Downwardly Global

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RACIALIZING SOUTH ASIA

The extended face-off with conservatism has had a deforming effect, encouraging multiculturalism to know what it is against but not what it is for.—Henry Louis Gates Jr., “Beyond the Culture Wars”

“Who are they, the South Asians?” Madiha asked as she looked around the annual incarnation of Masala! Mehndi! Masti! (MMM). Madiha had migrated to Toronto from Pakistan and was a frequent visitor to the local immigrant women’s settlement-services organization where we met. She had volunteered to sit at a table at MMM to represent the organization and distribute information on their services. To Madiha, “South Asian” was “just a Canadian thing,” and she did not categorize herself in that way. To her, South Asians were Indians, and this event, like all of South Asian Heritage Month, had been created for Indians, not Pakistanis. During the numerous planning activities leading up to South Asian Heritage Month events in Toronto, conversations always inevitably turned to the meaning of “South Asian,” which many Pakistani women rejected because of its cultural homogenization. During one such conversation, Naseem, originally from Karachi, said, “South Asians here are brought under the same umbrella. Canada does it because we look the same.” Echoing Madiha’s question, she asked, “Who are they, ‘South Asians’? . . . I never heard ‘South Asian’ before coming here.”

This self-distancing from “South Asian” was a narrative I heard repeatedly during fieldwork, and yet another example of how multicultural state
practices can end up excluding subjects and citizens through practices aimed at inclusion. But, as I also learned, identity is complicated. When explicitly asked about the categorization, most I spoke with rejected it. Yet many of those same respondents were women I had met through South Asian organizations, and many of them also participated in South Asian Heritage Month, indicating that they did engage strategically with the category when necessary. Nadiya’s statements represent this perspective well. She was a receptionist for a financial firm. Born in Karachi and a practicing Muslim, Nadiya had migrated for marriage under family reunification. In Pakistan she had been working as an elementary school teacher, which she had planned to do in Toronto. However, upon arriving she found out it would be impossible due to barriers to accreditation, so she never tried. She had been working for eighteen months as a receptionist after being trained for six months in computer science, but expressed gratitude for being able to work at all. She lived in a government housing project in Scarborough.

When our conversation turned to the category of South Asian, she said, “South Asian is a newly coined, politically correct term. I have been in this part of the world for six years now and only very recently have I come across it when filling out a form. Previously I have always referred to myself as a Pakistani due to lack of another word.” Her remark that she only recently came across “South Asian” when filling out paperwork is indicative of her understanding of it as a governmental category of difference, and one that she might alternately accept or reject depending on the context. Social theorists have written about the complex negotiation of racial, national, and sexual Others must engage as they navigate majority culture (e.g., Kurien 2003; Muñoz 1999, Spivak 1988)\(^1\). This chapter charts that negotiation with multicultural categories of inclusion as part of the back and forth that happens in the process of racialization and the making of multiculturalism, asking how women react to these sensorial regimes and demands for citizenship.

Multicultural state ideologies of citizenship try to force Pakistani women into liberal constructions of a “South Asia” that they often do not identify with, both racializing them and leaving them further excluded from acceptable and knowable forms of difference. In this context, the sanitized sensorium creates a demand for recognizable difference, a radical alterity, which renders them invisible as Pakistani and hyper-visible as South Asian. As the previous chapter detailed, Pan-Indian food, music, and clothing invoke a sensorial register that triggers acceptance—a kind of self-congratulatory multiculturalism that allows the greater Canadian public to feel morally
good. In response, Pakistani women talk back to the state, often resisting, but sometimes accepting or even subverting the category “South Asian.”

In taking up this racialized subject category in multicultural Canada, this chapter builds on the rich anthropology of citizenship. Moving beyond its formulation as an identity imbued with legal rights and affiliation to a particular nation-state, anthropologists have theorized cultural citizenship to understand a belonging that moves beyond legal papers (Blackburn 2009; Koll 2010; Ong 1999; Rosaldo 1997; Siu 2005). The concept of cultural citizenship refers to the right to be different in terms of ethnicity, religion, or language with respect to a national community, without compromising one’s right to belong in the sense of participating in a nation-state’s democratic processes (Rosaldo 1997). While Rosaldo focuses on group rights, Aihwa Ong (1999) examines individual agency. Ong suggests that citizenship is a process and a disciplining tool the state uses to distinguish between “ideal” and “unfit” citizens. More recently, anthropologists have theorized cultural citizenship as an analytic frame to understand the social and political exclusion of citizens despite their formal entitlement to legal rights. In contrast to these important works that describe a call for recognition, Pakistani Muslim women’s self-distancing from the category of “South Asian” happens in response to the state’s attempts at multicultural inclusion and recognition. That is, women react to the marginalization they experience when the state tries to interpellate them as citizens and subjects. What happens, then, when a form of recognition imposed by the state does not resonate with one’s identity? I argue that these state policies and practices of multiculturalism create divisions just as communities are striving for inclusion and attempting to define their identities in the context of migration and transnationalism.

In recent years discussions surrounding questions of state recognition have focused on Muslim minority culture in an imagined West and on a few key debates, including the wearing of the Islamic headscarf in France and the “reasonable accommodation” debate in Québec. These issues have largely focused on the relationship between an ostensibly coherent group identified as “Muslims” and an equally imagined “West.” Ethnographic work concerning Muslim groups in racially and ethnically diverse societies has focused on the politics of inclusion in a colonial regime, or a settler society, calling into question ideologies of secularism and multiculturalism, as well as conceptions of citizenship and national belonging. Such important studies have demonstrated the cultivation of a particular kind of Muslim
selfhood and its relationship to state practices. However, what has been less examined is the effect of state practices of recognition (or misrecognition) on the relationships between Muslims and other Others in an imagined West. Writing on the problem of recognition in the Australian context, Elizabeth Povinelli (2002) argues that state practices and policies create a form of identification that demands a radical alterity of its citizens and subjects. Charles Taylor (1994) also argues, “A person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion. . . . Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone” (25). In the Canadian context, I argue that these forms of recognition or legible Otherness (radical alterity) produce a discomforting alienation among Pakistani subjects in Toronto, fomenting the conditions for communal tensions between Pakistanis and Indians. “South Asia,” the state-sanctioned category of inclusion, becomes in practice a category of exclusion. Its meaning varies from state understandings of it as an inclusive category to individual understandings of it as “a gloss for India.”

Within contemporary debates surrounding multiculturalism, in particular a rhetoric of “equality within a model of difference,” struggles of identity are waged on immigrant bodies. These struggles remake ideas of citizenship and the nation in an era of global migrations and demonstrate a social order in which citizenship itself is based on embodied difference mediated by and through the senses. Throughout this book, but crucially here, the focus is on the intersection of two broad analytical areas regarding multiculturalism. First, multiculturalism is addressed as a set of legal and liberal practices, with particular focus on the politics surrounding the formation of a cohesive nation in the midst of a range of diverse practices and claims. Second, I look at the lived experience of multiculturalism through moments of friction between state bodies, civil society, and aspiring citizens to examine the ways multicultural policy arises through practices and how aspiring citizens translate these policies into their everyday lives. What does it mean to become a citizen of the liberal settler multicultural state when there are limited and proscribed subject positions for inclusion?

This chapter begins by examining narratives that women continually invoked surrounding the category “South Asian.” Their perspectives are representative of the damage governmental attitudes, narratives, and rhetorics around multiculturalism, difference, and minority culture can do to the affective attachments of community members. I then turn to an examination of the origins and politics surrounding South Asian Heritage Month
to understand the ways particular kinds of cultural differences become encoded in law and policy, and then how they get implemented in practice. Finally and importantly, throughout this chapter I hope to demonstrate ethnographically how these categories are produced in conjunction with a range of actors as a process of racialization. State classificatory systems often become a means through which the state governs, rather than an accurate reflection of how citizens identify themselves (Bernard Cohn 1987). While the state’s system of classification can never fully reflect self-understandings of citizenship and belonging because of the contradictory and complex nature of subjectivity and personhood, it is a crucial factor in the ways resources are allocated and census categories are produced, and thus form one (important) part of the process of racialization. This happens at multiple scales: state-produced categories of inclusion, grassroots organizing by certain segments of the community, and racism itself (both in the era of “paki-bashing” in 1970s and 1980s, and in the post-9/11 period).

Engaging “South Asia”

The question “Do you identify as South Asian?” was one that I asked in more and less obvious ways throughout fieldwork. The overwhelming majority of the women I spoke with rejected the term South Asian, saying that it conflated the interests of Indians and Pakistanis. Of those who did not like the term, many felt that in lumping all Pakistanis, Indians, Bangladeshis, Nepalese, and Bhutanese together many interests are lost, and sometimes that gesture simply becomes a gloss for India. Yasmin illustrated this perspective. I had met her while working with a settlement-services agency that handles unemployment issues. She had been an engineer in Lahore before migrating with her husband and children, and at the time of our interview she was unemployed. One day she said to me, “I feel South Asian somehow caters more towards Indians, rather than everyone of South Asian origin.” Responses to whether or not someone considered herself South Asian ranged from, “I refer to myself as Pakistani Canadian,” to “Definitely not South Asian, it’s just Indian,” to “Canadian of Pakistani origin.” Many also felt that the category was not defined from within, but was simply imposed by the Canadian state because, according to one Pakistani woman, “we all look the same.”

Mariam’s situation elucidates the relationship between multicultural constructions of South Asia and the complexities of identification in diaspora.
I first met Mariam by accident. I had been searching for Pakistani women’s organizations and found just one in an old copy of the Blue Book, a directory of social services in Toronto. I called the number listed for the president of the National Guild of Pakistani Women, and Mariam answered. Shocked by my interest in her, she revealed that the organization was in a state of disarray because there was little interest from second-generation Pakistani women to take up the leadership. “The only reason you found me,” she confessed, “is because I haven’t changed my number in twenty years.”

We often spoke about her own experiences of migration and her perceptions of community-building efforts. Our first meeting occurred at her workplace, a public elementary school in the West End of Toronto where she was doing social work. Mariam told me that she moved with her young daughter from Karachi to Canada in 1966, one year after her husband had immigrated to study engineering at the University of Toronto; she joined him as a part-time student in sociology, eventually earning her master’s degree. “Until 1969,” she told me, “there were only twenty Pakistani families in Toronto,” a small but cohesive group. In the mid-1960s there was “no discrimination,” she told me. “By 1969, though, there was a recession, and so came discrimination.” Pakistanis worked with Indian organizations to address issues of racism and human rights violations. The derogatory term “Paki” was introduced, but, according to Mariam, “Pakistanis didn’t really understand it—the Toronto Star explained it to us.”

The history of “paki-bashing” in Toronto is important for understanding the stakes of political naming and self-identification. “Paki” is a racial slur used to denigrate people from Pakistan. The term dates back to the mid-1960s, and is thought to have originated in Britain. Though discussed extensively in the context of Britain, and to a lesser extent in the United States, paki-bashing also happened in Toronto. In a study on racism in Toronto conducted in the 1970s, researchers found images of Pakistanis circulating that they deemed racist: “Indians (including Pakistanis) coming from the subcontinent are not wanted anywhere. They are [depicted as] the wretched of the earth, unable to feed, clothe, or house themselves. They are lazy and slothful and come to live here on welfare” (Khan 2012: 159). Some members of the Pakistani community of Toronto felt the Toronto Star was to blame because of an article published on May 10, 1975, titled “Racism: Is Metro Turning Sour?” In the article, a nineteen-year-old housewife was quoted as saying, “Everyone I know is against Pakistanis. They are dirty, physically dirty—you can see it on them. And they smell.
Their houses are dirty too. That’s what my friends tell me” (quoted in Khan 2012: 161). This was the first time the term appeared in a Canadian media source. In a response to the piece, Khalid Hasan, a member of the community, wrote: “That you chose to quote a mindless nineteen-year-old Scarborough housewife who in turn quoted ‘friends’ to the effect that all Pakistanis live uncleanly, is unfortunate. Surely there are less provocative ways of highlighting the irrationality that lies at the heart of all racism. You unwittingly succeeded in stamping on the mind of your average reader an image of the average Pakistani which he may continue to nourish despite its total unreality” (quoted in Khan 2012: 161). These responses led to a protest by the Pakistan Canada Association in which 300 people marched on Nathan Phillips Square (Khan 2012: 162).

By the 1970s, “Paki” was used widely in Canada—in addition to “dot-head” or “curryhead.” A Sikh temple that was built in the new Little India in the early 1970s was vandalized, with swastikas and “Paki Go Home” painted on its doors (McCaskell 2005: 6). Raghu Krishnan (2003) writes of his own experience with Paki-bashing in Toronto in the 1970s. He reveals that those of South Asian origin, first- or second-generation Pakistani immigrants to Toronto, suffered in an atmosphere of violence and constant taunting. This memory of racism, he writes, contributed to his own radicalization in high school, which later led him in 1989 to found the United Coalition Against Racism at the University of Toronto. He also founded the Toronto Coalition Against Racism after a skinhead attack on Sivarajah Vinasithamby, a Sri Lankan Tamil refugee who was working in a restaurant (Krishnan 2003). The former head of the Council of Agencies Serving South Asians told me that this widespread violence, which cut across South Asian community lines, led to coalition building within the Toronto South Asian community.

Paki-bashing led to popular Indian-born novelist Bharati Mukherjee to leave Canada for the United States. In a 1981 Saturday Night magazine article she wrote: “I was frequently taken for a prostitute or shoplifter, frequently assumed to be a domestic. The society, or important elements of it, routinely made crippling assumptions about me and about my ‘kind.’ . . . I quickly learned that the country is hostile to its citizens who had been born in hot, moist continents like Asia.”5 Toronto-based filmmaker Deepa Mehta has similarly commented, “I’ve been called a Paki bitch many times; I’ve had tomatoes thrown at me.”6 In May 1980, Amir Din, a Pakistani resident of the government housing project on Tandridge Crescent in Rexdale, was beaten in front of his wife and children when they returned home
with groceries. A group of ten white youths hanging out in the lobby of the building started calling them names. One of them tried to kick Mrs. Din. Then one of the kids held the elevator door open while two others kicked and punched Mr. Din, using a broken soda bottle to cut him. “I feel angry; I feel scared—helpless, I guess,” he said in an article in the national newspaper, the *Globe and Mail*, asserting that “being called a Paki happens every day,” but this kind of violence was new. Decades later, in a 2007 article in the *Globe and Mail* called “Do ethnic enclaves impede integration?” Amrita Kumar-Ratta, the Canadian daughter of Indian immigrants, was quoted as saying, “I have been called Paki. People say things like ‘Go bathe so you don’t smell like curry anymore.’”

That afternoon at her school, Mariam revealed her own experiences of discrimination. She told me that she had worked as a sociologist in Pakistan, and after getting her master’s degree at the University of Toronto she managed to get work as a contract sociologist in Toronto: “It was the most difficult time to get work.” In job interviews they would say, “My God, you speak English!” Asked where she learned it, she would reply sarcastically, “I learned it on the plane,” which, according to her, they always believed. Eventually she got a job working for the Canadian government and then for the school board, handling cases of racism and violence involving Indians in particular—but at the time, she told me, the term “Indian” included Pakistanis.

Racial and ethnic categories are historically and culturally produced and continue to be reconstructed over time by both individuals and society, as shown by analyses of the malleability of South Asian identity formation in the United States (George 1997; Koshy 1998; Leonard 1992). George (1997) argues that nearly all upper- and middle-class South Asians in Southern California refuse to be raced: “[Rejecting a] racial identity for themselves [is] a response to the multiracial world they inhabit and . . . a response to the current mode of immigrant-bashing rampant in California” (32). In fact, processes of classification in the United States have been particularly fraught. In the 1950s, Indian immigrants to the United States were categorized as “Hindu,” though most were Sikh; in the 1970 U.S. census, South Asians were listed for the first and last time as “white”; in 1977, they lobbied for and won reclassification as “Asian Pacific Americans”; and they eventually won the category “Asian Indian” in the 1980 census. Koshy’s (1998) work effectively demonstrates the ways in which ethnicity is historically constructed. She writes, “Asian in the United States and Britain is not merely a geographical referent but a metaphor shaped by particular
geopolitical relations” (25). The construction of the category of South Asian, while similarly malleable, has been very different in Canada.

Nadiya, who highlighted experiences of discrimination, particularly around work, echoed Mariam’s stories. She once told me, “I now would use the term South Asian specifically when applying for a job, to avoid negative stereotyping.” This appeal to avoid stereotyping as Pakistani and/or Muslim is indicative of the discrimination Nadiya had experienced on the job market. While she uses the category in that realm to help her, it points to the discrimination that Pakistanis still feel they are subject to, and the ways that “South Asia,” which she believes is “a newly coined politically correct term,” erases religious differences, thus making that discrimination invisible.

**Identifying Religious Difference**

In the Canadian context, the state’s imposition of the South Asian category of inclusion has two interrelated effects. First, it conjures the specter of the historical struggle for a national identity based on an independent Pakistan; second, it elides religious identity, and therefore renders invisible the discrimination Muslim immigrants feel they are subjected to. Thus, when everyone becomes simply “South Asian,” particular histories, contexts, and experiences, such as Muslim marginalization, are lost in diaspora. Communal tensions between diasporic South Asians do not stem from primordial differences between Pakistanis and Indians, as they have been described through the language of ethnic conflict, but as I demonstrate here, are an effect of a “liberal settler multiculturalism” (Povinelli 2002) that heightens differences between groups.

Mariam had very strong feelings against the category “South Asian,” which surprised me given that she had spent much of her career working with Indian as well as Pakistani organizations. “Indians are in the forefront of South Asian Canada,” Mariam told me. “For example, there are two Pakistani dancers not identified as Pakistani in a famous Indian dance group.” Mariam also felt very strongly that Pakistanis were not included in South Asian Heritage Month. In speaking with a number of members of other organizations with “South Asian” in their names, including the organizers of the Heritage Month festivities, I was told that Pakistani participation was encouraged, but it was difficult to find any who wanted to take part. Drawing on her experience within the Pakistani community, Mariam told me, “Pakistanis don’t dance or sing [despite the fact that she had just
complained that Pakistani dancers were not identified in a famous dance group, and they think that these festivities are un-Islamic, so they don’t go.” I did in fact speak to a number of Pakistani women who did not want to participate in “South Asian” events because they considered them un-Islamic for serving alcohol or having dance performances. Mariam also felt that Pakistanis are not represented because there is not a lot of leadership within the community. “Pakistanis need something like an organized voice. . . . We’ve gone more into religion—Islam has replaced country.” She believed that for Pakistanis in particular, the religious differences seemed the most difficult to overcome.

The assertion of a Canadian identity over a Pakistani or Muslim identity can also be contextualized in a post-9/11 world in which such allegiances may be suspect. Sunaina Maira (2009) argues that cultural citizenship is of particular import for South Asian Americans because “legal citizenship is not enough to guarantee protection under the law with the state’s War on Terror, as is clear from the profiling, surveillance, and even detention of Muslim Americans who are U.S. citizens” (82). These contemporary exclusions from cultural citizenship, she writes, have historical precedents in the cultural exclusion of nonwhite groups, including Asian Americans, as “perpetual foreigners” (Tuan 1998, cited in Maira 2009). One of the issues with cultural citizenship Maira articulates is that, while movements for cultural citizenship are critical of state practices, they are still embedded within a framework of inclusion. In talking with Mariam, discussing post-9/11 hate crimes against the community took place alongside our discussion of cultural festivals; cultural citizenship, violence, and state action are fused for Arabs/Muslims/Others in the post-9/11 world.

After 9/11, Mariam said, “there was a major shift in the Canadian community and my students were traumatized. There were more Muslim students being harassed.” She described speaking at two conferences in the aftermath of 9/11 and working with the Canadian Muslim Liberty Association: “Assaults against Muslims have gone up ten times! And the police know this, but there’s no help for students. There’s trauma, there’s fear, people don’t believe the students.” She offered the example of a ten-year-old Iranian boy who was traumatized, dreaming night after night that a plane would hit his apartment building. “Teachers and the principal felt he was fine, but his mother called the school many times over the course of two months. Eventually the principal called me; I had to explain it to him [the principal]. I found a Farsi-speaking therapist to help the boy.” She went on to
say, “But women have it the worst. When I go to mosques, I tell women to stop wearing the hijab. Safety first, but the mullahs don’t like it.”

Some, who chose not to align themselves with South Asians, have felt that they have had to compromise their Islamic beliefs, which they consider to be a key part of their culture, and further, that the grouping of all South Asians is a homogenizing gesture that will impact the identity of the next generation. The former president of the National Federation of Pakistani Canadians, Noordin, expressed this set of ideas. Noordin had been in Canada since 1968. Once in Toronto, he met and married a Pakistani woman with whom he had four children; at the time they were both attending the University of Toronto. He had been educated in Pakistan in electrical engineering before moving to London to do a two-year diploma in computer science. He was from Sialkot in the Punjab and decided to move to Canada for economic reasons. When he first arrived in Canada, he worked in a factory for a year doing labor before finding work in IT. For the past twenty years he had been working in investments involving real estate. He has been active in community building, forming organizations and building connections.

He cited a major issue facing the Pakistani community: how governmental categories hindered larger community building for Pakistanis. “Our entity as Pakistanis is challenged by the provincial and federal government. . . . We are all grouped [into] South Asian as one. I’m not South Asian. I want my Pakistani heritage to be recognized. I don’t want my children to lose their identity as Pakistani. Our children have an assimilation problem. We want them to assimilate, but also to keep within our religion and cultural circles.” Noordin points to two issues in this narrative. First, Pakistani community building is hindered by governmental categories and rhetoric that insist on melding those from diverse countries into one cultural group. Second, this categorization hinders assimilatory efforts on the part of the next generation (because, I suspected, for him assimilation for his children was not intended to be as South Asian, but as Canadian). That is, the desired assimilation into the majority group rather than into another minority group.

Noordin was very resistant to the formation of South Asian Heritage Month:

The Pakistani community feels it should not be called South Asian Heritage Month; it’s Indian Heritage Month because there was not consultation with the Pakistani community or the consulate. We
should not be taken up as one group. There are many countries in South Asia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, etc. They all have different cultures. People don’t have that much in common; the religion, social, culture, economics are entirely different. India is a larger country, a bigger community. I worked with Indian groups; they try to monopolize the situation, acting like a big brother. Each country should be given their own identity.

Noordin was very resistant to sharing an event with the Indian community, but he later told me that he was very comfortable working with the Sikh community. “I have noticed that I feel more comfortable with Sikhs than Hindu—maybe it’s the language of the Punjab; we have some culture in common with the Punjab.” For Noordin, it seemed that national divides between Pakistanis and Indians were insurmountable, while religious differences between himself and his Sikh friends were overcome by a common history in the Punjab. Many considered the categorization “South Asian” to be a façade for hegemonic Indian nationalism, which would erase Islam as a part of one’s identity. Furthermore, despite a history of racialization and violence against Pakistanis, people still choose that identifier over South Asian to affirm a post-Partition identity that was hard-won.

Embracing Coalition Building

However, not everyone agrees about the use or rejection of the term. Some Pakistani community members I spoke with had an economic interest in coalition building. Faisal, for example, was a well-established Pakistani businessman who had moved to Canada in 1969 as a student. He was president of both the Canada-Pakistan Business Council and SOS, a charitable organization that exists in thirty-one countries. He worked extensively with Indian and Pakistani businessmen in Toronto and told me, “We get along well, but there isn’t much integration because of religious differences, which restrict [Hindus from participating in Muslim] religious activities.” However, he told me that at cultural events, such as festivals, “we all come under the same platform.” He went on to say, “People do get along well because Canada is tolerant. In general there is a good understanding between India and Pakistan. There is respect for each other. People become colorblind.” It is interesting to consider his last comment, which seems to suggest that Indians and Pakistanis are racially different. Importantly, it also demonstrates
the power of the language of the multicultural state and the influence of the concept of color blindness in Faisal’s understandings of diversity and minority culture, which are aligned with the multicultural state’s desire to imagine itself as color blind and inclusive.

Like Faisal, Aisha referred to herself as South Asian. I first met her through her role as an organizer of Toronto’s second annual Basant Festival, a kite-flying celebration that also takes place in Pakistan. Like Mariam, Aisha was in her sixties. One day we met in the coffee shop of a large bookstore in downtown Toronto in advance of Basant. She and I had met through mutual acquaintances, and she was trying to recruit me to volunteer at the festival. Aisha had moved to Toronto four years before our interview. She was born in Karachi, and her husband was from Lahore. Many of her family members from her mother’s side had moved to Canada and the United States. In the aftermath of Partition, her family lived in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). Her story was unusual among the ones I collected during fieldwork, as it was one of upward mobility that continued into the diaspora.

During our conversation at that bookstore, she revealed: “We have no common clubs. Some Indians or Pakistanis are reluctant to come to [South Asian] events. People say they don’t want to go. They say it’s an Indian event. We’ve tried Pakistani food in Indian venues, but it doesn’t work; everyone wants butter chicken.” She went on: “There isn’t enough communication between Pakistanis and Indians here—they live in small pockets. We should band together here.” In reference to South Asian Heritage Month she said:

The Pakistani aspect was very small this year. It will be different next year. Pakistani dancers exist; there is singing and dancing, but it’s not culturally approved. They think the only women involved would be prostitutes. It’s because of the fundamentalists, they think everything is wrong. It’s not true for the new generation. They [the parents] live here and go see Bollywood films, but they don’t want kids participating. In Bengal, you are supposed to entertain guests in the domain of dance . . . and singing. Indian culture is at a higher level because dancing and singing is part of their culture.

While organizing the Basant Festival in Toronto, she experienced resistance and was repeatedly and angrily told, “Basant is a Hindu festival.” While she uses the term “South Asian,” she still marks religious divides within the community, as Faisal did. There may be a temptation here to conclude that the poor tend to communal tension while the rich do not, but that
would be a simplistic understanding of the dynamics within the community. Rather, there are ways that class and economic interests (of capitalism) override seeming differences in the interest of making money. Both Faisal and Aisha were businesspeople who wanted to make contacts and develop connections; even so, both their narratives were haunted by Partition-era religious divides, and both asserted that those are the most difficult divisions to overcome.

Prema Kurien (2003) has written on the concept of “South Asian” and how meaningful it is to Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, and Bangladeshi immigrants in the United States. The debate is roughly divided between those interested in coalition building to address common concerns versus those who want to maintain individual group identities. The former claim that there are numerous cultural similarities, and policymakers do not see differences between South Asian groups anyway, while the latter argue that the cultural and political differences between groups are too great. She argues that in diaspora, religious differences and tensions have exacerbated. Mariam’s and Aisha’s perspectives reveal contrasting attitudes toward “South Asia” in the diaspora. Both felt the need for community building, but while Aisha embraced it, Mariam did not.

Mariam’s perspectives reflect some of the ways the state-sanctioned version of South Asia does not resonate with the majority of the Pakistani community in Toronto. Asking Pakistanis to identify as South Asian—that is, with a group to which they feel little belonging—results in their marginalization by the very form of recognition meant to give them political voice. Multiculturalism in Canada is predicated on notions of inclusion that cut across ethnic and racial categories, as well as religion and national affiliation. Ironically, such attempts at state inclusion have served to exclude Pakistani women from civic participation as South Asians because they do not see themselves represented in such government-sponsored cultural events like national heritage days and ethnic festivals. These perceptions of the meaning of South Asia are particularly revealing in the context of the development and origins of South Asian Heritage Month and the government’s involvement in imposing the category.

The Origins of South Asian Heritage Month

In 1988, the Ontario Society for Services to Indo-Caribbean Canadians celebrated the 150-year anniversary of the arrival of Indians to Guyana.
In April 1997, the Indo Trinidad Canadian Association (ITCA) began commemorating what it referred to as Indian Arrival Day. In 1998 the name was changed to Indian Arrival and Heritage Day, and in 1999 the ITCA began celebrating May as Indian Arrival and Heritage Month. In 2001, Raminder Gill, the only Indian Member of Parliament, introduced Bill 98 in the Ontario legislature, which was passed on the condition that the name be changed from Indian Heritage Month to South Asian Heritage Month over concerns that there would be confusion with Indigenous groups. Thus, in Ontario, May is South Asian Heritage Month and May 5 is South Asian Arrival Day. According to the Canadian government, the South Asian Heritage Act was passed to celebrate the presence of people from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and the Caribbean.

While South Asian Heritage Month and South Asian Arrival Day are widely celebrated, many are not aware of the latter’s direct tie to Indian indentured labor. May 5, 1838, actually marks the formal end of slavery and the beginning of the system of indentured labor in the British West Indies. That was the day that 396 Indian immigrants, referred to as the “Gladstone Coolies,” landed in Guyana from Calcutta. According to Moon-Ho Jung (2006), “The word coolie was largely a product of European expansion into Asia and the Americas, embodying the contradictory imperial imperatives of enslavement and emancipation” (13). They were lured with false promises and coercion by professional traffickers, who also used practices such as forced detention and kidnapping. John Gladstone, a plantation owner in British Guiana, turned to Indian indentured labor as the solution to the “emancipation problem.” After complaints were filed with the British Anti-Slavery Society, there was an investigation of the working conditions of the “Gladstone coolies,” revealing beatings and extortion. A quarter of the laborers died by the time their contracts ended in 1843; the majority of those who survived returned to India, despite their option to remain in British Guiana (Jung 2006: 14). Between 1835 and 1918, 341,600 indentured laborers were relocated from India to Guyana.

Despite these grim origins, in Canada, Indian Arrival Day is not a time of critical reflection on the dark history of indentured labor and exploitation, but a celebration of transnational migration and arrival. In this way, South Asian Heritage Month itself is haunted by the specter not only of Partition-era communal tension, but also the violence and exploitation at the heart of Indian emigration. Celebrating the first boatload of indentured
laborers to the Americas is indicative of a kind of historical blindness. It erases the history of violence at the heart of this kind of migration in the name of claiming national belonging in a place that condoned labor exploitation. Erasing this history also allows the state and immigrant communities to turn a blind eye to the damage caused by multiculturalism. This act is reminiscent of what Ananya Bhattacharjee (1992) calls the “habit of ex-nomination,” referring to the way some South Asians in the United States attempt to recapture their middle-class status in diaspora by ignoring real social issues such as violence against women in the intimate spaces of family life. Similarly, Bhattacharjee’s insights apply to the examples above of Faisal and Aisha, who demonstrate through their interest in the financial benefits of coalition building a desire to regain status lost during migration. As I argued in the previous chapter, South Asian Heritage Month is considered a success story of Canadian multiculturalism because it gives recognition to minority subjects. “South Asians” are also another kind of success story of multicultural inclusion, in contrast to the marginalized racialized category of “Muslim” and “those who look that way.”

South Asian in Practice

South Asian Heritage Month consists largely of cultural festivals occurring throughout the country with the help of the federal government in Ottawa. Masala! Mehndi! Masti! is the premier event of the South Asian community in Toronto. While it typically happens in the summer, and outside of the official South Asian Heritage Month, conversations around MMM and other festivals held in May concerned questions of who was “South Asian.” I also reference them again here because attending cultural festivals like MMM and listening to Pakistani women talk about them demonstrated that their relationship to the South Asian category is also importantly gendered. As many writers have argued, the performance of culture and nationalism has been understood in the intimate spaces of family life and cultural practice as the purview of women (e.g., Chatterjee 1993; Kaplan, Alarcon, and Moallem 1999). In these contexts, women are understood to be the bearers of tradition, culture, and language, handing them down to the next generations. The dependency on women’s bodies becomes both representative of Pakistani nationalism and acceptable multiculturalism, which also relies on women’s bodies and labor. The category of South Asia is already gendered because, in representing the nation through cultural identifica-
tions and allegiances, women do symbolic and material labor but are not included in the exercise of power. Thus, we can perhaps read Pakistani women’s rejection of being categorized as South Asian as a rejection of multicultural practice that only includes them in symbolic (and not material) domains. While these women may be invisible in certain cultural contexts, they are hyper-visible in the context of cultural celebration.

When viewed through the lens of patriarchy, South Asian Heritage Month festivals occupy an uncomfortable space in liberal settler multicultural politics, as well as in practices of recognition and belonging. Women’s performances are central to South Asian Heritage Month festivities, in the form of more obvious Indian classical dance, but also in cooking authentic Indian foods and performing in heteronormative (and patriarchal) family structures, including providing childcare. These particular calls for the recognition of difference by multicultural state practices not only normalize certain categories of identification (as South Asian) but also recognize and regularize only particular forms of gendered performance (cooking and dancing). In the cultural festival, women are expected to perform intimate cultural labor while at the same time the state devalues that kind of work. Within the sanitized sensorium, the labor of the cultural festival is co-opted, controlled, and contained by the state and its commitment to multicultural policy, practice, and performance. While women’s performances in these contexts are integral to the representation of culture, they happen within constraints of acceptable difference; they are heterosexual, heteronormative, patriarchal, and South Asian. The production of radical alterity in the making of South Asia is therefore also gendered. Thus, when women reject the label South Asian they are rejecting state discourse and the state’s power to produce their bodies.

All the South Asian organizations I worked with played a role through activities ranging from staging workshops to staffing an informational table, which targeted its flyers to what the organization called “a more mainstream family-oriented” audience, toning down its leftist inclinations. A notable exception, perhaps proving why this was necessary, was a table for a South Asian organization that promotes safe-sex practices and family planning. That day they were distributing condoms with wrappers that had attractive images of Indian goddesses on them. As I traveled down the path between tables, I noticed that many of the condoms had been tossed on the ground once participants who perhaps condemned the idea of premarital sex realized what they were. Engaging with the realities of premarital sex
and birth control, real issues facing the community, were not part of the celebration of South Asian Canadian culture.

During the last day of MMM I had volunteered to sit at one of the tables with Lubna, a forty-year-old single woman who was originally from Karachi. I had met Lubna at an unemployment workshop at a local immigrant women’s organization. It had been raining all day, but that did not deter the hundreds still in attendance. As Lubna and I sat waiting for someone to ask us a question, she told me that she felt the entire festival suggested a “mainstream Indian population” that was very different from the Pakistani population: “We’re poorer, not well organized and don’t do Bollywood or dancing. So who is this for?” These divisions within the community were highlighted and exacerbated during these festivals. Comments such as Lubna’s demonstrate that subjectivity is central to the lived experience of immigration and citizenship in Toronto, as is the role of the sanitized sensorium in constructing multicultural citizenship. The immigrant body becomes a site of discipline and illuminates how ideals of normative citizenship, and thus national identity, are constructed as well. Taking this into consideration, we can see the ways that whiteness is naturalized as the center and subject of liberal multicultural discourse. Examining the everyday experiences of immigrants as partially included subjects demonstrates the challenges and fractures in notions of citizenship.

_Cultural Producers_

Pakistani artists are considered central to the making of South Asian public culture, and some have been central to South Asian cultural festivals. For the group of Pakistani artists I met, cultural production, employment, and social inclusion were intertwined. I found that it was impossible to discuss identity and self-referencing without addressing larger social issues pertaining to belonging, such as work and stable employment. Exploring their feelings not only toward art and South Asian Heritage Month, but also migration and citizenship, including their own problems with securing a livelihood, draws together questions of identity (and self-naming), belonging, and marginalization in the public culture of Toronto and the multicultural state.

While in Toronto I became friends with Rhea, who was the executive director of the South Asian Visual Arts Centre (SAVAC) at the time. SAVAC was established in 1993–94 by a group of visual artists who were curating
the visual arts of Desh Pardesh; in 1994 it was incorporated as a nonprofit organization along with the Alliance for South Asian AIDS Prevention. In 2008, they changed their name to the South Asian Visual Arts Center and became federally incorporated. In 2013, they were awarded a multiyear Ontario Trillium Foundation grant for a project that traces SAVAC’s origins as part of Toronto’s history. Through my relationship with her and other artists I met, I was able to organize a roundtable discussion with eight Pakistanis artists (three men and five women) about issues they had faced living in multicultural Canada. Most had gone to the National College of Art in Lahore and were trying to establish themselves as artists in Canada. At the time, SAVAC was the only artist collective in Toronto organized along ethnic lines. During our roundtable, I asked if anyone ever thought about returning to Pakistan. Zafir, a Pakistani artist, said, “There are Kashmir issues, Afghani issues. There was intellectual stiflement in Pakistan. I was either going to stay and fight or pack up and go.” Saad added, “I don’t know if people come here for economic betterment. Most people from art schools will find a more comfortable situation at home, so most come for access in the intellectual sense.” Zakiya added, “I expected it to be more open, more friendly, more open intellectually. In the first year I found it to be very difficult. It’s very limiting here, the Pakistani community in Toronto is limiting. To them, I’m eccentric. It’s hard to connect with other people. In Peshawar, people are very open.” Tabina interjected, “I disagree, people from Peshawar are very male oriented. I didn’t find it so open.”

When I asked about their participation in cultural festivals, Zakiya said, “I’ve been to an Eid function that was like a cultural festival. Food, music mostly. It’s nice to feel like it’s Eid; it’s nice to take the kids there, then go home.” Sarish said she went to MMM, but “didn’t like it. The performer we went to see wasn’t good. The food was good, though.” Rhea added, “The mission of Masala is to bring South Asian art out in the mainstream. It’s family-oriented art. Not like Desh Pardesh. Masala does a good job of getting the community together. It’s a weekend to have artists present their work. It’s a very limited expression of art, it’s a community or commercial event. It’s a promotional event, rather than a grassroots event.” Zakiya added, “It’s more like Bollywood art.” Rhea pointed out, “Its strength is its huge audience.” Zakiya explained, “The art shows in Pakistan have religious limits. Defense and Clifton [neighborhoods in Lahore] are fine, but elsewhere it’s limited.”

I asked about the term South Asian. Lila told me that she heard it in Toronto for the first time. Sarish said, “It’s discriminatory, we want a different
identity. Why the South Asian brand?” Saad questioned Sarish’s statement, perhaps trying to defend Canadian state practice: “It could be racial. We’re not white, we’re not Chinese, we’re South Asian?” Sarish responded, “Why do we need to identify?” Both Sarish and Saad struggled to make sense of the South Asian category; Sarish marked it as a branding strategy by the government, while Saad tried to understand its origins.

It was getting late and several members had to leave. Making their apologies, they headed out the door. Rhea turned to me, “It’s hard for people like Saad because he worked for twenty-five years as an architect.” Sarish added, “There’s lots of frustration, it shatters your confidence.” Lila added, “Doctors are facing this too. Doctors are not at all accepted. No matter how much you know before you come, it’s a different picture here. You have to do your résumé again. My Uncle was a banker in Pakistan, top-level management. He was told he needs to work on his résumé. It feels strange and it makes him angry.” For Saad and others in his position, cultural production, earning a living, and belonging were inseparable. Discussing their identities was about discussing multiculturalism, their art, and having a source of income.

I later had the opportunity to meet with Lila and her husband at their home, where we discussed these issues further. I had been wandering around the Etobicoke neighborhood looking for the address I had been given when I ran directly into Lila. She had wet hair and was running outside to pick up a tea towel that had fallen out the window. In her thirties, she wore dark-framed glasses, had long black hair, and seemed really cool and interesting, so I immediately wanted her to like me. We took the elevator up to her apartment to meet her husband, Tahir. Both artists, they had been in Canada for five months at the time, having migrated from Islamabad. They were originally from Karachi, but had studied in Lahore. They moved to Canada because they wanted to explore the world. They were happy with their decision. Lila told me, “I didn’t expect Canada to be the way it is. I expected to stand out, but here there are more Pakistanis than in Pakistan.” She also elaborated, “I prefer not to use the word South Asian. Here people are put into cultural groups. I never used it before and I’m not going to now.” In Pakistan, they had their own gallery, which they ran for two-and-a-half years before closing it. They both attended settlement-services workshops on arrival and said the classes “felt useless . . . telling everyone the same thing, doing the same thing.” She elaborated, “People come here with years
of work experience. Why erase what they know and begin again?” She continued, “odd jobs are degrading. They degrade your dignity. It’s frustrating because you’re not even good at odd jobs. People think the West is money, but no one can prepare anybody unless they’re physically here.” While Tahir was still unemployed, Lila had begun working as an assistant at SAVAC.

I did not get a chance to speak with Maha at the SAVAC roundtable, so we arranged to meet later at her workplace in the graphic services department for one of Canada’s major banks. She went to the National College of Art in Lahore and graduated with a Bachelor of Design. Her father was a civil engineer who moved the family. Maha was born in Lahore, moved to Saudi Arabia when she was three, then back to Pakistan when she was seven. After she graduated from college she worked for an ad agency in Lahore as a graphic designer for two years. She decided to leave Pakistan because the social and economic system was terrible. “The economy was going down the drain,” Maha said, “people who can get out are getting out. In Pakistan, the religious fanatics won’t let the country progress. I wish Partition hadn’t happened, India is ahead of us, more stable.” Her grandparents were in the Indian part of the Punjab, but moved to Lahore after Partition.

Maha was married in Pakistan, but moved on her own ahead of her husband. The plan was that she would stay and sponsor him, but ultimately she decided to end the marriage instead. She had no friends or family and stayed with acquaintances in Mississauga for two weeks, but became uncomfortable because she felt she should be paying them rent. At first she wasn’t sure if she should stay in Canada, but ultimately she decided that she would. She initially found work as a waitress in a Pakistani restaurant. The owner, a Pakistani immigrant himself, understood her situation and gave her a salary advance so she could get her own apartment in Mississauga. She saved up and bought a computer so she could begin trying to find work as a designer. She put her portfolio online, sent out résumés to two thousand organizations she said, and had ten interviews. While I am not sure if Maha really sent her résumé to two thousand businesses, her reaching for a number that large suggests that her search was broad and intense. She found work in a restaurant for ten to eleven months, then started doing freelance work for the company she is now with. She explained, “My manager took a chance when he hired me. He hired me in a senior position,” which she felt was based on her strong portfolio. She had been at the job for three years and found herself happy and secure, although the
job itself was not creative because her work had to succumb to corporate standards.

When I asked Maha how she felt about the term South Asian, she said she did not use it. “I say Pakistan, or a place near India. People don’t use it in Pakistan. A country gives someone an identity.” Her remarks here signal the relationship between her identity and her national affiliation. Maha did not want to identify as South Asian, perhaps because of what she told me next: “Once, three or four white teenagers stopped me and asked if I was Muslim. I could see the hate and anger in their eyes so I kept walking. They ran and yelled at me.” She decided not to go on walks alone anymore. Being identified as South Asian erases the discrimination she experienced, and the hate crime she escaped. Identifying as Pakistani demonstrates a form of resistance to that erasure and it allowed her to assert a part of character that was important to her. Despite the fact that Maha does not like the term for herself, she has lots of Indian friends. “The tensions between the countries are because fanatic extremists are running the countries, giving people the notion that people don’t get along.” In Maha’s case, her dislike of the term South Asian has nothing to do with tensions between Pakistanis and Indians, but rather is about her desire to maintain an identity as Pakistani.

A few years later, on a return trip to Toronto, I was having lunch with a friend at a restaurant in Little Italy. After sitting down, I looked up and recognized the artwork on the walls: a series of paintings by Zakiya. I had told her about venues like this over coffee one day when she asked me about the art scene in Toronto. I had mentioned this restaurant in particular, which was known for having a rotating art exhibit featuring local artists. I was so happy to see that she was able to make her art present in the Toronto scene. But being visible, even for artists, can be a double-edged sword, as public and state discourses have the power not only to recognize but also to circumscribe the terms of belonging.

These artists and cultural producers want to be seen for what they are, not how the multicultural state might project them. Their stories and perspectives help paint a broader picture of the Pakistani Muslim immigrant community in Toronto. Exploring individual experiences regarding their art, South Asian Heritage Month, and making a living demonstrates the ways identity and belonging are intertwined in individual experiences of marginalization in a range of social spheres. And while their migration trajectories or experiences finding work may be different from some of the
other foreign-trained professionals I spoke with, there were also important similarities in terms of how they felt about being interpellated.

**Imagining Citizenship**

In planning sessions for these kinds of South Asian festivals, there was often tension regarding the construction of the category South Asian. I repeatedly heard the sentiment that Amina expressed to me: “I refer to myself as Pakistani and don’t agree that all Indians, Pakistanis, et cetera can be called South Asians. We might come from similar geographic regions but have individual characteristics.” As Naseem said earlier, “South Asians here are brought under the same umbrella. Canada does it because we look the same. Who are they, ‘South Asians’ . . . I never heard ‘South Asian’ before coming here.” I had met both of these women while conducting fieldwork at a nonprofit for South Asian women, so I was surprised by their reluctance to call themselves “South Asian.” But I realized that it points to the material necessity behind certain kinds of coalition building.

Despite its contention, the category was also mobilized by nonprofits that drew on what Gayatri Spivak has called “strategic essentialism” in order to obtain funding for activities and programming having to do with cultural celebrations, employment, and health issues—all related to the settlement-services encounter between nonprofit workers and immigrant women. The Canadian government most often gives funding to particular ethnic groups, thus creating conditions in which there is little inter-ethnic coalition building and smaller groups are lumped within larger ethnic categories. “South Asian” circulates widely and is understood as a means to gain government resources because it is a legible category of multicultural difference. Ironically, this category that celebrates the “multi-ness” of Canadian society serves to exclude members of those very communities it is meant to include. In private, these identifiers became fraught because they did not coincide with women’s self-understanding of their citizenship and belonging in the multicultural state and in processes of migration. Through their disidentification with the term, Pakistani women actively redefine belonging by resisting and negotiating with available multicultural categories. Their own understandings of South Asia were haunted by their own personal experiences of migration and dislocation.

In *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures* (1997), Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Mohanty write, “We were not born women
of color, but became women of color [in the United States]. From African American and U.S. women of color, we learned the peculiar brand of U.S. North American racism and its constructed boundaries of race” (xiv). Their insights speak not only to their own experiences, but also more broadly to the experiences of immigrants who are interpellated into North American racial formations, which demonstrates the constructedness of such categories of inclusion.

This chapter has examined women’s experiences of multiculturalism and the politics of recognition to demonstrate how different segments of the South Asian immigrant community feel about and engage with multicultural governmental practice. I have sought to illustrate how the state-imposed category of “South Asian” can perpetuate and even naturalize divisions between Pakistanis and Indians in diasporic Toronto. By socially producing racialized difference, the Canadian state ultimately encourages Pakistanis to identify with a category that many feel champions the interests of Indian immigrants while marginalizing their own. Multicultural governance in this instance leads Pakistanis in diaspora to resist and reframe their conscription into the category of “South Asian,” which has now become the dominant name for them in Toronto, institutionalized and enshrined in South Asian Heritage Month. Their resistance demonstrates that communal tensions are naturalized and sustained by (post)colonial, multicultural governance, which (like the colonial state) manages not only differences but acceptable categories of belonging as well.

As the relationship of Pakistani women to the state-supported category of South Asian attests, the liberal settler multicultural state has the power to name minorities and therefore circumscribe the limits of inclusion. But that power lies elsewhere, too, in the terms of scholarly debate on multiculturalism, which has similarly been colonized by liberal discourse. Descriptors such as “difference,” “toleration,” and “ethnicity” are still common terms in the scholarly writing on these issues. As Audre Lorde (1983) famously wrote, “The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house,” and thus it is critical to engage the work on settler colonialism and bring it into conversation with the liberal discourse of multiculturalism.

In calling attention to the fact that Canada is a racial state (Goldberg 2002), I have attempted to show that, despite the presumed disavowal of race politics on the part of government policy makers, multiculturalism is a discourse of race. The framework of racialization emphasizes the ways racial and ethnic difference is both central to state practices and constantly pro-
duced through moments of friction between citizens and the state. In this context of race-making, Balibar and Wallerstein (2001) challenge the notion that racism is a relic of past histories and societies. Rather, they argue that it is a social relation that is embedded in contemporary social structures, including the nation-state and the relationship between the margin and the center. In their analysis, racism is a profoundly modern phenomenon tied to capitalism and class conflict. Taken together, discourses of settler colonialism and the racial state confront discourses of the state (both popular and scholarly) that move away from the liberal language of state multiculturalism and instead call attention to the underlying politics of racism, patriarchy, and heteronormativity that undergird late-liberal policies and practices.

These issues demonstrate the affective dimensions of the tension between visibility and invisibility in contemporary social life. Misrecognition is not the same as not being recognized. Misrecognition is being seen not as you are, but who you are assumed to be, and defining how you are going to be. This misrecognition has material effects in that it produces a kind of gendered precarity in which women struggle to survive and to maintain their dignity in the face of extreme marginalization.
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