marked me as Punjabi, the majority ethnolinguistic group in Pakistan. Punjabis are historically seen as the doubles for the hegemonic and dominant Pakistani statecraft and apparatus
and are implicated in violent ethnolinguistic struggles for rights, entitlements, and benefits in Pakistan. That Punjabis form a minority within the Pakistani immigrant population in Houston, where the dominant group is Urdu-speaking from Karachi and Hyderabad, challenged me to build relationships given my identification as a Punjabi.

Third, being a Sunni Muslim marked me as an outsider during my fieldwork with interlocutors from the Shia, Ismaili, and Ahmadiya communities. While I freely interacted with Shia Muslims at their homes and at Pakistani events, I asked permission before attending ritualized Shia commemorations such as Ashura. Ashura, a day of mourning, commemorates the death of the Third Imam, Husain, the son of Ali and Fatima and the grandson of Prophet Muhammad, through affective passion plays at a Shia mosque and community center and a procession through downtown Houston.

I also spent a weekend at an Ahmadiya retreat and collected oral life histories of members of the Ahmadiya community. Ahmadiya Islam is a reformist movement founded in the nineteenth century by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. Ahmadiya Muslims follow the teachings of Ahmad and believe him to be the messiah who is awaited by Muslims. This is a claim that is vociferously contested by the Pakistani state. It has led to an official classification of all Ahmadiya community members as non-Muslims. In Pakistan, the outcome of Ahmadiya claims to Muslim identity has been devastating and has contributed to the sustained persecution and vilification of Ahmadiyas. Indeed, within Sunni institutions in Houston, some commentators and leaders approach this issue with certitude, foreclosing the possibility of including Ahmadiyas within the Muslim ummah. A middle-aged Pakistani man who served on the board of a Sunni mosque and community center said to me on one occasion in unequivocal terms, “We are open to discussions on several issues, but a consideration of Ahmadiya community as Muslims is not one of them. There is a consensus among us that they are non-Muslims. It is just not open to discussion.” Perhaps given such exclusions from the Muslim ummah, and the commitment among Ahmadiyas to protest them, a Pakistani radio personality who hosted an Ahmadiya Islam radio program in Houston encouraged me to attend the retreat.

Finally, my status, first as a foreign student, and subsequently, as a temporary worker on an H 1B visa, also shaped my position in the
field, and as a researcher documenting the post 9/11 experiences of Pakistani Muslims. During the last decade, through the research and the writing of this book, I have experienced traumatizing racial profiling and encountered delays in the processing and renewal of my work permit that have severely disrupted my professional life, derailed research plans, and curtailed my mobility by restricting travel outside of the country for years on end. As I was about to assume a teaching position in 2006, I learned that the processing of my work permit application had been delayed because of background security checks. No amount of intervention from the local state representative or the officials at the college where I had been hired helped with expediting the background security and clearance process. It took thirteen months for the work permit to come through. During this time, the immigration lawyers I consulted advised me not to return to Pakistan. Without a source of income and health insurance in the United States, I subsisted on small loans from family and friends and went from having a tenure-track teaching position to being ineligible for employment. When the work permit finally came through, the relief I experienced was short-lived and the anxiety of a renewal weighed on me. While I worked toward changing my immigration status, I encountered delays throughout the varied stages of the process. At the time of this writing, the process is still far from over.

These immigration-related experiences—the persistent stress and anxiety of a tenuous status in this country—coupled with the crisis of unemployment and downward economic mobility have undermined any effort to set roots, invest in long-term career planning, or build relationships in the United States. Furthermore, my kinship relations became fractured as I was unable to visit family members in Pakistan for several years. The racializing of Muslims that I document in this book resonates with the vulnerability and oppression that I have personally experienced and continue to experience. It is these situated negotiations of outsider/insider status that shaped the knowledge that is produced in this book. In the chapters that follow, I attempt to self-reflexively account for my shifting position and identification, guided by a desire to provide some semblance of transparency to the power relations and clarify the contexts of interactions between my interlocutors and myself.
Overview of Chapters

The chapters are organized around specific ethnographic sites that demonstrate the heterogeneity of Pakistani American and the Pakistani immigrant experience in Houston. In chapter 1, I set the geographic context for this book, attending to the intersections between patterns of urban development, the emergence of the energy sector, and racialized spatialities in relation to diasporic Pakistani and transnational Muslim place making in Houston. Although Pakistani communities are dispersed throughout the Greater Houston area, there is a preponderance of Pakistani businesses, residential communities, and religious infrastructure in parts of southwest Houston. In chapter 1, two localities, Hillcroft Avenue and Bissonnet Street in southwest Houston, and newer, affluent suburbs, notably Sugar Land, in the farther reaches of southwest Houston, exemplify two types of urban spaces within which Pakistani immigrants are embedded.

Chapter 2 turns to the narratives of upwardly mobile, highly skilled Shia Ismaili Muslims employed in corporate America as a case study of transnational Muslim sectarian community formations in Houston. Since the changes in the U.S. immigration laws in 1965, Houston’s energy sector has served as a magnet for highly skilled Asian technical experts and professionals, as well as students pursuing higher education in the hard sciences. The collapse of Enron, an energy company based in Houston, in autumn 2001 resulted in massive layoffs. My Shia Ismaili Muslim interlocutors experienced rather unexpected unemployment. At this moment of crisis, they mobilized transnational Shia Ismaili networks to mitigate the impact of the loss of unemployment and rebuild their careers. The narratives and experiences of Shia Ismailis provide an important context for examining the intersection of transnational Islamic sectarian ideologies with racialized and classed regimes of U.S. labor flows, ideologies of the model minority, the neoliberal capitalist economy, and Pakistani nation building.

Chapter 3 continues to examine the intersections of transnational Islam with the neoliberal capitalist economy through an ethnographic analysis of the transformations in the South Asian ethnic economy, from its inception and development as a center of South Asian commerce in the 1980s to its twenty-first-century avatar as production and
consumption nodes in what I term the “transnational Muslim heritage economy.” The conjuncture of religious transnationalism, the realignment of Pakistani Muslim communities with coreligionists from other immigrant communities in Houston, and the transnational flow of capital and material commodities from Muslim countries to Houston has had the effect of transforming patterns of consumption and economic processes in Houston along the lines of religion and has contributed to the emergence of a transnational Muslim heritage economy.

I also relate these larger transformations in economic processes and practices of consumption to individuals embedded in ethnic spaces of commerce. The narratives and the everyday lives of Pakistani ethnic entrepreneurs who own and manage the businesses, and the working class and the working poor who provide much of the labor for these businesses, provide an important case study of the classed heterogeneity of the Pakistani Muslim community in Houston. Moreover, these narratives demonstrate the experience of marginality within ethnic spaces of commerce as well as within the larger American society. These narratives recast religion as a vital source of capital in mediating the experience of poverty and oppression.

Chapter 4, a case study of Muslim American gay men of Pakistani descent, illustrates the heterogeneity of the Pakistani population in Houston along the axis of sexuality. The narratives of my interlocutors center on everyday negotiations of religion and sexuality; they demonstrate deeply felt faith and spirituality and a desire to find acceptance in the Muslim ummah as gay Muslims. A cultural analysis of everyday negotiations of religion, race, sexuality, and transnationalism among gay Muslim Americans problematizes the exclusively heterosexual focus of research on transnational Muslim population movements and community formations in the United States in the early twenty-first century.

The complexities in negotiations of transnationality that are centered on the intersection of transnational Islam, South Asian cultural histories and diasporic nationhood, and racialized subjectification in the United States also find expression in Pakistani American festive celebrations, notably the Pakistan Independence Day Festival in Houston, the subject of chapter 5. I argue that the Festival belies the presumed secularity of ethnic festive cultures in the United States and provides an important case study for documenting the embeddedness of Islam
in Pakistani diasporic festive cultural celebrations. Indeed, the central-
nity of Islam in performances of long-distance nationalism and diasporic
nationhood position the Festival as a transnational Muslim celebration.
At the same time, the post-9/11 framing of the Festival as a “Houston
tradition” by the Festival organizers recasts it as a practice of cultural
citizenship that is central in mediating the experience of surveillance of
and racism toward Muslim communities, and in claiming space, rights,
and privileges as Houstonians.

In chapter 6, Pakistani radio programming in Houston provides
the final case study for examining the complex intertwining of trans-
national religious belonging with projects of diasporic nationhood. In
Houston, Pakistani radio is central to mediated negotiations of trans-
national and diasporic community formations on the one hand and
the exigencies of the global neoliberal market economy on the other.
The chapter traces the development of Pakistani radio from the 1970s
to the present as it was transformed from a community-centered ini-
tiative into a business enterprise. An examination of radio illustrates
how Pakistani politics range from the airing of personal conflicts to
the coverage of religion and homeland politics, especially the volatile
relationship between India and Pakistan. These mass mediated engage-
ments demonstrate the roles of diasporic nationhood and transnational
Islam in the production and reception of Pakistani radio programming
in Houston today.

The conclusion revisits some of the salient issues discussed in the
book and emphasizes the critical importance, as an essential political
project, of variegated alliance building between Pakistani Muslims and
other ethnic, racial, and religious communities during the contempo-
rary period of globalization and racialized U.S. regimes of surveillance.