Youth Culture, Citizenship and Globalization: South Asian Muslim Youth in the United States after September 11th

Sunaina Maira

Introduction: A State of Siege

In the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks, questions of citizenship and racialization have taken on new, urgent meanings for South Asian immigrant youth. Many South Asian Americans, Arab Americans, and Muslim Americans, or individuals who appeared “Muslim,” have been victims of physical assaults and racial profiling as part of the renewed anti-Muslim backlash and demonization of Arabs in the U. S.² This is not a new form of racism, of course, for it has been experienced by Arab Americans and Muslim Americans for many years,³ but South Asian Americans suddenly found themselves the objects of intensified suspicion and surveillance. There has been a shift, if only temporary, in U. S. race politics after 9/11 where the fault lines are no longer just between those racialized as white Americans/people of color, or even black/white Americans, but between those categorized as Muslim/non-Muslim, American/“foreign,” or citizen/non-citizen.

Within six weeks of September 11, Congress passed the USA-PATRIOT Act of 2001 (which conveniently stands for United and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act) under considerable pressure from Attorney General John Ashcroft who threatened Congress that “Those who scare peace-loving people with phantoms of lost liberties ... only aid terrorists.”⁴ Not so conveniently for Muslim, Arab, and South Asian Americans, the new laws gave the United States government sweeping new powers of investigation and surveillance — powers in many cases that had been circumscribed after the Church Committee brought to light the excesses of the FBI’s COINTELPRO operation that investigated and infiltrated civil rights groups in the 1960s.⁵

The Patriot Act has violated basic constitutional rights of due process and free speech, and, in effect, sacrificed the liberties of specific minority groups in exchange for a presumed sense of “safety” of the larger majority by creating an ambiguously defined category of “domestic terrorism”; by granting the government enhanced surveillance powers; and by taking away due process rights from non-citizens who can be placed in mandatory (and in actuality, indefinite and secret) detention and deported because of participation in broadly defined “terrorist activity” (often for minor immigration violations and also in secret).⁶ Before 9/11, about eighty percent of the American public thought it was wrong for law enforcement to use racial profiling, popularly used to refer to the disproportionate targeting of African American drivers by police for the offense of “driving while black.” However, after the shock of the 9/11 attacks, sixty percent favored racial profiling, “at least as long as it was directed at Arabs and Muslims.”⁷

After the terrorist attacks, popular feeling was that “somebody had to pay” domestically, as well as internationally, to restore the illusion of national security for Americans. The groups whose civil rights were considered expendable were two populations who historically have had little power to combat infringement on their civil rights: immigrants and Arab Americans. Surveillance of Arab American communities is not new in the U. S. It is closely tied to U. S. support of the Israeli occupation of Palestine...
and clampdowns on those who have protested U.S. policy in the Middle East at various times since the 1967 Israeli-Arab war — from the FBI’s monitoring of the General Union of Palestinian Students in the 1980s, to the attempted deportation of the pro-Palestinian activists known as the “L.A. 8,” to the nationwide monitoring and interviews of Arab American individuals and organizations before and during the first Gulf War. 

However, South Asians in this country have generally had a different relationship than Arab Americans to the policies of the national security state. Since the early twentieth-century, the anti-colonial activities of Indian immigrants who mobilized in the U.S. and published radical pamphlets such as “Ghadar” [Mutiny] have been targeted. The primary influx of immigrants from South Asia actually came to the United States beginning in the late 1960s as part of an effort by the U.S. to shore up its scientific and military technology expertise during the Cold War. Graduate students, scientists, and professionals who emigrated after the Immigration Act of 1965 generally did not engage in challenges to their adopted home state’s policies, and despite economically strategic lobbying for minority status in the 1970s to obtain civil rights benefits, the first wave of South Asians has, for the most part, tried hard to live up to the mythic “model minority” image. However, the second wave of South Asian immigrants, who began coming to the U.S. in the 1980s through family reunification provisions of the 1965 Act, was less affluent and credentialed than their predecessors, more likely to come from small towns or even villages, and to have had a very different exposure to U.S. race politics and the welfare state than those earlier immigrants. In addition, while immigrants from the first wave typically reside in middle- and upper-middle class, predominantly white suburbs in the U.S., these more recent immigrants generally live in urban areas, often in multi-ethnic communities, and work in service-sector jobs or in small businesses. The civil rights crisis after 9/11 thus not only affected South Asian, Arab, and Muslim African Americans differentially due to their varied histories of arrival and residence in the U.S., and the different relationships of the U.S. with their home nation-states. It also affected various South Asian American communities differentially, based on their class status and previous understandings of U.S. racism.

Unfortunately, it seems that so far there has been no nationally-based, collectively-organized response to the post 9/11 civil rights crisis.

This lack of coordinated national response by South Asian Americans is disturbing but not surprising. The relative absence of civil rights organizations established by the first wave of South Asian immigrants and the class schism in the community means that there is no organized national South Asian civil rights infrastructure, akin to the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, to respond to the crisis affecting the South Asian American community. The crisis of civil rights for South Asian Americans after 9/11 is the most virulent example of large-scale scapegoating of and violence against South Asians in the U.S. since the anti-Indian riots on the West Coast in the early twentieth century. As part of the domestic “War on Terror,” at least 1200 and up to 3000 Muslim immigrant men were rounded up and detained in the aftermath of 9/11, without any criminal charges, some in high security prisons. Nearly forty percent of the detainees are thought to be Pakistani nationals, though virtually none of the detainees has been identified publicly and the locations where many have been held remain secret, still true of the ongoing detentions in 2004. After 9/11, Muslim families began experiencing the “disappearances” of their husbands, brothers, and sons, and many families ended up leaving the country after indefinite separations and loss of the means of family support. Although unreported in the mainstream media, there have been mass deportations of Pakistani nationals leaving on chartered planes, some leaving in the middle of the night from New York State.

In June 2002, the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS) was established; this grossly discriminatory system requires all male nationals over sixteen years of age from twenty-four Muslim-majority countries, including Pakistan and Bangladesh as well as North Korea, to submit to photographing and fingerprinting at federal immigration facilities. After news broke of mass arrests of Iranians complying with special registration in southern California in December 2002, some undocumented immigrants and those with pending immigration applications, worried about registering and not being released, tried to flee to Canada. By 12 March 2003, the Canadian immigration service reported 2,111 refugee claims by Pakistanis just since 1 January of that year. The irony of Pakistanis leaving the U.S. to try to get political asylum in another country is hidden, rather than lost, for most Ame-
It would not be too dramatic to say that many in these communities feel under siege. The profiling and hysteria depicted in the early prescient 1998 film, The Siege — in which Muslim and Arab Americans in New York are rounded up behind barbed wire in response to a terrorist threat — resembles truth more than fiction. The profiling of Muslim and Arab immigrants affects the composition of communities and the nature of relationships within them. This is particularly prominent in areas with large concentrations of these populations that have seen an exodus of immigrants seeking to avoid arrest or deportation, such as Brooklyn’s “Little Pakistan” on Coney Island Avenue. More than 15,000 undocumented Pakistanis had reportedly left the country for Canada, Europe, and Pakistan by June 2003, according to the Pakistani Embassy in Washington. Perhaps more alarming, “an unknowable number of immigrants have burrowed deeper underground,” creating an even more subliminal and precarious world of individuals who cannot fully admit they exist, who cannot safely live their lives in the U.S. for fear of deportation and so live in the shadows, as well as under siege.

South Asian Muslim Immigrant Youth in Cambridge

These events in the aftermath of 9/11, now called the “war at home,” raise questions about what the racial profiling and anti-Muslim backlash mean for South Asian and Muslim immigrant youth coming of age in the U.S. at a moment when their “right to belong” in the nation is suspect. How do U.S. immigration and “homeland security” policies targeting Muslim immigrants affect the understandings of race, nationalism, and citizenship of South Asian Muslim immigrant youth? This paper is based on an ethnographic study that I began in fall 2001, focused on working-class, Indian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi immigrant students in the public high school in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and on their notions of cultural citizenship. As part of my research, I also interviewed immigrant parents, school staff, community and religious leaders, city officials, and community activists. I argue here that young Muslim immigrants’ understandings of citizenship shed light on the ways in which nationalism in the U.S. is defined in relation to transnationalism and globalization, multiculturalism and polyculturalism, and increasingly overtly, to the links between domestic and foreign policy that underlie U.S. imperial power. Not all the immigrant youth in this study have been directly targeted by the War on Terror, but I found that all of them in some way had to grapple with the scapegoating of Muslims, the demonization of Islam, and the fear of surveillance and deportation after 9/11. I also found that some youth, rather than accepting uncritically the premises of the state’s domestic and international War on Terror, were critical of U.S. responses to 9/11 from the perspective of global human rights, thus reframing the basis of citizenship, as my analysis will demonstrate.

Cambridge, Massachusetts is an interesting site for this research, for, while media attention and community discussions of racial profiling were primarily focused on South Asians in the New York/New Jersey area, there were hundreds of incidents around the country in places where South Asians have not been as visible in the public sphere or as organized, including incidents in the Boston area. It is also useful to focus on communities such as Cambridge, known to be more politically liberal, to understand what kinds of responses such a setting allows and does not allow, particularly for youth. The Cambridge Public High School has an extremely diverse student body that reflects the city’s changing population, with students from Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia. Students from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan constitute the largest Muslim population in the school, followed by youth from Ethiopia, Somalia, and Morocco. There are about sixty students of South Asian origin, including a few Nepali and Tibetan youth, who are almost evenly split between immigrant students and second-generation youth.

The South Asian immigrant student population is predominantly working- to lower-middle class, recently arrived (within the last five to seven years),
and with minimal to moderate fluency in English. As such, these youth generally seem to socialize predominantly with other South Asian immigrant youth and with other immigrant students in the bilingual education program. The majority of Indian immigrant youth are from Sunni Muslim families, most from small towns or villages in Gujarat in western India. Several of the South Asian students are actually related to one another as their families have sponsored relatives as part of an ongoing chain migration. Whole families have migrated from the same village in Gujarat, recreating their extended family networks in the same apartment building in Cambridge. The immigrant parents of these adolescents generally work in low-income jobs in the service sector, and they themselves work after school, up to thirty hours a week, in fast food restaurants, gas stations, retail stores, and as security guards.

At least half of the South Asian immigrant youth in the school live in public and/or private high-rise apartment complexes in North Cambridge. The remainder live in the Central Square area, an ethnically and racially diverse neighborhood that is undergoing gentrification. The families of these South Asian (Sunni) Muslim youth are not very involved in local Muslim organizations or mosques that draw a diverse Arab, North African, Asian, and African American population. They tend to socialize mainly with people from their own ethnic community, but neither do they seem to affiliate with the Indian American or Pakistani American community organizations in the Boston area, which tend to involve mainly middle- to upper-middle class, suburban families. Thus the responses of these immigrant youth are rooted in the specificities of their urban, working-class experience, an experience that is often completely unknown to their more privileged South Asian American counterparts in the area.

**Cultural Citizenship**

I found that in nearly all my conversations with South Asian immigrant youth, as well as with their parents, the discussion would inevitably turn to citizenship, for this was an issue that had profoundly shaped their lives and driven their experiences of migration. Research on youth and citizenship is meager and generally tends to come out of traditions of developmental psychology or functionalist socialization theory, both of which assume a limited definition of what constitutes the “political.” More recent work challenges these assumptions and pays attention to young people’s own understandings of politics, and the ways they negotiate relationships of power in different realms of their everyday life.

Citizenship has traditionally been thought of in political, economic, and civic terms, but increasingly, analysis focuses on the notion of cultural citizenship, for the rights and obligations of civic citizenship are mediated by race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, as well as religion, as apparent in the post-9/11 backlash. Cultural citizenship, according to anthropologist Lok Siu, is comprised of the “behaviors, discourses, and practices that give meaning to citizenship as lived experience” in the context of “an uneven and complex field of structural inequalities and webs of power relations,” the “quotidian practices of inclusion and exclusion.” Cultural citizenship becomes an important construct to examine because legal citizenship is clearly no longer enough to guarantee protection under the law with the state’s War on Terror, as is clear from the profiling, surveillance, and detention of Muslim Americans who are U.S. citizens.

The concept of cultural citizenship has been developed by persons such as Latino studies scholars Renato Rosaldo and William Flores and Rina Benczur, who take a new social movement-based approach to immigrant and civil rights. Their use of cultural citizenship analyzes how “Cultural phenomena — from practices that organize the daily life of individuals, families, and the community, to linguistic and artistic expression — cross the political realm and contribute to the process of affirming and building an emerging Latino identity and political and social consciousness.” The notion of cultural citizenship has also been developed, from a Foucauldian perspective, by cultural theorists such as Aihwa Ong, who are concerned with citizenship as a regulatory process, and who define cultural citizenship as “A dual process of self-making and being-made within webs of power linked to the nation-state and civil society.” Some writers in this vein, such as Toby Miller, have been skeptical about the possibility for using citizenship as the collective basis for political transformation — given its increasingly individualized, privatized definition — but are still open to its potential. My work, in a sense, bridges these two approaches. I am interested in the critical possibilities of cultural citizenship to galvanize the struggle for civil and immigrant rights, particularly for young immigrants, as suggested by the work of
Latino Studies scholars. At the same time, I view citizenship as being a limited basis for social transformation, given that it is state-sponsored and also increasingly privatized. Cultural citizenship brings with it all the contradictions of liberal multiculturalism and the inequities of global capital in which it is embedded, and so it is necessarily politically ambiguous in its emancipatory possibilities.

In my research, I am finding that issues of economic or legal citizenship spill over into cultural citizenship. These categories are more blurred than some theorists of cultural citizenship have traditionally acknowledged, so it not always possible to cleanly distinguish between the economic, legal, and cultural bases of citizenship. At this early stage in my analysis, I think there are three ways in which South Asian immigrant youth understand and practice cultural citizenship: flexible citizenship, multicultural or polycultural citizenship, and dissenting citizenship. These terms, drawn from the ways in which the young immigrants in my study expressed and practiced cultural citizenship, build on existing theories of flexible and multicultural citizenship, extending them but also suggesting new, critical forms (polycultural and dissenting), all of which, however, have their own contradictions and ambiguities. These three categories point to the ways in which the questions facing these youth go beyond debates about cultural rights to questions of economic, civil, and human rights, but, at the same time, point to the limitations of rights-based discourses, as the experiences of these youth demonstrate.

The forms of citizenship that emerged from this study — flexible, multicultural and polycultural, and dissenting citizenship — are responses produced by these immigrant youth simultaneously to the conditions of living a transnational adolescence. They are not exclusive of one another, nor do they exist in some kind of hierarchy of political or personal efficacy. I view these modes of citizenship not as static categories in a typology but as processes that are dynamic and crossing different spheres: social, economic, and political. These citizenship practices are performed by adults as well, but it is clear that young people have to negotiate particular concerns due to their positioning in the family and social structure, as well as their participation in education. While immigrant youth have to deal with the migration choices of their parents and the demands of being both students and workers, it is clear that their lives are profoundly shaped by the state and economic policies that drive their parents to cross national borders. Young people, too, grapple with the meaning of the state's role in their lives and with the implications of war, violence, and racism for an ethics of belonging.

Flexible Citizenship

"Flexible citizenship" is a concept that emerged to describe the experience of migrants who use transnational links to provide political or material resources not available to them within a single nation-state, as has been argued for affluent Chinese migrants by Aihwa Ong. It is different from traditional notions of dual citizenship, which imply an actual legal status as citizen of two nation-states, for it leaves open questions of national loyalty or strategic uses of citizenship status. The Muslim immigrant youth in my study understand citizenship in relation to the U.S. as well as one or more nations in South Asia. For them, national affiliations (such as "Indian" or "Bangladeshi") as well as linguistic-regional identities (such as Gujarati or Pathan) were very important, and they viewed all these identifications as compatible with U.S. citizenship. Most of these young immigrants desired and had applied for U.S. citizenship since they came to the U.S. sponsored by relatives who are permanent residents or citizens, in some cases fathers who migrated alone many years earlier. At least two boys had been separated from their fathers for about fifteen years. Faisal said his father had left Pakistan for the U.S. right after he was born, and had in effect missed his son's childhood while he was working in the U.S. to support him and the rest of his family until they could be reunited. By the time Faisal came to the U.S., however, his older brother was too old to enroll in high school and had to struggle to get a GED and find a job with limited English skills.

About half of these South Asian Muslim immigrant youth have green cards already; the rest are a mix of citizens and undocumented immigrants. They desired a U.S. passport because of what they perceived as its civic and also economic benefits. A few stated that they wanted to be able to vote, and several said that they wanted to be able to travel freely between the U.S. and South Asia, to be mobile in work and family life. After 9/11, of course, citizenship seemed to become less a matter of choice for immigrants, particularly Muslims and South Asian/Arab Americans, than a hoped-for shield...
against the abuses of civil rights. In fact, a few were surprised that I myself had not yet obtained citizenship in the fall of 2001, and were in some cases concerned that I seemed to have taken so long to obtain this vital document!

Citizenship for these immigrant youth is part of a carefully planned, long-term, family-based strategy of migration in response to economic pressures on those living in, or at the edge of, the middle class in South Asia. Some of these youth in Cambridge imagine their lives spanning national borders and speak of returning to South Asia, at least temporarily, once they have become U. S. citizens and perhaps when their parents have retired there. Transnational marriages and social ties are common in their families. For example, Sohail, who worked as a computer assistant after school, wanted to set up a transnational hi-tech business so that he could live part-time in Gujarat and part-time in Boston while supporting his parents. He saw this as a development strategy for Non-Resident Indians (or NRIs, a term used by the Indian government) to fulfill their obligations to the home nation-state, using the benefits of U. S. citizenship. It seems to me that these young immigrants’ notions of flexible citizenship are based on at least two linked processes of “self-making” and “being-made” as citizens in relation to the various nation-states with which they affiliate. First, their identification with India or Pakistan is based largely on transnational popular culture, on Bollywood films, South Asian television serials, and Hindi music that they access through video, DVD, satellite TV, and the Internet. In the interest of space, I cannot delve here into an analysis of transnational popular culture, but it is clearly an important arena for the expression of cultural citizenship by immigrant youth.

Second, flexible citizenship is necessarily intertwined with labor and education, issues that are interrelated for working-class, immigrant youth. These youth have come to the U. S. with their families, in some sense, as migrant workers. They work in low-wage, part-time jobs in retail and fast food restaurants and struggle in school to get credentials for class mobility. These are the same jobs that are generally also occupied by young people of diverse ethnic backgrounds in the U. S. However, unlike non-immigrants who provide this cheap and flexible labor, immigrant youth can perform the economic citizenship required of neoliberal citizenship, which is predicated on individual productivity in the capitalist state, but cannot win cultural citizenship because they are non-white, immigrant youth — and currently, because they are identified as Muslim. Their participation in U. S. public culture, in fact, is largely through work. Their relations outside the school and community are mainly with other immigrant or young workers and with employers. Waheed, for example, lamented that he could never go out into the city with his friends because they all worked on different schedules and it was almost impossible for them to have a night off together, since he worked night shifts at his weekend job as a security guard.

Compared to more affluent or highly credentialed South Asian immigrants, these working-class youth are more ambiguously positioned in relation to what Ong calls the U. S. neoliberal ideology of productivity and consumption that emphasizes “freedom, progress, and individualism.” They see the limits of this model of the self-reliant consumer-citizen — and of the “American Dream” — in their own lives and that of their families. Soman, who works in his family’s Bengali restaurant in Central Square after school and who often waits on South Asian students from MIT, says, “Here, you live in a golden cage, but it’s still a cage ... My life is so limited. I go to school, come to work, study, go to sleep.” The idea of productive citizenship is necessarily predicated on legal-juridical regulations of citizens and workers, and on the need for a low-wage, undocumented/non-citizen labor pool by employers who wish to depress wages and keep labor compliant. The work of citizenship as a disciplining technology of the state that keeps labor and immigrants vulnerable to exploitation and suppresses dissent is very evident after 9/11 with the ongoing arrests and deportations of immigrant workers for visa violations. There is a greater fear among non-citizens who have transnational ties, political or familial, that they are increasingly suspect when the “threat” to national security is attributed to specific foreign nations. Yet, in the face of such regulations of citizenship and its cultural boundaries, it became apparent to me that these young Muslim immigrants thought about citizenship in ways that were themselves flexible, shifting, and contextual. In some cases, it seems that religious identity actually prompts youth to think of themselves as belonging to the U. S., or at least identifying with its concerns, if not identifying as “American.” Sohail said to me in fall 2001, “Islam
teaches [us that] whatever country you live in, you should support them ... See, if I live in America, I have to support America; I cannot go to India." This, of course, is the same boy who said that he ultimately wanted to return to India and support its development. But these statements are not as contradictory as they first appear. Sohail is able to frame his relationship to Islam in a way that will help him think through questions of loyalty at a moment in the U. S. when Muslims are being framed as non-citizens because of a particular construction of Islam. Instead, Sohail uses Islam to counter this technology of exclusion of Muslims from the nation-state, both officially and unofficially, and to support a flexible definition of citizenship.

At a Boston rally in November 2001, protesting the imminent war in Iraq, Imam Talal Eid of the Islamic Center of New England used rhetoric of Muslim citizenship that has been increasingly adopted by Muslim clerics and commentators after 9/11. He said that he spoke for peace as a U. S. citizen of many years who believed that Muslim Americans could contribute to the "civilizing" of America (an interesting turn on Samuel Huntington’s phrase). Sohail’s strategy is part of a rather sophisticated understanding of citizenship as necessarily mobile, as drawing on different ideological resources to respond to the exigencies of diverse moments and places. Flexible citizenship is clearly an economic/family strategy for these youth but also part of a cultural strategy that allows them to manage diverse national affiliations.

Multicultural or Polycultural Citizenship

Not surprisingly, some of these immigrant youth talked about ideas of "cultural difference" and relationships with others in terms of multicultural citizenship, even if only implicitly, since multiculturalism is such a pervasive discourse of cultural belonging in the U. S., particularly in the arena of education. Their vernacular understandings of multicultural citizenship are not just in Will Kymlicka’s sense of minority cultural rights, but of everyday understandings of pluralism embedded in the social fabric of their relationships. For most of these youth, it is important to emphasize that they have friendships that cross ethnic and racial boundaries. In their daily lives, they do, in fact, hang out with Latino, Caribbean, African American, and Asian students, and with Muslim African youth from Somalia, Ethiopia, or Egypt, potentially forming an incipient pan-Islamic identity. Yet it is also apparent that students in the school, as in most American high schools and colleges, tend to cluster by ethnic group. Sohail comments that his friendships with non-South Asian students are sometimes questioned by other "desi" (South Asian) youth, but he defends himself by arguing for a more expansive conception of community:

I hang out with different kids but even I heard it from a lot of desis who say, ‘Why you go with them?’ They don’t like it, but I say if you want to live in a different world, you have to exist with them ... Sometimes you have to go outside [your group] and say, ‘Yeah, alright, we are friends too, we are not going to discriminate [against] you, because you are white, we don’t look like you.’ ... Your relationship is gonna be bigger, right. But if you’re gonna live in the desi community, you’re only going to know desi people, not the other people.

Sohail seems to trace the value he places on multiculturalist co-existence to an idealized notion of India as a multi-ethnic nation, at least before the horrific massacre of Muslim Indians during the Gujarat riots in India in spring 2002. He said: “India is a really good place to live in ... because they’ve got a lot of religions, different languages, different people.”

It is also true that there are moments of tension among these different groups of youth, as there are in any school or community. After September 11, some of the South Asian immigrant youth, particularly the Muslim boys, felt targeted by other high school youth. Accusations of “You’re a terrorist” or “You’re a bin Laden” enter into what might otherwise be just an outbreak of youthful aggression among boys, but which is now a part of a national discourse about Islam in the U. S. The South Asian Muslim boys, and girls, feel this acutely: does this mean they are the enemy, and how can they live as such?

One anti-Muslim incident in Cambridge occurred in the high school when an African American girl accused two Pakistani boys, Amir and Wahab, of "killing people" and reportedly called them "Muslim niggers." The girl was eventually suspended, but Amir was, in fact, a friend of the girl’s brother and said he tried to intervene to soften her punishment. Both boys emphatically refused to portray the incident as a Black/South Asian or Black/Muslim conflict. They insisted that this was the case of a lone
individual who, Waheed half-jokingly said, must have been “drunk” or “high.” Amir, in fact, said that he thought African Americans were less likely to have an uncritically nationalist response to the events of 9/11 than white Americans, even though he was hesitant to extend this generalization to their responses to the military campaign in Afghanistan.

For Waheed and Amir, 9/11 prompted a heightened self-consciousness about racialization that seemed, if anything, to reinforce the black/white racial polarization. Waheed felt that African Americans were not as shattered by the attacks on the U.S. because, in his view, black Americans feel alienated from the nation-state due to the legacy of slavery. While this racialized difference after 9/11 is more complex than Waheed suggests, what is important is that he believes that African Americans share his experience of marginalization within the nation. But Waheed does not completely dismiss the renewed nationalism of Americans after 9/11, saying, “The first thing is they’re born here in the USA, so that’s their country ... We are immigrants ... If something happens back home, like 9/11, and someone else did it, we’re gonna be angry too, right?” Yet it is also apparent that 9/11 seems to have drawn him into an understanding of citizenship that is based on racialized fissures in claims to national identity and affiliation with other youth of color.

For Waheed and others, the response of African Americans seems more significant than that of Latinos or even of Arab Americans because, on the one hand, they are the largest group of students of color in the school, and on the other hand, they stand for a particular manifestation of contested U.S. citizenship to these youth, even if not all are actually U.S.-born. The responses of these young Pakistani males suggest to me a potential polycultural citizenship, based not on the reification of cultural difference that multiculturalism implies, but on a complex set of political affiliations and social boundary-crossings, as Robin Kelley’s notion of polyculturalism suggests. This nascent notion of polyculturalism is embedded in the messiness and nuance of relationships of different groups with one another and with the state, and allows for political, not just cultural resonance, based on particular historical and material conjunctures.

Polycultural citizenship is not an idealization, however, of the complexities of race politics. I do not want to suggest that polyculturalism exists in the absence of anti-black racism in this community, or that racialized antagonisms and suspicion in the school are not taken in at all by immigrant youth. In getting to know these youth over a period of time, I have found that these tensions do indeed exist. Rather, I would like to argue that there is room in my notion of polycultural citizenship to acknowledge the resentment and competition bred by daily struggles for turf or resources. Given that polyculturalism critiques the idea of “pure” culture, or even “pure” hybridity, it would therefore not envision a “pure” politics of multiculturalist tolerance without any tension or negotiation. These young immigrants simultaneously invoke a multiculturalist discourse of pluralist co-existence and a polyculturalist notion of boundary-crossing and affiliation, embedded in political experience but also in popular culture practices shared with youth of color.

Muslim immigrant youth sense a connection with other youth of color and with African Muslim youth in the city, even as they struggle with the challenges that Muslim identity has posed to liberal multiculturalism. Syed Khan, an Indian immigrant who is on the Board of Religious Directors of the Islamic Center of Sharon, Massachusetts, is the founder of Muslim Community Support Services, an organization that is holding forums on issues of civil rights and cultural citizenship for Muslim Americans. He argues that the post-9/11 backlash has shown the limits of U.S. multiculturalism, in its inability to absorb Islam as a marker of difference within the nation, in a cultural if not religious sense. Khan said to me in fall 2002, “If this had happened to some other religious or ethnic group, which professors would speak out? How many rallies have you seen? How many protests? None of those traditional forms of response have happened ... Everybody is scared to speak up about basic values that are enshrined in the U.S. constitution or psyche.” Like other Muslim Americans, Khan is grappling with the ambiguities of secularism and civil rights at a moment when the state, uses religion, in addition to national origin, as the basis of its profiling.

Dissenting Citizenship

Muslim Americans and Arab Americans are defined, particularly after 9/11 but also at other moments (such as the Iran hostage crisis and the Gulf War) as political scapegoats and therefore cultural aliens. Their presumed cultural difference is highlighted as part of the Bush administration’s political and cultural doctrine that defines U.S. interests and
national identity in opposition to a “foreign enemy” and an “enemy within.” In fall 2002, when referring to the White House’s public embrace and then neglect of Muslim American leaders after 9/11, Khan commented, in a conversation with me: “Initially leaders, including Bush, had spoken up [against racial profiling], but afterwards, when it wasn’t as critical, outreach to Muslim Americans has stopped completely. Now, it’s bashing time.”

Other South Asian Muslims living in the Boston area were quick to point out to me the outpouring of support offered by neighbors and friends after 9/11. The two perspectives are, of course, both true. Individual acts of solidarity have co-existed with acts of discrimination, private and state-sponsored, on a mass scale. The two processes actually work together in racial profiling, which works on these multiple levels and through these contradictions of rhetoric and policy. Legal scholar Leti Volpp argues that the post-9/11 moment has “facilitated the consolidation of a new identity category” that conflates “Arab/Muslim/Middle Eastern” with “terrorist” and “non-citizen.” This identity category is obviously not new, but Volpp is right to point out that a “National identity has consolidated that is both strongly patriotic and multiracial.” This national identity both excludes and racializes Muslim identity, even if it is not racial at all, in the slippery sense of race in the U.S. The paradoxical racialization of Muslim identity is what Moustafa Bayoumi calls the “tragic irony” of “racial profiling” after 9/11.

Khan worries that Muslim American communities have not been speaking up enough against the prospect of social and political, if not physical, internment. However, it seems to me that some immigrant youth are willing to voice political views, even publicly, that most South Asian middle-class community leaders have not been expressing. The Muslim immigrant youth I spoke with had an analysis of 9/11 and the U.S. war in Afghanistan that drew on a notion of international human rights and resisted the nationalization of the Twin Towers tragedy. Amir said to me in December 2001: “You have to look at it in two ways. It’s not right that ordinary people over there [in Afghanistan], like you and me, just doing their work, get killed. They don’t have anything to do with ... the attacks in New York, but they’re getting killed. And also the people in New York who got killed, that’s not right either.”

Jamila, a Bangladeshi girl, said, “I felt bad for those people [in Afghanistan] ... because they don’t have no proof that they actually did it, but they were all killing all these innocent people who had nothing to do with it.” Aliyah, who could very easily pass for Latina, chose to write the words “IN DIA + MUSLIM” on her bag after 9/11. For her, this was a gesture of defiance responding to the casting of Muslims as potentially disloyal citizens. She said, “Just because one Muslim did it in New York, you can’t involve everybody in there, you know what I’m sayin’?” This critique of the anti-Muslim backlash was pervasive amongst the South Asian Muslim youth. Karina said, “After September 11, they [Americans] hate the Muslims ... I think they want the government to hate the Muslims, like, all Muslims are same.”

After the anti-Muslim incident at Cambridge High School, the International Student Center organized a student assembly featuring two Arab American speakers who criticized the War on Terrorism and the attack on civil liberties. Amir, Waheed, and a Gujarati Muslim girl, Samiyah, delivered eloquent speeches condemning racism to an auditorium filled with their peers. Amir said that when he was threatened by some young men in Boston, “I could have done the same thing, but I don’t think it’s the right thing to do.” Amir is a muscular young man and his call for non-violent response was a powerful one at that assembly — one that could also be taken to be an implicitly political statement about the U.S. bombing of Afghanistan in response to the attacks. Samiyah stood up in her salwar kameez and said, “We have to respect each other if we want to change society. You have to stand up for your rights.” Muslim immigrant youth are being visibly drawn into race politics and civil rights debates in the local community although it is not clear yet what the impact of this politicization will be over time. But a year later on the anniversary of September 11, when the International Student Center organized another student assembly in 2002, Samiyah’s younger sister and another Gujarati Muslim girl voluntarily made similar speeches that were reported in the local press.

Even though these working-class youth do not have the support of or time to participate in community or political organizations, they have become spokespersons in the public sphere, willing to voice a dissenting view. Other Muslim American youth have been forced to play the role of educators as well, giving speeches at their schools and in community forums about Islam, though a coordinator of a
Muslim youth group at the Central Square mosque says that it is a role not without pressure or fatigue for young Muslim Americans. Understandably, some of them are also hesitant to speak publicly about political issues given that even legal citizens are worried about expressing political critique or dissent, as the state has acquired sweeping powers of surveillance with the USA-Patriot Act. Repression works on two levels to silence dissent, as Corey Robin points out: on a state level, but also on the level of civil society, where individuals internalize repression and censor themselves.\textsuperscript{42} Robin astutely observes that there is a “division of labor” between the state and civil society for “fear does the work — or enhances the work — of repression.” Robin argues that the “effects of ‘Fear, American Style’ are most evident today in immigrant, Middle Eastern, and South Asian communities, as well as in the workplace where ‘suppression of dissent’ is evident since 9/11.”\textsuperscript{43}

In the face of such repression, I have found the Muslim immigrant youth with whom I spoke to be engaged in a practice of dissenting citizenship. Their expression of dissenting citizenship is based on a critique and affirmation of human rights that means they stand apart at some moments, even as they stand together with others outside the borders of the nation. Dissenting citizenship is not coeval with cosmopolitanism, at least in this instance, for it seems to me that even notions of cosmopolitanism that account for its particularity (as opposed to universalism), plurality of form, and imbrications with nationalism do not quite capture the specific political critique being waged here.\textsuperscript{44} The critique of these Muslim immigrant youth is both far more attached to regional and religious identity, and far more critical in its appraisal of U.S. nationalism and state powers than some liberal theorists of cosmopolitanism allow.\textsuperscript{45} The perspective of Muslim immigrant youth is very much rooted in their identities as Muslims who are targeted as such by the state, and also sheds light on the links between U.S. policies at home and abroad. In this critique of the U.S. state, I argue, dissenting citizenship goes beyond the debate between liberal and conservative appraisals of possibilities of cosmopolitanism because it raises an issue that is not emphasized enough by these critics,\textsuperscript{46} that of cosmopolitanism, and relatedly of globalization, as an imperial feeling. I use the term “imperial feeling” to capture an emerging acknowledgment, by media commentators on both the right and the left, that U.S. policy on the global stage is linked to economic and military dominance. This view is generally expressed not as a full-blown critique in the U.S. mass media, but as an emerging sentiment in the public sphere, a growing “feeling” (often an anxiety) that the U.S. is occupying the role of a new empire.\textsuperscript{47}

The dissenting views of Muslim immigrant youth implicitly critique this imperial feeling of U.S. nationalism after 9/11 through their linking of warfare within the state to international war. It is this link between the domestic and imperial that makes their perspective an important mode of dissent because the imperial project of the new “Cold War,” as in earlier times, works by obscuring the links between domestic and foreign policies. Legal studies scholar Kathleen Moore points out that even before the post-9/11 curtailment of civil liberties, the Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act narrowed the definition of “civil community” in response to the “heightened sense of insecurity required to maintain a restructured, wartime regulatory state after the primary security target disappears.”\textsuperscript{48}

Moore emphasizes that the distinction between citizens/non-citizens is used in political discourse to support foreign policy and justify the military campaigns and domestic priorities of the U.S. state, such as the battles over “welfare, affirmative action, and immigration reform.”\textsuperscript{49} This is even more true when the illusion of a “peacetime economy” is discarded for a nation at war as in the present moment. Furthermore, the War on Terror is an extension of the “war on immigrants” waged since the late 1980s, for it has stripped civil rights from non-citizens and led to sweeps and mass deportations of undocumented immigrants, extending the assault on immigrant rights begun with the anti-immigrant Proposition 187 passed in California in 1994, the heightened policing of U.S. borders, and the 1996 immigrant acts.\textsuperscript{50}

The dissent of Muslim immigrant youth is not vanguardist because it does not need to be. These young immigrants are simply — but not merely — subjects of both the “war on terror” and the “war on immigrants.” Their exclusion from processes of “being-made” as citizens, legally and culturally, and their emergent political “self-making,” highlight the ways in which civic consent to state policy is secured by imperial power. The targeting of a population demonized as “other,” and the absorption of previ-
ously targeted communities into a unifying nationalism and climate of fear, shift attention away from the ways in which the war at home and the war abroad actually work in tandem, at the expense of ordinary people everywhere. It is the links between legal, economic, and cultural citizenship that are so important for U.S. empire. Anthropologists Jean and John Comaroff argue that the neoliberal mode of “millennial capitalism” increasingly obscures the workings of labor and highlights instead processes of consumption, so that citizenship is recreated as consumer identity. The immigrant youth in this study are not outside this process of consumer-citizenship. They too understand themselves as consumers of, among other things, a lifestyle or education that compelled their parents to migrate from South Asia.

The process of dissenting citizenship is not without its wrinkles, for it seems that these young immigrants implicitly understand the limits of a state-based notion of citizenship, in its economic, cultural, and political senses. As “transmigrants,” they strategically use citizenship even as they manage the failures of both home and host states to guarantee protection and equal rights to Muslim subjects. The anti-Muslim massacres in Gujarat in 2002 and the military standoff between India and Pakistan reinforce a sense that South Asian Muslim youth are in an ambiguous zone between religious and national identification, between an Islamic state and a secular state turned Hindu nationalist. Although so far not many of the Indian immigrant youth seem ready or willing to speak about this, it is possible that the state-condoned anti-Muslim massacres in Gujarat have raised questions about their belonging and their rights for equal protection under the law in India.

This is understandably a difficult subject even for their parents to speak about, but one Indian Muslim immigrant told me that in “private spaces” there are expressions of the vulnerability that Muslim immigrants have felt, both in the U.S. and at “home.” At the least, perhaps, there is a sense that their cultural citizenship and loyalties are in question in both nations. When India and Pakistan were on the brink of war in 2002, one teenage Indian male said to me: “In India … they were asking Indian Muslims what we were willing to speak about this, it is possible that the state-condoned anti-Muslim massacres in Gujarat in 2002 and the military standoff between India and Pakistan rein-

And yet, ironically, at the same moment, Indian Muslims in the U.S. were being targeted if they were identifiably Muslim and the allegiance of South Asian Muslims and Arab Americans, in general, was suspect. The post-9/11 moment has highlighted the gap between what the state can presumably guarantee, through citizenship or constitutional rights, and what a specific political project such as the War on Terror actually puts into effect, overriding the rights of citizens in order to secure a new Cold War agenda.

Conclusion

This moment of empire underscores that notions of citizenship developed by youth, some of which I have explored here, are constructed in a dynamic relationship with various institutions, including the state, which are themselves, of course, mutable and multi-faceted. The flexibility of capital evokes strategies of flexible citizenship by young immigrants and their families, but the state is also flexible in its implementation of regimes of governmentality. After 9/11, for example, immigrants and Muslim/Arab/South Asian Americans have been forced to respond to new and constantly shifting measures to limit their civil rights, some of which are not widely publicized, creating more uncertainty and terror. The loss of immigrant rights makes non-citizens vulnerable to hyper-exploitation by employers after 9/11, and to fear of simply living their lives. For instance, in Cambridge, I heard several such stories, from an undocumented immigrant girl unable to enroll in a community college and continue her education, to another high school graduate confused about whether she could marry an undocumented immigrant for fear that he would be deported.

Yet it is important to remember that there are important continuities, before and after 9/11, that are often not acknowledged enough. My use of “post-9/11” is not meant to signify a radical historical or political rupture, but rather a moment of renewed contestation over ongoing issues of citizenship and transnationalism, religion and nationalism, civil rights, and immigrant rights. This state of emergency, this crisis of civil rights and its concomitant mode of dissenting citizenship, is, in fact, not exceptional in the U.S., for the post-9/11 moment builds on measures and forms of power already in place. This is a state of everyday life in empire.

Contrary to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s amorphous theory of de-centered “empire,” I argue that it is, in fact, imperialist power that is at work,
even if it has been clearly transformed by the new logic of global capital and the weakened link between the state and the economy. It is clear that the relations among nation, state, and capital have been transformed since earlier eras of imperialism, not to mention the fact that the state's power itself is in decline. However, imperial power does not necessarily require direct governance of colonized states; thus, the model of "imperialism without colonies" — or of neocolonial occupation, as in Iraq. The current moment of empire is situated in a long history of what some call "informal" U.S. empire that has used the framework of "universal rights" to cloak a project of reconstituting social and economic relations into a global capitalist order.

The conceptualization of U.S. empire is a project that has drawn renewed attention now that the term empire has come out of the closet in the academy and mass media. The power of the U.S. state to exercise the globality of violence and of economy characterizes this new mode of empire. U.S. empire has become increasingly "covert," if not more formal, as U.S. economic and military power is visibly tied to unilateral foreign policy and national interests, particularly after the demise of Soviet communism and especially after the events of 9/11, which have led to an increasingly authoritarian exercise of U.S. state power both at home and abroad. Although I share the skepticism of new theorists of empire and globalization about a state-bound notion of citizenship, I am interested in developing an ethnography of the new empire to understand the everyday struggles of those, such as immigrant youth, whose lives have been transformed by this ongoing crisis.

NOTES
1. The research on which this paper is based was funded by the Russell Sage Foundation and supported by my research assistants, Palav Babaria and Sarah Khan. Thanks to Louise Cainkar for her editorial feedback.

2. There were 700 reported hate crimes against South Asian Americans, Arab Americans, and Muslim Americans, including four homicides (two involving South Asian American victims), in the three weeks following 9/11-01. Jeff Coen, "Hate crime reports reach record level," Chicago Tribune (October 9, 2001). At least 200 hate crimes were reported against Sikh Americans alone. Jane Lampan, "Under attack, Sikhs defend their religious liberties," Christian Science Monitor (October 31, 2001). The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) reported that it had documented 960 incidents of racial profiling in the five weeks after 9/11-01, with hate crimes declining and incidents of airport profiling and workplace discrimination on the increase. Associated Press, San Jose, CA, "Hate crime reports down, civil rights complaints up," (October 25, 2001). The trend only continued to intensify; the CAIR report, The Status of Muslim Civil Rights in the United States: Patterns of Discrimination (Washington, D.C.: Council on American-Islamic Relations Research Center, 1998); Jack G. Shaheen. Hollywood's Reel Arabs and Muslims. In Muslims and Islamization in North America: Problems and Prospects, ed. Ambreen Haque (Baltimore, Maryland: Amana Publications, 1999), 179-202.


5. Chang, Silencing, 43-66s.


10. There have been impressive efforts by local groups such as Desis Rising Up and Moving (DRUM) in New York City, that has been organizing around the detentions, South Asian American Leaders of Tomorrow (SAALT) in Washington D.C., South Asian Network in L.A., and Alliance of South Asians Taking Action (ASATA) in the Bay Area, among others. In addition, several progressive, community-based South Asian American organizations shifted their focus to address the impact of 9/11 on their constituents. South Asian Muslims have also worked within Muslim civil rights organization, such as the American Muslim Alliance, Muslim Public Affairs Council, Muslim American Society, and...
Council on American-Islamic Relations.


23Chang, Silencing, 69-87.


21The re-registration component of the program was officially ended by the Department of Homeland Security in December 2003, after protests by immigrant/civil rights and grassroots community organizations, while other aspects of the program remained in place, and the detentions and deportations put in place by the program continue.


22Swarns, “More Than 13,000.”

22The high school has approximately 2,000 students, of which about forty per cent are white and the remaining sixty per cent are students of color. African Americans are the largest group of students of color (about twenty-five per cent), followed by Latino(a)s (fifteen per cent), and Asian Americans (about seven per cent). In 2000-2002, thirty-three per cent of students had a first language other than English and fourteen per cent were in the bilingual program, which suggests that the immigrant student population in the school is somewhere between these figures.

22The 2000 Census reported 2,720 Indian immigrants (2.7 per cent of the population), 125 Pakistanis, and 120 Bangladeshis in Cambridge, a city that is 68.1 per cent white American, 11.9 per cent African American, 11.9 per cent Asian American, and 7.4 per cent Latino (U.S. Census Bureau). 2000: <http://factfinder.census.gov/bf, lang=en 2000 SF 3 U_DP2 geo ID> (November 13, 2002). This, of course, does not include undocumented immigrants. The “native” population is 74.1 per cent, and foreign-born is 25.9 per cent; 17.7 per cent are not citizens and 31.2 per cent speak a language other than English. Cambridge is of course skewed by the presence of the academic community; while 8.2 per cent (3,108) of those enrolled in schools are in high school, fully 70.5 per cent are in college or graduate school, and 38.5 per cent of the population over twenty-five years old has a graduate or professional degree.


32 See Maira, forthcoming.


34 Ong, “Cultural Citizenship,” 739.

35 Manu Vimalassery, “Passports and Pink Slips,” SAMAR (South Asian Magazine for Action and Reflection)

36 Robin D. Kelley, Yo’ Mama’s Disfunktional! Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America (Beacon Press, Boston, 1997).


46 Kathleen Moore, “A Closer Look at Anti-Terrorism Law: American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee v. Reno and the Construction of Aliens’ Rights,” in Arabs in America: Building a New Future, ed. Michael Suleiman (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), 84-99; see 95. The 1996 Anti-Terrorism Act “reintroduced to federal law the principle of ‘guilt by association’ that had defined the McCarthy era,” reintroducing “guilt by association” with groups defined by the state as “terrorist” and thus reviving the ideological exclusion of the Cold War-era McCarren-Walter Act, and giving the authority to deport noncitizens on the basis of secret evidence (Cole and Dempsey, Terrorism, 117-126). From 1996 to 2000, the government sought to use secret evidence to detain and deport two dozen immigrants, almost all of them Muslims, but ultimately the evidence thrown out and the accused were released (see Cole and Dempsey, Terrorism, 127).


54 Glick Schiller and Fouron, Georges Woke Up, 208-214.

55 Harry Magdoff, Imperialism Without Colonies (New

59 Panitch and Gindin, 10-13.

60 Alain Joxe, Empire of Disorder (Los Angeles and New York: Semiotext(e), 2002).