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Making, Negotiating, and Maintaining Identity:
Gendered Racialization of Immigrant Bangladeshi Women

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Abstract
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I'm exploring what conceptions of interiority and exteriority, of Self and Other play into claiming or not claiming a "South Asian American woman" identity and the state's role in inscribing identity politics. The U.S. government has deployed identity politics such as forced racial categorization, creating protected classes within the law, etc. to retain coherence and control within the incredibly diverse population of the country. However, the state does not have a totalizing effect on populations; I'm interested in the resistance, fractures and, complicity that arise in post-colonial, diasporic communities when they face identity politics, and gendered racism.

Race is an ideology; the American racial ideology is challenged by the diasporic double consciousness that immigrant South Asian Muslims hold. The private sphere has been vital in the production of diasporic identities, politics and consciousness. It harbors a certain type of resistance that is unintelligible to the state and to other outside structures. Cultural, religious, and linguistic practices that is unintelligible to the state that happen in the private sphere is an everyday act of resistance against the racial ideology that has been placed on Muslims. The consciousness of the diaspora challenges rigid ideas of race, gender, and nationality. It works in subversive ways to create alternate spaces and mind sets that work to resist hegemonic narratives of what it means to an immigrant, South Asian, and Muslim. The diaspora can also be complicit in racial hierarchies of the state – it can reinscribe and proliferate racist ideals that further marginalize minority populations.

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Introduction

The political history of South Asian immigration into the United States is long, complex and driven by economic and political factors. Since the 1970s, there has been a large increase in immigration from South Asia (India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Nepal). Immigration patterns often follow the economic forces that globalization creates. The U.S. has been recruiting skilled labor from South Asia since the mid 20th century- and under the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, immigrants were able to sponsor their family members to migrate to the U.S. Due to the unique position that these immigrants occupy, they can tell us about the gendered-racial structures of the U.S.

I'm exploring what conceptions of interiority and exteriority, of Self and Other play into claiming or not claiming a "South Asian American woman" identity and the state's role in inscribing identity politics. The U.S. government has deployed identity politics such as forced racial categorization, creating protected classes within the law, etc. to retain coherence and control within the incredibly diverse population of the country. However, the state does not have a totalizing effect on populations; I'm interested in the resistance, fractures and, complicity that arise in post-colonial, diasporic communities when they face identity politics, and gendered racism. The theoretical frames that I am considering are a part of critical race, gender, postcolonial, diaspora and self making theories. I will ground these frames with ethnographic evidence from interviews and everyday observations of immigrant women from Bangladesh, most of whom work in retail and foodservice industries in the metro Atlanta area.

Always Wanted For Their Labor, Never For Their Lives

In *The Karma of Brown Folks*, Prasad details the origin stories of the South Asian diaspora in the U.S. These stories are weaved with immigration law history of the country. In 1964, Representative Matsunaga (D-HI) addressed the U.S. House Judiciary Committee and said that discrimination based on national origin should be illegal. He claimed that this type of discrimination provides material for “communist propaganda and creates a suspicion among our Asian friends about motives of the United States” (Prasad 74). During this time, the Committee was considering an immigration bill that would get rid of country specific quotas and make it easier for U.S. citizens to sponsor their family members for immigration. The Representative’s motivation for this speech was to create a moral argument for this reform. What was often unsaid about this reform was that the U.S. government was recruiting highly trained skilled labor to help boost the technology industry. This unsaid motive was then used by the state however it wishes to further its agenda. An example of this is vilifying under-paid immigrants for using public assistance and using that as a reason to cut welfare programs (Gomez 2015). It is important to pay attention to the state’s unsaid motives and actions and how that shapes race and immigration in the U.S. because it plays an important role in the racialization of immigrants.

A common belief about immigration to the U.S. is that it works by getting into the back of a “immigration line” and waiting for one’s turn to migrate - that this immigration line is administered race neutrally. In actuality, political economy and geopolitics all go in a state’s decisions about immigration. For South Asians, immigration to the U.S. has followed specific objectives of the U.S. government. One of the biggest factors in South Asian migration to the U.S. is the H-1B visa. The H-1B visa was created with the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 which allows employers to temporarily employ highly skilled workers in specialty

occupations. The Immigration Act of 1990 established an annual quota of 65,000 H1B visas which remains today (Lowell 2). Though workers under the H1-B visa could apply for permanent residency and potentially for U.S. citizenship, the premise of this visa views migrants as just bodies providing labor. The immediate family members of H-1B visa holders, until May of 2015 were not authorized to work, get a driver's license or attend college.

Commenting on the often times dehumanization process of immigration to the U.S., Prasad writes that immigrants to the U.S. are always wanted for their labor, but never for their lives (81). He writes that immigrants recruited for their labor are socially and politically marginalized. They become the bottom rung of the society and often become the scapegoats for the economic and social problems of the country such as rise in violence, unemployment and poverty. Immigrants are forced to assimilate into the social structures of the U.S. and not given the agency to live in a way that reflects their wishes, dreams, religion, or culture. While the social and economic marginalization of immigrants is pervasive, I add that South Asian immigrants, especially those who are Muslim, are wanted not only for their labor but also for the maintenance of the racial structures of the U.S. Immigrants don't solely live as labor supply even within the U.S. political economy. It is within the state's interest in maintaining a race of people who are alienated and othered. (Cainkar 131). Within this context, I want to explore what happens when immigrants exert sociality, refuse identity politics through everyday acts of resistance when the state doesn't want "their lives". I want to know how South Asian Muslims make sense of immigration, state power, race, and gender.

Feminist Methods of Presenting (An)Other

There are large feminist methodological concerns when collecting and analyzing ethnographic data. In *Feminist Activist Ethnography: Counterpoints to Neoliberalism in North America*,

Craven and Davis define feminist ethnography as "a project committed to documenting lived experience as it is impacted by gender, race, class, sexuality, and other aspects of participants' lives" (1). The project of feminist ethnography is to challenge traditional western academy's representation of the third world and marginalized people and uplift the subaltern's voices. Lived experiences and standpoint theory are strong themes in feminist ethnography because they provide insight and depth that is frequently missed in other disciplines and research methods. Standpoint theory posits that knowledge is not just measurable, observable facts, rather it is also socially produced and situated. Therefore, marginalized groups are better situated to understand power relations in a society than the dominant group (Collins 746). This is the uniqueness of studying South Asian Muslims – Post 9/11, they are socially situated to understand the racial and gender structures of the U.S. This ethnography also charges the researcher to ethically grapple with the fact that ethnographic evidence is always mediated by time, space, political situation, the identities of the informant and the researcher. While a true and perfect representation of lived experience might be impossible, there are certainly steps that have to be taken to bridge the gap between experience and representation. I will highlight these steps in the following sections.

I did eight interviews of Bangladeshi immigrant women in the Metro Atlanta area and observing festivals, fairs and other community spaces. The interviews were semi-structured and lasted about an hour long each. I chose this method because it will allow me to catch the richness and depth in my informants' experiences. I have a list of questions that guided me through the topics and issues that I want to learn about from my informants, however I kept the interviews open ended and let my informants shape the interview. I was committed to doing experientially driven research which meant that my informants' experiences were paramount in the construction of my interviews. I did two long and one short test interviews to figure out the

topics and issues that I would focus on in my subsequent interviews. Feminist methodology also implores me to think about who is doing the research and who benefits from it. Though my intention is not find the solution to the problems that my informants present, I hope that this research will provide insight that can be used towards change and improvement in the community. Advocacy groups often use personal narratives for the advancement of public policy and community service groups also use them to mold their services to better serve their constituencies. A commitment to use ethnography to help community lead political efforts is not only a part of feminist methodology but also a way to create a platform for the subaltern's voices.

Doing these interviews in Bengali is the basis of my feminist methodology. In her article "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses", Mohanty argues that third world women have been constructed as a monolithic, victimized group who are pawns in western patriarchy and global capital. An important way to interrupt colonial discourse in representation is to create a platform where voices of the subaltern can thrive. This includes using the native language of my informants and making sure I put the experiences of my informants in the center of my theory and analysis.

The scope of this project is small and there are some limitations. The racial and gender identity framework that I am will use in this research is space-time contingent. They are reliant on the current understanding of race and gender; they are also reliant on the socio-political culture of Atlanta. They are reliant on the fact that I conducted my interviews during a presidential election year where racial and immigration issues are hyper visible in the public. All of these factors influenced my interviewees answers and it's possible that they would answered my questions differently or less politically in another year. But this study is important because it

is this dependence on specificity that will highlight the richness of experience that only ethnography can bring.

Telling Our Stories

It is imperative in feminist ethnography to consider that identity does not stand in for method. Critically thinking about my identity is an important aspect of this research along with having a thought out feminist methodology. Though I consider myself to be an insider of the community I am studying, I have to deconstruct my subjectivity and how it will impact my ethnographic evidence. This is a very personal topic for me- I consider myself South Asian, and I am a first generation immigrant. I moved to the U.S. from Bangladesh when I was 16 years old. The struggles that me and my family went through, especially in our first years in this country, is one of the primary reason for my interest in this topic. Like my interviewees, I also worked minimum wage jobs in the foodservice industry throughout high school. My mother and members of my extended family continue to work these jobs that provide no benefits or safety. However, even within this environment, there is rich social life, connection and resistance to oppression and exploitation. I hope to uplift the struggles and sociality of my community. I am invested in this topic on an intellectual and personal level. I have been studying globalization, neoliberalism and migration throughout my undergraduate career. These geopolitical and economic systems have also deeply impacted my life.

On the surface it seems like I am researching a community that entirely reflects me. But there are vital differences in my subjectivity that I know will affect my interviews. I am assuming that my interviewees saw me as the same race as them, however age will again affect this. Most of my interviewees moved to the U.S. during their 30s or 40s. I moved during my teenage years and went to high school here. The processes and effects of gendered racialization

will surely differ among us. My informants probably perceived me as a woman and this may have affected their comfortableness with me and they might be more likely to discuss their experiences with gender. However, the fact that my haircut and my clothes are not traditionally feminine did create some distance. Though I am queer and most of my interviewees are straight, it was not a problem. None of my questions are about sexuality and it is not culturally common for elders to discuss matters of sexuality with younger people.

I told my interviewees that I am doing the interviews for my honors thesis at Emory University. To be able to go to Emory is considered a huge privilege in the South Asian community in Atlanta and I know that my interviewees took our interactions very seriously. There is a sense of respectability that went with the fact that I'm an Emory student. This might have affected the data I got - some may want to tell me things that they think I want to hear, or things that they think will advance my project better. I tried to avoid this by explicitly saying that I am there to document their experiences and though I have a hypothesis in mind, their interviews will direct my thesis, and not the other way around. Despite these possible barriers, I think the interviews went well. I was able to pick up implicit communications, vernacular, a better understanding of body language, and have more of a cultural understanding of these women's experiences and histories.

With all the advantages I get by being an insider to this community, there are also additional ethical concerns that arise. I am worried about giving interviewees false hope that this research will directly impact their lives positively in the short run. Zavella writes in "Feminist Insider Dilemmas" "informants are subject to betrayal and abandonment by the researcher and thus feminist ethnography masks a deeper, more dangerous form of exploitation" (55). As I have outlined in this section, even with the presence of several barriers, I do consider myself an

insider in this ethnographer project. I have and will continue to think about the ethics of this project; I will not attempt to be a savior of this community, nor will I pretend to be a researcher with the most authentic understanding of this community. I will merely try to be a good translator. I am using pseudonyms for all of my informants. I have also changed some identifying information for certain informants who requested it for security and safety reasons.

Diasporic Subjects in a Postcolonial World

Many diasporic people have cultural, familial, political and economic ties to the idea of the homeland. Ideas of the original homeland and the new host country are always mediated by each other. There is a problem with over-emphasizing the diasporic nature of this group, since issues like shadism, sexism, and classism get relegated to the private sphere and noted as familial dispute and generational differences (Lowe 26). However, migration and the changing of consciousness that it creates is vital to consider in the gendered racialization of these subjects. Steven Vertovec calls in Du Bois' theory of double consciousness and claims that diasporic subjects also create a critical consciousness through multilocality (8). The sense of detached belonging and hyper sense of unbelonging, of being 'here' and 'there' pushes the diaspora to have multiple and fractured subjectivities.

Most of my informants were born into East Pakistan which was a British colony till 1947 and were in their early teen years when the Bangladeshi liberation war broke out in 1970. Most strongly identify with the state of Bangladesh and embody the conditions of the postcolonial subjects. However, this postcoloniality is challenged by the racial and citizenship requirements of the U.S. South Asian post colonial subjects are in a constant process of negotiation with the state, with ethnic and religious loyalties and themselves.

Narratives of displacement, (re)settlement and memory are very important constructs in the racialization processes of immigrants. A gendered, romanticized vision of the homeland and a sense of being displaced from that homeland gets reinscribed in the collective memory of immigrants. It is “important to any discussion of identitarian movements is an understanding of memory, both collective and personal, constructed and erased, as well as of the narratives shaped and obscured in its mobilization to service identity affirmation” (Bahri 26). Even though this (re)settlement is voluntary, the belief of being displaced due to many structural reasons, especially due to economic insecurity, makes a strong impact on how immigrants view race, gender, identity and agency. Diasporic consciousness is pushed and pulled in this process and is complicated further with the introduction of the new gender regime and the private space where culture and heritage is relegated to (Prasad 102). In this regime, South Asian women emerge as the repository for culture and religion and are responsible for upholding practices that create the postcolonial South Asian diasporic private.

Collections like *Our Feet Walk The Sky*, *A Patchwork Shawl*, and *Body Evidence* recount South Asian immigrant women’s personal and political experiences. They detail how the private sphere has been vital in the production of diasporic identities, politics and consciousness.

“Fragmented Selves” in *Body Evidence: Intimate Violence Against South Asian Women in America* details how South Asian femininity and agency are shaped by communal meanings of honor and shame; feminine bodies then become responsible to uphold these values. “South Asian norms assume that there are no problems that cannot be handled privately” (Rajan 95). Though the private sphere is presented as an apolitical home, it is deeply politicized and highly affects South Asian diasporic femininity. Linta Varghese writes in “Looking Home” that South Asian gender works to create notions of home, homeland and community by widening the space of the

private and controlling women's behavior (158). Negotiating race and gender in the private and public sphere are strong themes in the experiences of new South Asian immigrants.

Racialization of Brown Bodies in Asian America

In sociology and legal studies "racialization" is understood as the process of ascribing political and cultural meanings, sometimes forcibly to racial identities (Cruz 2004, and Harpalani, 2013). Though no group of people are can simply be forced to take on a racial identity that they do not agree with, political institutions can do a lot to push people in identitarian practices. Though theories of racialization have focused on the creation and transformation of racial categories over time, Harpalani writes that the racialization of racially ambiguous peoples such as South Asians has been under-theorized. They have also been under-theorized because South Asians have been gone through informal racialization, rather than formal racialization- Harpalani claims that formal racialization through political institutions have decreased in a post Brown V. Board of Education era (111). Though it is true that the processes of informal racialization such as discourse, media representation etc. have been underestimated, I argue that formal racialization of Muslim South Asians has increased in a post 9/11 era.

Part of this formal racialization is the increased usage of the term South Asian in cultural, political and economic institutions. The term "South Asian" emerged out of bureaucratic convenience and political activism. The U.S. government started using different iterations of the term "Asian American" during the 1940s. There are big ideological and logistical problems with naming such a diverse group one thing- there are so many ethnicities, religions, sects in that region of the world that for a lot of people Asian American and even South Asian feels flat. The 1930 and 1940 census had Hindus in their list of races to check off- this is a religion. In 1980 - Asian Indian was introduced in the census and in 1990, the term Asian and Pacific Islander

(Morning, 61). How the state takes up different categorization and forces people to comport their understandings of race to fit its agenda is an important factor to examine in the gendered racialization of immigrants. Though South Asian is not a term that resonates with many my informants, I am interested in it because that is how political institutions racialize Bangladeshi women.

The state has vested interest in managing race and racial boundaries to maintain sovereign power and coherence within the polity. The U.S. government has an interest in managing race through political and legal institutions and “giving” race to the population. (Sheth 6). Political and social institutions in the U.S. deploy race as a neutral phenomenon. This is the American Condition - a turning of biological differences into an ontological project. The construction and implementation of race is especially unique to the U.S. because of its long history of forcing social meaning onto race. Race “reflects the logics and dynamic of legal institutions, foreign policies, diplomatic relations with other nations, attitudes toward perceived ‘outsiders’ and need by political authorities to respond or place its constituencies in order to remain in power” (Sheth, 3). This ontological project that the state and its institutions deploy is not divorced from the political ideology of the state.

There are different racialization processes happening for Bangladeshi immigrant women - they get coded within the “model minority myth” of Asian Americans and within the Othering of Muslims. The “model minority myth” claims that all Asian immigrants are highly successful, especially in academia and business because of hard work and diligence (Ho, 1). On a surface level, South Asians are categorized as Asian Americans. However, there are distinctly different processes of racialization of South Asian Muslims. The majority of recent South Asian immigrants are relatives of H1-B visa holders, undocumented immigrants and are usually low

wage workers. Though the stereotypes of hard-working and high-achieving Asians persist, almost 25% of Bangladeshi immigrants earn below the poverty line (CARE 22). This “model minority myth” is one of the ways that the state has given a population race with enormous social meaning attached to it. Though it is under-researched, this myth has affected public policy and distribution of economic and resources.

The way that brown Muslims are being racialized in the West also serves to function as the state’s agenda in the War Against Terror. It breeds “fundamental hostility that sovereign institutions directs toward individuals whose comportment seems to threaten the fundamental political-cultural order on which the state is based” (Sheth, 90). After the War on Terror began, the U.S. government started putting measures to control the Muslim population including detention, surveillance, raids, mandatory registration of Muslim immigrants, and passing laws against sharia in state legislatures (Sheth 96 and Cainkar 131). For Muslim South Asian women, visible markers of Otherness like the hijab threaten the so called secular order of the U.S. The figure of the terrorist and suicide bomber have now been expanded to include women. This affects the state’s practices, the consciousness of the public and the racialization of South Asian women. This particular racialization is unique to South Asian Muslim women since they have to grapple with both the gendered post colonial consciousness and the gendered racial ideology of the U.S.

In a moment when race is deployed by political and social institutions, what about those subjects that reject this? My informants are not just the victims of the gendered racial system of the U.S. This is my departure point - many new immigrants who have been raced as South Asian, brown, Asian American and Muslim do not want to take these identities. In fact, many of my informants actively reject identity and identify politics. Even the most marginalized populations

have agency and the capacity for resistance as there is no totalizing power of the state or its institutions. In a Foucauldian understanding of power - wherever the state is exerting power and deploying race, there is resistance (Foucault 45). In this conceptual understanding of power, there are both repressive and productive consequences of power. The gendered racialization of Bangladeshi women does not just happen without any mediation or resistance.

Making of the Neoliberal Self Against the Other

Transnational economic systems affect gendered racialized subjectivities and histories. A postmodern understanding of globalization and neoliberalism says that effects of these systems are bidirectional. Post colonial subjects are not just victims of this global economy, rather they are active agents in the system- shaping and re-inscribing these structures in their lives (Weeks 100). Some of my informants are here as a direct result of globalization pushing them out of their countries. Some are here to look for better economic, educational, health care opportunities. They are here to improve the social and economic standing of themselves and their families and they fall into the neoliberal script of self making and promotion. The political philosophy of race in the U.S. fits into the neoliberal understandings of the self. Creating and controlling racial and gender boundaries are done through various discursive, therapeutic and consumption practices. Often these practices of maintenance center around creating an abject or finding an Other to distance the Self from.

In addition to the state's investment in producing and administering a raced self, immigrants also partake in the various practices of self making and maintenance. It is done explicitly and implicitly. Using Foucauldian theory of the self, Freeman writes that neoliberal subjects deploy technologies of the self, "which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform

themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality “(Foucault in Freeman 2). This is at the heart of the contradictory ideology of neoliberalism. Though the state’s neoliberal ideology is imbued in flexible self making, its’ deployment of race is rigid and structured. Subjects are forced to comport to the racial category and identity that the state provides while dealing with state backed institutions and a culture that is preoccupied with flexible self making.

Racialization of South Asian Women

South Asians in Asian America

The 2011 estimated population of Asian Americans is over 18 million (Pew Center 1). The federal government defines Asian as people having origins in East Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Indian subcontinent. (Hoeffel 1). This means that Asian Americans encompass people from different countries such as China, Korea, India, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, etc. This categorization holds people together from an entire continent- people with different ethnicities, different languages, customs and cultures. They do however share a similar history in the United States. Asian immigration to the U.S. started in the 16th century and has continued to this day. The majority of Asian Americans immigrated after the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which removed country specific migrant quotas and made it easier for U.S. citizens to sponsor their family members for immigration (Lowell 6). And importantly this legislation created the H1-B visa which allows employers to temporarily employ highly skilled workers in specialty occupations. The Immigration Act of 1990 established an annual quota of 65,000 H1B visas which remains today. Many Asian Americans took advantage of this opportunity and immigrated to serve as a labor force for the booming technology and ancillary industries. Most of my informants immigrated to the U.S. between 2000- 2010, with their families by getting visas through family members who were citizens (through the H1B visas or Reagan administration amnesty policy for undocumented immigrants).

The Republican response to the 2016 State of the Union Address was delivered by South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley, who is herself South Asian. In her speech Gov. Haley remarked that she would welcome properly vetted immigrants, regardless of their race or religion. Just like the U.S. had done for centuries. (Haley 2016). This statement asserts that race and religion have

never been a factor in immigration laws. This is a view that many Americans hold and it is simply historically inaccurate. Immigration laws were made in the U.S. to decrease the rate of people immigrating from Asia. There have been several immigration laws that have specifically target Asians. In 1882, the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed which banned migrants from China for several decades. In 1907 the ‘Gentlemen’s Agreement’ limited the amount of migrants from Japan. The 1917 Immigration Act restricted immigration from countries in Asia. The Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 was passed to create barriers for any migrants that were not from Western Europe. Most Asians were not given a path to citizenship till the mid – 20th century.

Raced by the state

I never thought about race before. Since I came to this country, I’m constantly thinking about it. I think about it when I’m at work, I think about it when I’m at the mall, I think about it every time I see a police officer I think about it. This country is obsessed with race. I thought about my religion, I thought about my nationality, but honestly I didn’t really think I had a race before I migrated to the U.S.

- Luna

Most of my informants expressed similar feelings about race in the United States. They said that they felt forcibly raced in the country and indicated that they thought that the country was “obsessed” with race. Luna, a 43-year-old mother of two teenagers, immigrated to the U.S. from Bangladesh seven years ago with her family. Luna’s first time feeling raced was when she was entering the U.S. and was walking through the Immigration and Customs line. The officer made small talk with her and asked her about her race. Luna, confused When she said Bangladesh, the officer responded by saying that there were a lot of Indian Americans who live in Atlanta and that she would fit in great with the “Asian community” in the city. She was frustrated with this interaction and said she stopped conversing with the officer.

Luna seemed irritated even just recalling the story. She rolled her eyes and made sighing noises the entire time. Then she quickly added “well you know what it’s like, I’m sure you’ve

had the same experience in this country”. This statement shows some of the complexity of racial identity and racialized experience in this country. Luna was hesitant when the Immigration officer grouped her with Indian Americans and then Asian Americans in general. However, she did not think twice before trying to make a connection based on race and nationality with me. In fact, throughout her interview she kept saying “well, you know what its like” to mean that I must have had the same experiences as a South Asian. This highlights the fact that though Luna wanted to resist the notion of being South Asian or Asian American, she believed that we have common experiences based on our racialization and thus we do have something that binds us together. This is a very important point that most of my informants experienced and it is central to my thesis: identifying with a race is not the same as building solidarity based on racialization.

Race is an ideology, and the crux of my project is exposing it as such. Race has deep and meaningful, positive and negative impacts on people’s lived realities. In the U.S., race is often understood as both a biological and a social reality. The study of racial difference, racism and racial inequality “tend(s) to accord race a trans-historical, almost metaphysical, status that removes it from all possibility of analysis and understanding” (Fields 2). Understanding race and as a social construct is not enough. It needs to be understood as an ideology that operates through social, economic and political structures. Racial identity and identity politics depend on the notion that race is a thing, an observable physical fact, rather than a notion is in its core ideological (Fields 2). It is this racial ideology that effects how only everyday interactions but also the structuring of policies, institutions and systems.

The notion that race is an observable fact is what frustrated Luna in that interaction with the Immigration officer. The officer seemingly observed Luna’s race and mapped her onto his understanding of racial belonging in Atlanta. From his perspective, Luna, a person who was

entering the country and this city for the first time, already belonged to a space carved out for people like her. While she felt extreme frustration at being forced into that space on a “observable fact”, she understood the ideology behind race. She felt that this process of being racialized into a broad category of Asian is probably something that I experienced as well. The seemingly contradictory reaction that she had to this experience while retelling it to me is the reason why my ethnography is focused on immigrant women. I think their experiences expose the racial ideology of the U.S. clearly and profoundly.

The reason why I choose to focus on South Asian Muslim immigrants is because this group fits into the racial ideology of this country in a very unique way post 9/11. Sheth writes that Muslims are a “population that had neither been a coherent group nor a race prior to becoming the focus of the state” (Sheth 87). Sheth argues that the state racializes groups of people to keep coherence and order in the polity. It is not a coincidence that the first time Luna felt racialized was by an immigration officer, an agent of the state. Formal racialization by the state is something that all my informants said that they had experienced. One of the bluntest examples of that came from Nafisa’s interview. She had immigrated in 2000 and in 2002, her brother and her son had to go to an Immigration and Naturalization Services office and get fingerprinted and photographed as a part of the National Security Entry/Exit Registration System. This system was designed to track Muslim men from certain countries as a part of domestic counter terrorism efforts. Her brother and her son had recently travelled to Pakistan which has been a red flag for the INS. Nafisa described her experience:

It felt so intrusive and unjust. I was so scared, because there were rumors going around in the community, that Muslim men were being rounded up and sent to Guantanamo Bay. I felt helpless. I wore the hijab at that time and I started getting strange looks from my neighbors, at the grocery store and at my children’s school. Yes, people started treating me differently, but my family had never felt as ostracized at the day that they had to go to INS. I especially felt scared for my eldest son, he is such a soft- hearted person and I felt

like I had failed to keep him safe. It broke my heart to have to see him leave the house with his shoulders slouched and his head hung low

Nafisa told me that she stopped wearing the hijab in public after that incident with the INS. Tears had welled up in her eyes while she told me this story. The INS took no further action with her brother or son after the registration, but it was clear that the incident left a deep impact on her and her family. She expressed a sense of deep shame and embarrassment at being singled out by the state.

Nafisa said that she hated being part of a group that the government and society were persecuting. “It really bothers me that some database, somewhere in the government has my brother and son’s names. It feels like we will be tracked forever”. Experiences like this made Nafisa give up the hijab, and the men in her family stopped going to the mosque for several years. She professes a disdain for being racialized and categorized by the state. Nafisa and Luna’s stories, though very different from one another have a common theme: hesitancy to take on the state’s subscribed racial ideology.

Nafisa mentioned that she felt helpless that she couldn’t keep her son safe; it was hard for her to see him leave the house and go into uncertainty. This is a very telling moment of her narrative. She specifically mentions that she felt responsible for keeping her family and her home safe. When I asked her to expand on this, she clarified that she felt that “I’m responsible for what happens inside the home, and my husband is responsible for what happens outside it”. She explains that in “our culture” (just like Luna, she made several statements using the word “our” to signify and she and I shared the same culture, race and experiences), everyone has a role and hers was to protect and private sphere and keep it “pure”. She assured me that she still runs her home by the teachings of her faith. She tells her granddaughter all about Islam and teaches her Arabic so she can read the Quran. “Sometimes, my son thinks its too much, but what can you do,

you have to control what you can”. I’m not exactly sure what Nafisa meant by “controlling what you can”. She might have been referring to the fact that her granddaughter will soon be immersed in American culture and prefer to hang out with her friends rather than read the Quran. But I think Nafisa is also pointing to a deeper point – South Asian Muslim femininity, has been relegated to the private by both the operations of the state as well as operations of hegemonic masculinity and patriarchy. Nafisa was very proud of how she was running her household now. She said though society as a whole still felt unsafe for her, and that she still sometimes feels uncomfortable being in public, she loves being home where she can truly be herself.

The private sphere harbors a certain type of resistance that is unintelligible to the state and to other outside players. Cultural, religious, and linguistic practices that is unintelligible to the state that happen in the private sphere is an everyday act of resistance against the racial ideology that has been placed on Muslims. Nafisa articulated a type of resistance against the state’s coding of Muslims as an outside threat. She is using the means that she has to quietly resist the attempt to keep Muslims suppressed. The private sphere can be a powerful tool against the systemic degradation of Muslim culture and practices.

In traditional feminist theory there is a focus on escaping the private sphere and a need to conquer the public sphere, usually through means of the state. In his gender analysis of South Asian politics, Prasad writes “in the United States the desi¹ sunders the world into two: the outside world, the world of the workplace, is a world of capital that must be exploited as much as possible, and the inside world, the world of the home, is a world of culture that must be protected and cherished. Practical Occident and Spiritual Orient” (Prasad 104). Prasad argues that in this

¹ Literal translation of ‘desi’ is countryperson, but in the West, many diaspora communities use the word to mean South Asian.

construction the desi woman emerges within this logic as the repository of tradition, culture and this is a highly negative phenomenon. Prasad oversimplifies what is happening here perhaps because he does not consider socioeconomic status of the women. Much of research about South Asians have been about upper and middle class immigrants who had the luxury to not be bothered by politics or public policy (Morning 64). The situation is very different for working class and low income populations, especially Muslim ones, who have a harder time escaping the structures of gendered and racial domination. There is no acute split and hierarchy between the public and private spheres like Prasad suggests. When the private sphere houses these practices, it inherently transforms into a political space.

Nafisa's subversive resistance is something I noticed in a lot of my informants. Raffi is a perfect example of this. Raffi, a 45 year-old-woman, who works at a high school cafeteria is a very influential and well known person in the community. She is very friendly and has a boisterous personality. Our interview lasted twice as long as the others. It's clear that she loves telling stories and she is naturally funny. Raffi, who immigrated to the U.S. in 2009, said that she heard about stories from community members about feeling anti-Muslim sentiment everywhere. She said she never felt that anyone had outright treated her poorly because she is Muslim. "But you know I'm not what Americans think a Muslim woman is like, I'm too loud for that, most Americans don't even make the connection in their head that I'm Muslim. I don't care though, I'll mix Arabic words in my sentences sometimes just to freak people out" she said her thundering laughter filled the coffee shop I was meeting her in. Raffi said that she doesn't go to the local mosque because it's too controlled by traditional men for her. She however did assure me that her children all know the "right way of praying" and they pray together as a family. Like Nafisa, Raffi also expressed a deep sense of satisfaction at being able to construct her private

sphere as she wished. She mentioned that there were times when her husband would try to dictate matters of the household but she would shut it down immediately. From her perspective, she was powerful and had agency to shape her private life as she wished.

When I asked Raffi about racial identity, she scoffed at me. “I don’t understand the racial system in this country. What are we supposed to be? Asian or brown or Muslim or Oriental. I don’t know but I’ve been called all of those things.” She told me that whenever she needs to fill out a form where she has to pick a racial category, she completely skips it or checks off the ‘Other’ category. She explained to me:

I don’t know why everyone in this country including your grocery store needs to know your race. I’m serious, I got this survey in my email from the market and they wanted to know my gender and race. Ok I understand why some government programs might need it to make sure they are running it in an equitable way, but why does every form I fill out need to know my race. I’m not even sure I know what my race is.

Her frustration with being raced wasn’t just limited to checking off a racial category in forms. She expressed deep annoyance at moments where she felt that people observed her and her family’s race and made judgments about it. Though she said that people don’t really read her as Muslim, they read her as South Asian. She told me the several stories where she felt people categorized her, asked her racist questions and made huge assumptions about her. When I asked her how she dealt with all of that, she said she would always try to “intentionally mess” with people’s understanding of her. “I give people weird answers, or immediately ask them the same intrusive questions that they asked me. I try to have fun with it, because if I didn’t I would be depressed every day”. Raffi’s playful yet certain way of dealing with the forced gendered racialization is a form of everyday resistance to the hegemonic racial ideology of the U.S. Though it is true that this subtle resistance could never stop something like the Department of

Homeland Security starting the National Security Entry/Exit Registration System again, it is a powerful tool that is deployed by oppressed people.

South Asian Muslims have this double sided problem of being hyper visible and invisible within U.S. culture. Though they are seen as potential security threats and are made hyper-visible, they also get lost in this “Model Minority Myth” which serves to erase their struggles. The “Model Minority Myth” posits that Asians and Asian Americans are all hardworking, academically successful and are especially high achieving in math and science fields. (Yi and Museus 1). This stereotype is saturated in media and in other outlets of American culture. While on the surface it is not a negative stereotype, it can have serious consequences when people stop seeing Asian Americans as only hard working, high achieving people with so economic or social issues that need resolving. Varaxy Yi and Samuel Museus write that this is highly problematic construction of Asian Americans as a monolithic and homogenous group. “It serves to discount the challenges of other minority groups, it masks the serious inequities within a vastly diverse population, and it renders that population invisible in discussions carried out in public policy, politics, health, education, and other arenas” (1). This myth is working to erase the economic and educational struggles that is facing the South Asian communities.

Raffi’s shared various encounters with her children that played into the “Model Minority Myth”. She said that many teachers in her children’s schools were confused by her children’s race since they have Muslim last names and light skin. Their racial ambiguity has apparently caused what Raffi calls “racial anxiety”. She explained that she thinks that teachers in middle and high school make many decisions based on race. They put most of the upper class, white students in the advanced and gifted classes and most of the black students in less rigorous classes called college prep courses. However, South Asians are mixed in all the classes and this creates a

sense of ambiguity. A math teacher asked one of Raffi's sons what race he was in front of the entire class. "I was so angry when I heard the teacher did that. When I asked my son why the teacher asked him that question, my son explained that he was making recommendations for what classes students should take next semester and was slightly confused that her son was good at math. I think the teacher thought my son was Latino and he was confused that his racial stereotypes didn't fit into my son". Raffi confronted the teacher about his behavior and told him that she thought it was inappropriate for him to single out her son like that in front of the class. The teacher apparently half heartedly apologized and said that he didn't think it was that big of a deal and made an off hand comment about how sensitive children are these days. This is the one of the few moments where I noticed Raffi get really serious. Before this moment, even when she was sharing hurtful comments that she had received or telling me about her financial struggles, she always had a playful tone and a joke right after her stories to lighten the mood. This story however seemed to emotionally impact her and she did not attempt to hide it. Maybe it was because it involved her son, but she seemed very troubled by the fact that this country's racial regime would continue to affect her children.

The issue may seem small and there is pushback about why people complain about having seemingly 'positive stereotypes', but it does intensely impact people's lives and their access to resources. One of my other informants, Fatima also shared deep frustration with stereotypes of Asian Americans. She is a 35-year-old woman, and she immigrated in 2010. She was a very soft spoken person with a shy disposition. Fatima only finished the 7th grade in Bangladesh before she had to work full time to support her family. She was very excited to move to the U.S. when her brother was finally able to apply for her visa. She and her family had waited almost ten years for this. Tala thought that she would find a good job here and possibly go back

to school. Unfortunately, is working two jobs to make ends meet and barely had time to think about going back to school. Her English is not that proficient so she went to a community center to take English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. She said that she did well in those courses but was very confused by how the instructors treated her.

They kind of made a lot of assumptions about what I would be good at and what courses I wanted to take. I told them that I was interested in improving my English, get a GED and look into business classes, but they kept giving me brochures about STEM related fields. They wouldn't tell me about the seminars that the center had about 'women in business', I had to find out through my classmates. I was very frustrated with their treatment because I could only go to the center once or twice a week and they kept misdirecting me. One time they even gave me a brochure to a culinary program. I was also told about an Asian American Resource Center that was connected to the community center I was going to. I went there one day and I felt so awkward and out of place. People kept telling me to go there, but I don't really think I am Asian American, there was nothing there for me.

Gendered racialization can work in large sweeping ways but also in interpersonal interactions and affect small decision making that impact people's lives. Fatima's experiences at the community center highlight some of the struggles that many first generation immigrants go through, especially ones that have limited English proficiency. But her particular experiences as a Muslim woman in that community center is different. Fatima thinks that the program managers didn't think that she could ever be good as a business class, let alone run her own business one day. Fatima said that she has stopped going to the center but will try to look for ESL classes elsewhere. She seemed hopeful in her answer and I noticed her body language shift and tone, almost to signal a defiance against the gendered racial script that was given to her.

“Making America Great Again”

Categorization in forms and the Registry are just some of the ways that the state forces racial ideology on its subjects. Discourse, particularly political discourse can also have a very The current political discourse from the right wing regarding Muslims is terrible. Donald Trump,

one of the front runners to get the nomination to be the Republican candidate said openly that he would ban Muslim immigrants from coming to this country and create a register for current Muslim immigrants. This is a part of Trump's political platform to "Make America Great Again". All of the other Republican candidates have shared similar views and policies – it can be described as a reactionary panic against immigrants in this country. The reaction portrayed in the mainstream media has been of complete shock. There have been so many political pundits who denounced this. In fact, President Obama himself has made several statements about the xenophobic nature of Trump's policies. What most people forget is that the policies that Trump laid out has already been implemented in the U.S. through various immigration and citizenship policies. There was exactly a Muslim Registry, the National Security Entry/Exit Registration System that was carried out by the government and it existed under President Obama's administration. The Department of Homeland Security already controls how many people get granted visas from certain countries.

Most of my informants talked very animatedly about the presidential campaigns, especially about Donald Trump. Though most comments were jokes or insults, Tala and Nafisa were seriously concerned about their futures and the chance of a Republican president. Nafisa said "I know President Obama is not the best, and he has expanded the use of drone warfare, but I really worry about the alternative". Talking about Trump was one of the only moments that my informants talked about cross racial solidarity. Fatima talked about how minorities have to stick together and make sure that a republican president doesn't pass a lot of racist laws. "This has happened before to black people in this country and other immigrant groups too, we will get through it".

In this chapter I discussed how the U.S. government has raced South Asian Muslim immigrants and how my informants have managed these processes. This racialization ranges from interpersonal interactions to larger systemic realities. I have also illustrated how my informants enact everyday acts of resistance. Raffi, Fatima and Nafisa's stories show that though the state and political ideology about race can have a very strong effect on immigrants' lives, structures of power do not have a totalizing effect on people's lives. Raffi and Nafisa found solace in their control of the private sphere and Fatima recognizing the pattern of exclusion in this country. Though all of them expressed that they now spend time and energy dealing with racism, none of them said that it took over their lives. Next chapter I will examine how this gendered racialization is tied to nationalism, neoliberalism and the consciousness of the post colonial diaspora. The U.S. racial ideology is tied to its economic systems and is enforced through systemic and interpersonal neoliberal practices. This ideology is challenged by the consciousness of the diaspora that rejects stable categories through doubleness.

Making of the Neoliberal Self in a Globalized World

Globalization and the international movement of labor

Neoliberalism is a global phenomenon that works with the processes of globalization. It advocates for the use of laissez-faire economic policies, opening of free trade (with force if necessary), privatization of previously public sector industries, and reduction of government spending in public benefits or entitlement programs. Along with effecting systems of government, neoliberalism also works on an individual level. It colors the way people think of themselves and their communities. For my research, neoliberalism effects my informants on a systemic level as well as on an individual level. On a large scale it effects global labor movement and immigration; it also effects racial identity on an interpersonal level and how people define and maintain race. The U.S. political and economic systems are very tied to its gendered racial ideology. This ideology dictates public funding for education and healthcare. It shapes who is thought of as “cheap labor” and who isn’t. Ultimately it helps define a lot of the social realities of many marginalized populations in this country.

The experiences of Tala, Anya and Seema show how connected these international political and economic systems are to deeply personal ideas of the self and about racial and national identities. They also show how neoliberalism creates divisive practices that maintains the boundaries of race and gender. Tala, a 47-year-old woman moved to the U.S. three years ago. She used to be one of the Managing Directors of a public hospital in Bangladesh. In her last four years in Bangladesh, she had been moving around different districts of Bangladesh because a lot of management positions in the public healthcare system were being cut. Eventually her position was also cut and she was offered a position at Square Hospital, one of the many private, corporate hospitals that flourished during the mid 90’s. Funding from the state as well as

International Monetary Fund (IMF) turned towards privatizing the majority of public sector. Tala losing her job at the public hospital was one of the reasons she decided to immigrate to the U.S. She and her husband wanted to give their three children good job and educational opportunities. Tala now works as a receptionist at a community health center in Atlanta.

I know I didn't escape structural adjustment or corporatization by immigrating here. I know that the community center is run pretty similarly to the private hospitals in Bangladesh. But I just don't think that I would be able to handle working in that private hospital. I spent 20 years of my life serving the public healthcare system in Bangladesh and I just couldn't imagine being actively part of the public sector cuts there. I also knew that the adjustments would also hit the public school system soon and I would have to struggle to send my children to private school.

-Tala

Bangladesh is one of 35 countries that adopted Bretton Woods institutions' sponsored structural adjustment program (Bhattacharya 12). This program consists of loans provided by the IMF and World Bank. The loans have conditions such the liberalization of the economy, privatizing industries and making major public sector cuts. Many post colonial countries like Bangladesh have been deeply shaped by these adjustment programs. Globalization and neoliberalism explains why institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF care about the make up of economies in developing countries. As Tala explains policies of globalization like structural adjustment have a huge impact on labor movement and migration. Structural Adjustment Policies moved funds out of the public healthcare system and invested it into the corporate hospitals. This has been happening in Bangladesh in all major aspects of the economy most notably power, manufacturing, and education.

Tala portrays how the neoliberal policies of the IMF directly effected her personal immigration history which in turn would effect her concept of racial and national identities. She expressed after years of watching these adjustments happen, she wanted to "escape it". She juggled these feelings with nationalistic feelings towards Bangladesh. Tala had a very somber

disposition throughout all of our exchanges. Her answers to my questions seemed very composed and calculated. It felt like she was a politician running for office and I was journalist asking questions about her policy platforms. She found out about my project through Raffi (another informant) and called me and said that she was very excited about being involved in it. Raffi told me that Tala was one of the “political types”, that she was heavily involved in the leftist political group in Bangladesh. Raffi also mentioned that she was surprised to hear that Tala was immigrating to the U.S. “I never would have expected this. I thought she was going to live there and serve in the public sector forever”. Tala herself told me that she sometimes feels guilty about her decision to immigrate.

Yes, I do feel guilty sometimes, I feel like I abandoned my homeland when things got tough. I was very politically involved in my community and it was really hard to tell people that I was moving to the U.S. Living in this country has been hard for me. I feel the discrimination and prejudice. I don’t think I will ever fully feel like a part of this country, I will never feel like a full citizen. It makes me feel really bad that my children will not grow up experiencing their culture.

The guilt that Tala expressed is something that both Nafisa and Raffi also experienced. They all conveyed a sense that they had wronged their children somehow by having them move to the U.S. She also expressed feeling that she abandoned her homeland in a way. I asked Tala who she thinks is a “full citizen” of this country and whether she thought her children, who would grow up here fulfilled that category. She answered that citizenship was based on race. It’s not something that has to be achieved, it’s how political systems work in each nation. She explained that she thinks that though “White Anglo Saxons were the first true immigrants of this country”, they have the political power right now, so therefore they are the full citizens. Everyone else has to assimilate into their ideals. For Tala, everyone who was not an Anglo Saxon was in this different political space where they had to struggle to create a home. She said “I think my

children will struggle fitting into this society, maybe even more than me because I kind of know where I stand, they will have a harder time remembering and cultivating a sense of being home”. She added that maybe she was projecting these anxieties onto her children but as a mother it was her duty to make sure that her children knew about their heritage. Motherhood and the private sphere play a very important role in not only the consciousness and identities of Tala but also it defines the entire household.

How globalization creates international labor movement and voluntary and involuntary migration has been extensively documented such as *Globalization and its discontents: Essays on the mobility of people and money* by Saskia Sassen, *Servants of globalization: Women, migration and domestic work* by Rhacel Parreñas and *The Turbulence of migration: Globalization, deterritorialization and hybridity* by Nikos Papaastergiadis . These transnational processes affect constructions of citizenship, race and gender. For Tala’s case, she and her family had the ability to decide that leaving Bangladesh was the best option for them. Many migrants are not as privileged as her family. My youngest informant, Anya grew up in a very impoverished Northwestern part of Bangladesh which often suffered from famine and extreme poverty. Anya was recruited to work in Malaysia when she was sixteen. She was promised an office job, a good salary and educational opportunities. When she got to Malaysia her passport and other documents were withheld and she was sent to work in a packaging factory. Tricking young women into often times dangerous factory jobs is a global phenomenon and a by product of the global economy that needs a constant source of ‘cheap labor’. Anya was eventually able to get her documents and leave Malaysia. She didn’t explain the details of how she entered the U.S. or how she got a work permit here but she described it as a long and arduous process. She now works as a cook at an Indian restaurant and is taking an ESL class in the

community center. Her hours are not close to what she used to work at the factory, but she easily works 60 hours a week. Her understanding of nationality and race were knotted with her transnational experiences as a worker.

I don't really know what my identity is. Honestly I don't really feel connected to any particular country. I do miss my family, but my childhood was so upsetting that I don't like to think about it that much. My time in Malaysia was kind of like a blur. I didn't go out much so I didn't really get to see much of the country. In the U.S., I don't really know where I fit. I struggled to find a community here. Some of the Bangladeshis here look down on me, they think I am a slum kid. I don't really feel like I connect to any country specifically.

Similar to Tala, Anya also expressed that she feels like she is in an 'Other space', nothing that can be specified or categorized. She also specially mentioned the fact that she doesn't feel connection to any nation-state. She feels like a "pawn used for the economy", and doesn't have any particular strong, positive feelings for any geographical space. "I think its easy for the government to think about people like me because I am a woman. Or maybe they just see me as just another victim of poverty". Anya explained that her gender further marginalized and obscured her. She clearly articulated that her experiences as an exploited worker and as a part of a marginalized community very directly affected how she aligned herself nationally and racially.

Anya's story brings the complexity of racial, gender, and national identities in a globalized world. It is clear that national and racial identities are tied together. Papaastergiadis writes that globalization has raised "new questions about the institutions of governance and exposed the limits of the nation-state. The influence of transnational corporations, the integration of financial services within the networks of global stock markets have all undermined the legitimacy and putative autonomy of the nation state" (8). I agree that globalizations and the resulting immigration and diasporic communities has challenges the limits of the nation state and its politics of border. However, nation states have not simply let these transnational processes

challenge their autonomy. Countries are heavily invested in border control and managing immigration. In the U.S., Post 9/11, Immigration and Naturalization Services transformed to Immigration and Naturalization Services and the Immigration and Customs Enforcement and was housed under the Department of Homeland Security. Immigration was now seen as a national security issue. All of my informants indicated a level of discomfort when dealing with ICE or INS. The constant surveillance of the federal agencies deeply effected their feeling of belonging in the country. Anya said that “they ignore me when they want but I’ve also heard about Guantanamo and the registry where they take Muslim men”. Anya is pointing to the hyper visibility that Muslims have experienced post 9/11, but also points to the fact that the state can ignore them whenever it wants.

Neoliberal Practices and the Authentic Self

Ideas and discourse about an ‘authentic self’ has proliferated and the state has taken this up for its uses. An authentic self is someone who is in tune with who they are at the core. The racial ideology of the U.S. depends on this idea. It is a sweeping generalization of how people relate to themselves. The state demands a stable authentic self that comports itself to the way that identities have been defined. The authentic self is an example of universal selfhood, which is the belief that every person in the world subscribes to an idea of the self. It is rooted in western subjectivity and does not take into consideration the factors like religion, spirituality, gender, national history etc. that also play into peoples’ construction of themselves.

The idea of the homeland is tangled with the idea of the self, and immigrants show how the self can be in flux. Tala had struggled with the idea of her homeland as well. What she described is often understood in post colonial studies as the theory of hybridity or the “diaspora double consciousness”. Samir Dayal suggests that traditional understanding of the diaspora is

centered on the state and not on the lived experiences of migrants. “Contemporary debates about multiculturalism and transnationalism demand a rethinking of diaspora beyond the state centrist migrancy of allegiance to the host vs. the home country. Diaspora studies affords a critical perspective on the very visible thematic of cultural migrancy” (Dayal 1). He posits that migrants don’t simply shift their allegiance and identity from one state to another, and that there is something much more complicated that happening. What Tala described was a state of hybridity where she is working through a very complex web of belonging and un-belonging or as Dayal would note a “proliferation of border culture” (1). This proliferation happens by the literal dispersal of people who would traditionally claim border culture. This border culture challenges the stability of the self. It is no longer just confined to the actual geographical borders of nation states, it is ideological. Rather it is a diasporic consciousness that spreads as people migrate. Unlike the dominant narrative surrounding immigration in the U.S., Tala did not simply become an “hyphenated American” that is Bangladeshi-American or South Asian American. Instead, her nationality, racial identity were in flux and tangled within political and social structures. Tala’s cultural migrancy and diasporic consciousness was tied up with with the social and economic roles that she has played – public administrator, mother, wife, and immigrant.

Tala’s story is not a case for multiculturalism that is often peddled by proponents of globalization as a positive side effect of the global economy. Multiculturalism is a fraught and inadequate idea that depends on stable racial identities that come together and make the metaphorical “melting pot of the United States”. Dayal sharply contradicts this idea:

Multiculturalism feebly acknowledges the unmooring of cultures from places but simultaneously contains cultural differences within a unitary national narrative. I am interested not only in geographical displacement but also in the possibilities of a transvaluation of *diasporic* sensibility, a metaphorization of deterritorialized critical consciousness in general that is alive to the uses as well as the dangers of metaphorization (Dayal 46).

Several of my informants expressed this *diasporic sensibility*, a discomfort in racial identity inherently challenges a dichotomous understanding of ‘native’ and ‘immigrant’. It also challenges the stable understanding of race that multiculturalism is dependent on. When I asked Tala how she would identify racially at the moment she replied that she did not know. “I am something other than white, but I don’t know what”. The racial ideology of the U.S. (which includes multiculturalism) is dependent on a stable, natural and authentic Self. This does not take into account how migration and the diaspora consciousness, of always feeling “here and there” affects subjectivity.

The racial ideology of the U.S. expects everyone, including immigrants, to subscribe to an observable, categorized race but diasporic consciousness and practices challenge this sense of rigid stability. The ideology around racial identity is dependent on an authentic and natural self. Race is one of the ways that an authentic self expresses itself, this is the basis of western subjectivity. In the U.S. the self or the subject has often been built up against an Other: the savage Native American that needed to be colonized, the African slaves that needed salvation, the immigrant that needed to assimilate. The need for an Other show that the Self is not a natural and stable thing. As Tala said only some people were protected under citizenship and have access to political power; everyone else is in this Other space. Immigrants and diasporic consciousness challenges this notion of a universal selfhood. “Part of what is useful about the diaspora as an analytical tool is its ability to engage the dynamics of migration, settlement, displacement and place-making at multiple scales of analysis” (Bald 15). Bald writes that diasporic space inherently rubs against hegemonic power. This is illustrated by an anecdote that Tanya told me. Tanya works at a grocery store and is very active in the community. She is always arranging festival gatherings and community service trips. She works through the Bengali

Association of Georgia; they have an office that they work out of which is adjacent to a hall where they host a lot of their events.

When I first started volunteering there and started organizing events, there would always be police officers swarming. This would be especially true if it was an event where people came in traditional dress. We have a lot of Muslim men who grow out their beards and wear the skull cap. I'm sure this looks very suspicious to them (police officers). One time I had gathered a bunch of volunteers to move donated items across the complex to a storage unit. I swear three different security officers came and questioned us about what we were doing and whether we had permission to move things. I was so surprised; why would we need permission to move our own things. I feel like every time there are more than three of us gathered in the complex, they call for back up haha. I don't care though, let them stare and surveil all they want, we will keep dancing and keep making noise, that's not illegal.

-Tanya

Tanya described that she felt further emboldened when she was in community with other people who share the same experiences as her. She describes her perfectly how diasporic spaces filled with communality, song, and dance can rub up against hegemonic power. The noise that Tanya mentions that her community will keep creating challenge the racial structures that the state was to impose on South Asian Muslims.

To be clear, not all of my informants expressed diasporic double consciousness or complicated feelings about their identity. Some were very confident in their identity and subscribed to the notion of an authentic, stable self. Some were complicit in the racial and racist ideology that the state provided. Neoliberal practices that are encouraged by the state are essential in both proliferating the self and the racial ideology of the state. Neoliberal consumer practices were a very prominent way that some of my informants defined and maintained racial boundaries. Freeman called these therapeutic material social practices that help regulate the self (135). For my informants these practices were where they shopped, where they spend their free time, which restaurants they went to etc. Their answers felt deeper than just a preference in cuisine or grocery stores, rather they sounded more profound. Seema said "I only go to the

Bengali store, I cannot stand going near Patel Plaza, all the Indians go there. They try to pretend to be nice to us, but I know they don't like us going to their space" Another informant Nelly said "I stay on the right side of Buford Highway, and try to stick to the Bengali stores". When I asked what that signifies Nelly answered "That is just how things are done". Nelly and Seema also mentioned that they don't understand the Bangladeshis who spend time other South Asians especially Pakistanis, they thought that those people were wasting their time. It is telling that consumer practices would create deeper meanings in marginalized communities. "Histories of partitions, relocation and subsequent political conflicts continue to influence how many families define their ethnicities today" (Bandana 19). There are clear splits and conflicts within the South Asian community and metaphorical and geographical lines have been drawn even within diaspora communities. It's clear that these political histories continue to effect communal understandings of race and nationality. This will also continue to effect the next generation of South Asians who will learn from the collective memories of their community.

Neoliberal practices by the state also deeply affected my informants' lives. Neoliberalism cuts public benefits and programs for the promotion of supposed free market practices. Recently many programs that supported new immigrants have been cut. Tanya, one time called a community center and asked why they had stopped their new immigrant service classes. The answer she got was that the classes were cut because they had to use the space for other purposes and because the director thought that "it would be better for immigrants to learn new skills and about this country on their own". This is the contradictory nature of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism tells that in order to be successful you have to invest in your private self, just like the Director of the community center told Tanya. This is how the cuts to public benefits and programs are rationalized: the burden to provide services on private individuals and private organizations. In

this situation the state seemingly disappears. However, in some cases, such as the tracking and surveiling Muslim communities, the state is hyper present. This contradictory nature of its operation is how the state uses neoliberalism to its benefit.

The Apolitical Model Minority

The “Model Minority Myth” also perpetuates the stereotype of the apolitical Asian American subject, especially South Asian women. This apolitical subject has been created by both the state and the media and has been carefully used to maintain the racial hierarchy of the U.S. This along with stereotypes of Asian Americans who are good at STEM related fields originates historical immigration patterns. The people who came from Bangladesh, India, China, Japan especially since the 1970s onwards were recruited to work in these fields through the H1-B visa program. This however never gets brought up in the discourse around race and immigration because it exposes the fact that the state uses immigration and race for its purposes. Just as immigrants fulfill a role in the economy, Asian Americans fulfill a role in the racial structure of the country. It works to perpetuate a hierarchy of racial minorities in this country. When you have the “good, hard-working Asian Americans”, it is easy to victimize and further marginalize black and latino communities who are painted as lazy and incompetent.

Some of my informants were complicit in the “Model Minority Myth” especially as it related to perpetuating anti-black and anti-Latino prejudice. The “Model Minority Myth” also pits Asian Americans against other minorities in the U.S. In popular understandings of race relations in this country there is an accusation of African American and Latino/a people of not working hard enough, of not ‘pulling themselves up from their bootstraps,’ of not being ‘good minorities’ (like Asian Americans). Not only does this sentiment paint all minority experiences

in the U.S. with the same brush but it uses the Asian Americans and the “Model Minority Myth” to perpetuate the U.S. racial structures.

I think ‘our’ kids work harder. They are not lazy like some Americans, especially the black Americans. I don’t mean to be rude but this is just something I have observed. Why can’t they work as hard as my children do? They go to the same classes, have the same teachers. Even in my work, I’ve seen that black customers are the rudest, sometimes even more than the racist white customers I have.

-Seema

Seema has very distinctively made black students in her children’s schools and her black customers the Others in her life. Race and identity are relational. She has easily ‘observed’ the racial facts in her community. This brings us back to Dayal’s point on Doubleness; he is skeptical of it. “Doubleness as I am conceptualizing it is less a ‘both/and’ and more of a ‘neither just this/nor just that’. My attempt here is to conceive doubleness negatively, to explode the positive and equilibristic contractions of diaspora around the desire for belonging ideally to two or more places or cultures” (47). There are negative productions of this doubleness and complicity in anti-black racism is one of the most prominent examples.

The consciousness of the diaspora challenges rigid ideas of race, gender, and nationality. It works in subversive ways to create alternate spaces and mind sets that work to resist hegemonic narratives of what it means to be an immigrant, South Asian, and Muslim. The diaspora can also be complicit in racial hierarchies of the state – it can reinscribe and proliferate racist ideals that further marginalize minority populations. Neoliberalism and its practices is one of the main ways that individuals and the state can deploy race, gender, and nationality. Its contradictory nature works in favor of the perpetuation of hegemonic ideologies.

Conclusion

Feminist Ethnography is a challenge to traditional institutional social sciences. It does not believe in the stability of observable facts, measurable outcomes, or a researcher's objectivity. My research did not observe facts and figures of the immigrant experience in the U.S., neither does it have specific measurable outcomes. Instead I hope that it sheds lights on the complexity and depth of racialized gendered subjectivity at this particular moment. In this project, I have attempted to bring the theories of feminist ethnography and intersectionality in practice. I was not an unbiased, objective researcher. I was a part of the community I was studying and this heavily affected both the questions I asked and the answers I received. There is no way to mitigate these effects and in fact deliberating on them is the crux of feminist ethnography. "Establishing equality between participants and researchers was a fundamental strategy of feminist ethnographers, who tried to work toward intimacy, dialogue, and mutual self disclosure in their relationships with research participants" (Aune 4). I worked to bring this sense of reciprocity in my interviews by building a rapport with my informants. I am a part of the South Asian community in Atlanta, I shop at Patel Plaza which is the biggest complex of South Asian store, I go to festivals, concerts and Jumma (Muslim Friday prayer) with these community members. This not only help build trust with my informants, but it also aided the research since I had an insiders perspective on the community. Observing and exposing how power works in implicit and explicit ways is central to Feminist Ethnography. I have tried to show how the structures of race and gender affect the lives of South Asian Muslim immigrants.

All of my participants were direct immigrants from Bangladesh to the U.S. with the exception of one, who had lived in Malaysia before migrating here. Immigrants, especially South Asian Muslim immigrants, offer a unique view into the gendered racial structures of the U.S. The

forces of assimilating into the racial structures, racial identity and identity politics are strong. The resistance and complicity that arise in this situation is an insightful look into how race operates in this country. It was clear that all of my informants had deeply thought about how race and gender their private and public lives. The themes of belonging, assimilation, marginalization were prominent in my interviews. The process of formal and informal racialization which ranges from dealing with the Department of Homeland Security and consumption patterns shows us that political and social structures deeply effect modern American subjectivity. Adult immigrants who are newcomers to this system have to constantly mediate this positionality. I have tried to theorize how can immigrants resist these hegemonic systems through everyday practices. They can also aide in the state in maintaining the racial hierarchies. There is a lot of work that needs to happen to dismantle the Model Minority Myth and to prevent the perpetuation of anti-black racism in South Asian communities.

Race is an ideology; the American racial ideology is challenged by the diasporic double consciousness. The idea of the 'homeland' effects racial and national identities. My informants expressed tangled ideas of what they consider to be their 'homelands'. Through everyone had an 'origin story', and a clear narrative of why they decided to immigrate, not everyone was sure about what race or nation state they would consider their own. This ambiguity and refusal of a categorized race is a direct challenge to the racial ideology of the U.S. which promotes a stable and essential idea of race. Multiculturalism, which is a tool of globalized neoliberalism, requires subjects to have a stable racial identity. In a post 9/11 surveillance and police state, Muslims have provided a distinct view on how the state uses race. Being Muslims has increasingly become a hyper visible and marked category. The state wants its constituents to have a categorized race so that it can use this 'observable fact' however it chooses. The U.S.

government through implicit and explicit messages and actions has made Muslims the enemy of the West. This serves to perpetuate the War on Terror and fuels the military industrial complex.

The private sphere is resistance. Many of my informants expressed finding agency in their private sphere whether it was making sure that their children learned their histories, talking in Bengali, praying without fear, or wearing the hijab. From the perspective of mainstream American feminism, my informants are victims of the patriarchy. I propose that these women occupy a third space that breaks from the binarist 'victim' and 'agent'. Mainstream Feminism wants the private to be political through exercises in the public, i.e. rallies, protests, or through the state i.e. passage of legislation. The default understandings of resistance, as understood in liberal ideology enforces a progressive narrative of politics that is grounded in a liberation project. This is too prescriptive and not grounded in the realities that many marginalized women face that limit access to traditional means of political change. South Asian Muslim immigrant women show us that there should be no hierarchy of resistance or political participation.

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