

Title—Here, There, and Elsewhere: The Making of Immigrant Identities in a Globalized World

Author—Tahseen Shams

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Categories: Migration, Islam, Race, Globalization, Power

Place: The United States

Time: 1980-Present

Argument Synopsis:

Shams' book looks at the dualistic relationships between global geopolitical discourses and local spaces of identity formations. She analyzes the ways in which South Asian Muslim Americans are associated with Islamic 'elsewhere', while articulating immigrants' identification as subjects rather than victims of Islamophobia in the United States. The book is a part of the larger literature on the Muslim American experience. She challenges the common understanding that immigrant lives are shaped exclusively by their sending and receiving countries—she suggests that immigrants are vectors of globalization, both producing and experiencing the global interconnections beyond sending and receiving countries. Shams demonstrates how immigrant identities are formed at the intersection of three spaces: here, there, and elsewhere. For Shams, what catalyzes an 'anywhere' into an 'elsewhere' are exogenous shocks. The concept of exogenous shock refers to an unpredictable event that has originated from outside an economic model.

The book is organized into seven chapters. Shams' main contribution is the multicentered relational framework. She focuses specifically on the interconnections between the homeland, host-land, and elsewhere places affect the identity construction of South Asian Muslim Americans. Shams discusses how elsewhere places affect immigrants' identity construction vis a vis connection to their homelands, perceptions of their community within the host-land, and their engagement in elsewhere places. One chapter explores the development, utility, and social consequences of adopting a moderate Muslim identity. Another explicated South Asian Muslim Americans, both within the United States and elsewhere. Shams discusses the varied salience of different 'elsewhere' places to the lives of South Asian Muslims in the United States—in order to explain why an ISIS attack in Europe is more salient to the lives of South Asian Muslim Americans than a similar event taking place in a Muslim majority country in the Middle East.

Shams utilizes sixty in-depth interviews among South Asian Muslims in Southern California for a bulk of her evidence. Shams describes how her research participants manage their social identities as good, moderate Muslims. She seeks to illustrate Muslim immigrants' sense of solidarity with their coreligionists in various parts of the Muslim world because of their Muslim religious affinity known as ummah. Shams situates immigrants' experiences and identity-making within the relational context of global geopolitics. She underscores global connectivities and the limitations of understanding immigrant experiences with only host-land and homeland.

Key Themes and Concepts:

- For immigrants, a necessity as complex and intangible as belonging cannot be fulfilled and resolved merely by acquiring a set of official documents and being designated as citizens
- The ability of exogenous shocks emerging from elsewhere to impact Muslims in the United States depends on the global distribution of power
- Homeland conflicts are viewed as less important because they do not challenge the global hierarchy of power relations among countries