

NEGOTIATING “INDIAN-NESS”:  
TRANSNATIONAL IDENTITIES OF INDIANS IN THE  
OKLAHOMA CITY METROPOLITAN AREA

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Abstract: Historically, research on immigrants in the U.S. has relied heavily on interpreting various ways in which they socially and spatially assimilate into urban areas. Since the September 11 attacks, this research has begun to address the shifting negative attention toward immigrants who are Muslim or have Muslim-like appearance. On the one hand, geographers have focused on immigrant transnationalism, signifying inter-connectedness across national borders, and on the other hand, the focus has been on how immigrant identities assimilate within the U.S. society. In this dissertation, I bring these two strands of research together in order to understand the effects of the 9/11 attacks on every day immigrant life. Specifically, I investigate the case of Indian immigrants in the Oklahoma City metropolitan area (OKC metro) to explore the meanings associated within their transnational identities. I use qualitative research methods, specifically semi-structured interviews and participant observations to analyze data collected in public and private spaces important to Indians in a three-county region that constitute the OKC metro. Results from this analysis show transnationalism, with reference to OKC Indians, is constitutive of everyday practices both within and outside OKC metro. Specifically, three forms of transnational identities among OKC Indians, namely: everyday, racialized, and networked, form as distinct yet mutually constitutive part of the overall immigrant experiences of Indians in the OKC metro. Everyday transnational identities among OKC Indians are socially and spatially constructed in the metro's public places, including Indian grocery stores, Indian restaurants, and religious places including Hindu, Sikh, Christian, and Islamic sites. Since 9/11, these constructions have been further modified as Indians responded to the sometimes-negative effects of racialization due to 9/11. Racialized transnational identities have emerged as Indians modify their appearances and find different ways to communicate their identities. Simultaneously, Indians network with other Indians across local, regional, and global scales forming networked transnational identities. In summary, this dissertation aims to enrich the understanding of Indian immigrants in an under-researched geographical area in order to contribute toward positive attention on the everyday life of post-9/11 immigrants in the U.S.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

*“I’ve grown up with so many stereotypes about my culture, I just knew that it was something I needed to advocate for. A lot of the remarks weren’t meant to be malicious, but just due to the fact of ignorance.”<sup>1</sup>*

#### Background

Since the September 11, 2001 attacks (9/11), immigrants in the U.S. sharing resemblance to the perpetrators have been scrutinized, stigmatized, and targeted. Numerous attacks on immigrants, particularly those from the Middle East and South Asia have contributed to the “othering” of immigrants belonging to these regions. This *confusion due to conflation* has been especially severe on immigrants who have arrived around the time of the attacks in U.S. urban areas that have a very small minority population (Tumlin, 2004; Winders, 2007). Since 9/11, scholars have increasingly voiced the need to unpack various facets of immigrant lives in order to quell violence and raise awareness on their unique multiplicities associated with their life in the U.S. This dissertation focuses on Oklahoma City

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<sup>1</sup> Ms. Nina Davuluri, soon after the 2013 Miss America contest, reacting to racism from people who mistakenly targeted her for being an Arab terrorist. A daughter of Indian immigrants, Ms. Davuluri was born in Michigan and raised in Oklahoma. In 2013, she became the first Indian-American to win Miss America. (Source: Judkis (2013). Miss America Nina Davuluri fights post-pageant racism with a beauty queen’s poise. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from <http://www.washingtonpost.com>. Last accessed October 16, 2016.

metropolitan area Indian immigrants and their transnational identities in order to bring attention to an under-researched immigrant community in combating post-9/11 stigmatization.

### Problem Statement

Due to prevalent racism against immigrants in Western nations, there is an urgent need to unpack the meanings that constitute the everyday constructions that forge immigrant identities. With the dismantling of colonialism in the 1950s, the post-colonial era has inspired qualitative researchers to study immigrant identities. These scholars examine historical and socio-spatial changes in immigrant communities who previously unrecognized. As immigrants from the developing world increasingly located to developed nations, scholars study various attributes within immigrant identities including gender, race, religion, and sexual orientation, among others. These scholars have used innovative critical frameworks including transnationalism and performativity, thereby advancing post-colonial studies (Patel, 2005, Kennerly, 2008, Melo, 2015). Research on immigrant identities has emerged as a coming together of two complementary research worlds. On the one hand, scholars including Stuart Hall and Edward Said provide a critical post-colonial lens on the condition of their fellow people of color living in Western nations. On the other hand, critical theorists from these nations, including Erving Goffman and Judith Butler, as well as critical geographers Peter Jackson and Katharyne Mitchell, theorize performativity and transnationalism, respectively, as frameworks that set into motion work of additional post-colonial scholars. Despite these trends in increased scholarship and changes in immigration policies, recent historical events, due to global terrorism, have created challenges for immigrants and the need for additional research avenues.

In the United States, 9/11 uniquely re-configured the post-colonial narrative of immigrants. Some Americans, many of them descendants of European immigrants, turned against new and

incoming immigrants from Middle East and South Asia. Pre-existing racism against non-White people, along with post-9/11 suspicion of immigrants, created new racialized post-9/11 narratives, questioning the motives of the aforementioned immigrants and their descendants. Chandrasekar's (2003) "Flying While Brown" captures the racialization of "brown-ness" as a source of identity conflict in a post-9/11 America. Further, anti-immigrant rhetoric in the 2016 U.S. elections emerged to counteract immigration flows from nations of people with brown skin, including Mexico as well as predominately-Muslim nations (Osnos, 2016).

Using the OKC metro as a case for study, in this dissertation, I employ qualitative inquiry to advance work on "brown" immigrants. Specifically, I study Asian Indians as post-colonial immigrants within the OKC metro. Using participant observations and semi-structured interviews, I interpret three constructions of transnational identities, namely: everyday, racialized, and networked.

My study contributes to the emerging post-9/11 scholarship of an underrepresented region, the U.S. Great Plains. By unpacking various subjective identities of Indians, I am hopeful that my study enables future researchers to continue to push new frontiers in scholarship on immigrants to help mitigate the harmful vitriol of post-9/11 hate both within and outside the United States.

### Significance of Study

*New York Times* columnist Anand Giridharadas recently wrote about the journey of Raisuddin Bhuiyan, a Bangladeshi Muslim, mistaken for an Arab terrorist shot in a Dallas minimart by a White supremacist soon after 9/11 (Giridharadas, 2014). While Bhuiyan survived, his identity as a naturalized Bangladeshi-American had become racialized because of 9/11. Bhuiyan, of course, was part of a larger

American experience that had its own cyclical movements of some immigrants experiencing racism and eventually assimilating. Thus, as the Giridharadas (2004, 201) notes:

He [Bhuiyan] was part of something larger, of course: part of the vast infusion of new blood that kept the country young and churning, and that defined its essential being. This was America's strange, stirring commitment: to keep itself vital by allowing itself, again and again, to become somebody else's. Immigration had made, and continued to make, America; immigration ever seemed poised to tear America apart. The people were asked to celebrate this recurring passage into new hands. But in hard times those who had only the glory of their pasts could choose to cling to them—even if it meant sending the country to hell. Yet if you survived their wrath and remained, you would become as much a part of the scenery as they. You would become old blood, too. Thus the country, having become yours, would become somebody else's.

The need to “look beneath” and “unpack” the meanings within the larger narratives of immigrant identities is therefore crucial in a post-9/11 America. Unlike Bhuiyan, while the majority of Indians in America, including myself, have lived without being shot, the need to examine various aspects of Indian identities is necessary to inform mainstream American society to avoid racist generalizations, particularly concerning racial conflation with terrorists involved in the 9/11 attacks. Within the larger identity of “Indian,” several aspects of identity, including ethnic, linguistic, and religious, inform the larger, collective constructions of various Indian groups. This study, in part, contributes to an emerging body of research within social sciences and humanities that promotes anti-racist, anti-xenophobic scholarship on Indians in a post-9/11 America. Specifically, my study is among the first in geography to focus primarily in Oklahoma. Therefore, it provides a foundational socio-cultural knowledge to help other researchers to expand the geographical scope of a post-9/11 enquiry on Indian communities in other underrepresented research regions within America.

Accordingly, I rely upon identity, subjectivities, and transnationalism to understand “Indianness” in the OKC metro. I use Stuart Hall's (2000) definition of “identity” because it refers to the

bringing together of two aspects of how individuals identify themselves, namely, self-identification of the individuals or *subjects* and the practices that they are *subjected* to, also known as *subjectivities*. Hall (2000, 19) examines identity, as thus:

I use 'identity' to refer to the meeting point, the point of *suture*, between, on the one hand, the discourses and practices which attempt to 'interpellate,' speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be 'spoken'. Identities are thus points of temporary attachments to the subject positions which discursive practices construct.

By using this approach to examine the practices that enable the constructions of individual identities, a more nuanced examination of immigrant identities is made possible. Subjectivities include the various positions that an individual is subjected to and for this reason, subjectivities of an individual are always “unfinished, partial, non-linear” (Blackman *et. al*, 2008, 16). Blackman *et. al* (2008, 16) further note that subjectivity “as any other concept is seen as an active agent that shapes and is shaped by prevailing social, cultural and political spaces.” In my study, subjectivities of Indians are formed as a result of ongoing practices of transnationalism. In its simplest terms, transnationalism as defined by Basch *et al.* (1994, 7) is “a process by which migrants, through their daily life activities create social fields that cross national boundaries.” More directly, relevant to my dissertation, Nagel (2001, 247, my emphasis) notes that, “geographers – via transnationalism – have the potential to enhance thinking about culture, politics, and *space*.” Thus, I use transnationalism and related words “transnational” and “transnationalities” to indicate the spatial processes that enable the constructions of Indian identities.

In the following six chapters, I analyze Indian identity in Oklahoma City. First in Chapter Two, “Literature Review,” I review key research that traces the socio-political foundations of immigration in the United States. In particular, I will draw attention to the racialized re-makings of immigrant experiences in the U.S. In this chapter, I elaborate upon the evolution of immigrant transnationalism

literature that emerged due to the historical trends in U.S. immigration policies, from the nation's founding to the post-9/11 era. I also review literature that focuses on everyday identities, particularly by bringing in Erving Goffman's body of work. Second, in Chapter Three, "Methods," I detail the qualitative methods I used to collect data and elaborate on the characteristics of the sampling population. Additionally, I describe how I analyzed the data that I then expand upon in the subsequent three chapters. Third, in Chapter Four, "Everyday Transnational Identities," I report on how everyday spaces, including grocery stores, religious sites, and restaurants feature in the everyday-ness of OKC Indian identity. Fourth, in Chapter Five, I examine more closely how the effects of 9/11 influences racialized transnational identities specifically as it pertains to modifying their appearances and communicating their identity labels to negotiate negative post-9/11 attitudes in various public places in the OKC metro. Finally, in Chapter Six, I explore various networks both within and outside OKC that enable Indians to engage in transnational negotiations. In Chapter Seven, I summarize my findings and provide recommendations for future studies.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

*E pluribus unum* (Latin for “Out of many, one”)

Official motto of the Great Seal of the United States<sup>2</sup>

In 1776, a new immigrant nation was born, the United States. The Swiss-American philosopher Pierre Eugene du Simitiere created the motto that would become the U.S. creed, formalizing the United States as a nation from which many identities emerged encompassing various nations, races, and religions. That out of many identities emerging from various nations, race, religions, this motto formalized the United States as one nation. However, little over two centuries later, it took another immigrant to challenge the scope of this American pluralism. In *Forgetful Nation* (2005), Ali Behdad challenges the rhetoric of America as the land of immigrants given the long historical record of federal legislation and racism directed against immigrants—particularly immigrants of color. Specifically, Behdad (2005) argued that conventional discourses surrounding America as the “land of immigrants” is devoid of the historical role race played in shaping the lives of immigrant lives across generations. From the nation’s founding to the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, Behdad (2005) places

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<sup>2</sup> Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. 20540 USA. URL: <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/pp.print>. Last retrieved on October 16, 2016.

the recurring theme of “historical amnesia” within the larger narrative of the nation’s memory, as if each subsequent generation forgot the embattled histories of immigrant identities.

In this literature review, I draw upon research that shows how immigrant identities in America, challenged by both federal laws as well as everyday contestations due to racism, have endured social, spatial, and demographic consequences due to America’s immigration scene. I position the historical and geographical basis of anti-immigrant sentiments directed toward immigrants of color—as well as white immigrants—during their journeys to incorporation within America’s metropolitan areas.

First, I begin with early foundations of the ‘white male normative’ that dominated most of the early period of American history and laid the foundation for racism against “people of color.” Second, I show how the vitriol of anti-Asian policies constructed these groups as the “foreigners,” in order to maintain so-called racial purity. Third, I review the series of Asian exclusion legislation that dominated through most of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century despite this time being labeled the “progressive era.” Fourth, I show how Wartime exclusion of Asians immigrants—even while many were second-generation Americans—during the Second World reinforced the racialized immigrant landscape. Fifth, I show how post-World War II revival of America’s cities created labor needs that necessitated the 1965 Immigration Act. Sixth, I review studies that point to the effects of the 1965 Act in re-shaping America’s suburbs as well as rendering them racialized landscapes. Seventh, with the 9/11 attacks as a backdrop, I describe the racialized consequences of federal policies on immigrants. Finally, I put forth Erving Goffman’s *Presentation of Self* as a useful theoretical framework to interpret post-9/11 subjectivities as seen across three forms of transnational identities that I present in this dissertation: everyday, racialized, and networked transnational identities.



## Early Immigration and Foundations of the 'White Male Normative'

*The American is a new man, who acts upon new principles; he must therefore entertain new ideas, and form new opinions. From involuntary idleness, servile dependence, penury and useless labour, he has passed to toils of a very different nature, rewarded by ample subsistence.*

Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782)

Crèvecoeur's words represented a paradox during America's nascent history. As a White, Protestant immigrant, he was untouched by brutality that millions of African slaves and Native Americans faced during the nation's founding. Crèvecoeur's words, however, encapsulates the origins of a binary in American immigration—that a privileged few white (Protestant) men held power over a large disenfranchised population that included women, non-Protestant whites,<sup>3</sup> and people of color. Early legislative power approved by the nation's founding men reinforced this binary by explicitly coding laws with racial hegemony. The Naturalization Act of 1790—the first ever U.S. immigration law—approved by George Washington paved the way for free White European-only immigration creating a racial barrier for non-White immigrants, a policy that existed until 1965 (Adelman, 2003). As the Act read:

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America, in Congress assembled, That any Alien being a *free white* [emphasis from the original] person, who shall have resided within the limits and under the jurisdiction of the United States for the term of two years, may be admitted to become a citizen thereof. (Source: library.uwb.edu)

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<sup>3</sup> The "Know Nothing" political party was formed by Protestant White leaders during the 1850s as an anti-Irish/anti-Catholic, anti-immigrant movement. Calling themselves "Native Americans," the Know Nothing power peaked during the 1856 presidential election but was hugely unpopular. Abraham Lincoln famously quipped his intentions to leave America if the Know Nothings came to power: "*When the Know-Nothings get control, it will read 'all men are created equal, except negroes and foreigners and Catholics.'* When it comes to that I should prefer emigrating to some country where they make no pretense of loving liberty — to Russia, for instance, where despotism can be taken pure, and without the base alloy of hypocrisy." (Browne, 1914, 153).

Subsequent immigration laws passed in 1795 and 1798 further strengthened the case for “free White men” to gain citizenship, thereby constructing a socio-cultural foundation of a *free white male*—a societal foundation that influences racial tensions to this date (Martin, 2002; Sáenz and Douglas, 2015). The exclusion of immigrants was particularly harsh to women due to laws that automatically suspected all women of “immoral” values. As Lee (2003, 97) notes, early U.S. laws barred women unjustly on the grounds of false generalizations. Thus, “Women of all backgrounds immigrating independently not only were subject to the ‘likely to become a public charge’ clause in immigration law, they were also considered morally suspect.” Neuman (1993) calls this era (1776-1875) in the U.S. the ‘lost century’ for American immigration laws—a missed opportunity by nation's founders to create an inclusive America for all immigrants regardless of their race and gender (Sanchez, 1997; Abrams, 2009).

#### “Yellow Peril” and the socio-political construction of “foreign-ness”

By the start of the Civil War in the 1860s, a racialized spatialization of immigrant America was emerging. White immigrants from Europe either found themselves serving in their state militia units or working in armament factories in major American cities including Chicago and New York (Behdad, 2005). This created a vast shortage of labor in newer, yet larger states in the American West that were witnessing economic boom. California’s Gold Rush starting in the late 1840s, as well as the Central Pacific Railroad construction in the Mountain States in the 1860s, prompted railroad contractors to look beyond the West Coast to meet urgent labor shortage (Kung, 1964). As the news of this demand extended beyond the West Coast and into the Pacific Ocean Rim, it reached the people in mainland China, who, tired of fighting the British due to the Opium Wars, looked toward California for a new start (Kung, 1964; Chan, 1989). By the 1850s, nearly 25,000 Chinese had settled into California forming the largest Asian community in the United States (Chan, 1989; Sandmeyer, 1991). The sudden

influx of Chinese immigrants created mass xenophobia among many White natives who called Chinese by the racist term “Yellow” for their skintone. Thus, “Yellow Peril” was a period emerging in the mid-nineteenth century targeting Chinese and Asian immigrants (Marchetti, 1994; Kawai, 2005). The reference to “Yellow Peril” emerged from racist generalizations of East Asians, primarily from popular culture (specifically, movies) emerging in the late 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Marchetti (1994,2) defined Yellow Peril as: “Rooted in medieval fears of Genghis Khan and Mongolian invasions of Europe, the yellow peril combines racist terror of alien cultures, sexual anxieties, and the belief that the West will be overpowered and enveloped by the irresistible, dark, occult forces of the East.”

“Yellow Peril” thrived in California largely due to racism in the nineteenth century California challenging the newly arriving Chinese immigrants (Seager, 1959). Additionally, anti-Chinese sentiment morphed into anti-Asian racism across the U.S. Thus, an era of “Yellow Peril” emerged during the 1800s whereby Chinese along with other Asian immigrants in the U.S. were systematically discriminated in all areas and levels of society (Miller, 1969; Saxton, 1971; Wu, 1982; Anderson, 1991; Saito, 1997; Shim, 1998; Kawai, 2005; Lye, 2009). One of the direct outcomes of the “Yellow Peril” xenophobia was the construction of a new category, “foreign” for immigrants (Anderson, 1991; Santos *et. al*, 2008).

Thus, caught between the racialized binary of dominant “White” and “Black” Americans, Saito (1997) notes that this third category “foreign” emerged during the height of the Chinese immigration in the late nineteenth/early twentieth centuries. Thus, as Saito (1997, 76) asserts, the emergence of Asian “foreign-ness” in America created a new racial dimension (White versus Asian) to an existing racial binary (White versus Black):

These realizations led me wonder what ends were served by the attribution of foreignness to the racialized identity of Asians, and to conclude that it helps reinforce racial, social and economic

hierarchies in the United States in two ways: first, by placing Asian Americans as a buffer zone (the "model minority") between those identified as "black" and "white" and, second, by constructing Asian Americans as instant outsiders against whom "real Americans" (black and white) can unite in times of crisis.

A widespread anti-foreign movement influenced other Asian settlement identities based in racialization within and outside California. For example, a new group of "Punjabi-Mexican" population emerged in Central Valley when Punjabi men from India arriving as prune farmers married Mexican women to gain U.S. citizenship, since "non-White" Indian men were barred from gaining naturalization (Leonard, 1992). Many left for Oregon and Vancouver (Canada), both receiving many of the immigrants pushed out of California. Others arrived east in New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio's industrial belt (Ichioka, 1980; Hing, 1994; Gibson and Abbott, 2002; Kim, 2014). Similar to this scattering of Indians across America, other Asian groups were compelled to find new homes in America's newly industrialized cities. With Asians increasingly competing with native-born Americans for jobs and continued persistence of racist U.S. laws, their twentieth century journeys both within and from outside of the United States became even more challenging (Kim, 2014).

### "Nativism" and Asian Exclusion During the "Progressive" Era

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, immigration acts continued to work against Asians by limiting their residential and employment access that in turn influenced the foundation of Asian immigrant geographies in the United States. In particular, scholars have pointed to discrimination against Chinese women who were broadly generalized as to be vulnerable to prostitution, which prompted the U.S. Congress to create additional restrictions to an already limited Asian inflow (Peffer, 1999; Lee, 2003; Espiritu, 2008). First, the 1875 Page Act prevented migration of people into the U.S.

from "China, Japan, or any Oriental country."<sup>4</sup> While this law set a precedent to prevent Asian women and *coolie*<sup>5</sup> labor from entering, it ended up barring all Asians from entering. Commenting on anti-Asian sentiments during this period, Sayler (1995, 128) notes that other groups such as Indians were included in this exclusion, thereby creating an overarching anti-Asian sentiment throughout the nation:

For Californians and other westerners, exclusion was the only solution. It seemed only natural to most commentators that if Chinese were to be excluded, so should all other Asians, especially inasmuch "the Chinese are infinitely preferable" to other Asians, particularly "the Hindoos."<sup>6</sup>

The people who resisted Asians called themselves "Nativists"—a group of people that historian John Hingham defines as emerging from Nativism, as "an intense opposition to an internal minority on the grounds of its foreign (i.e. "un-American") connections" (Hingham, 1975, 26). Nativists argued to completely block all immigration inflows, and as scholars have argued, late nineteenth century Nativism-inspired lawmakers created stronger resistance to subsequent immigration inflows (Perea, 1997; Navarro, 2009; Schrag, 2010).

Incoming Asians, despite immigration restrictions, continued to trace the path led by those who came before them. Consequently, spatialities that surrounded the Nativist-era immigration were centered on the traditional nineteenth century immigration gateways in the Pacific West Coast. However, as Ahmad (2007) notes, job competition during the peak of the railroad-era construction between Asian and white workers prompted Nevada, California, and Idaho to create laws that provided free passage for Chinese to move to the Eastern cities of New York, Philadelphia, and

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<sup>4</sup> Library of Congress. URL: <https://memory.loc.gov/ammem/awhhtml/awlaw3/immigration.html>. Last accessed October 16, 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Coolie is a (racist) British colonial term denoting unskilled laborer from Asian nations including India.

<sup>6</sup> "Hindoos" was a generalized racial category used in late nineteenth through early twentieth century for all South Asian Indians, regardless of their religious background (Campbell, 1869). Thus, even Punjabi men from India following Sikh religion were categorized as "Hindoos." See Hochschild and Powell (2008) for a more detailed discussion on the racialization of Hindoos in nineteenth century America.

Cincinnati. For the California legislators, for example, found the Chinese, “dangerous to the wellbeing” of California’s communities” (Ahmad, 2007, 54). While California’s law emerged as a result of the nation-wide Nativist-led anti-immigrant racism, a larger, more sweeping U.S. immigration law was brewing as Nativists gained control of the U.S. Congress.

The 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act emerged in response to Nativists’ demands to create the most sweeping immigration laws preventing Chinese as well as any Asian entry into the United States. In addition to suspending the entry of *all* Chinese, and Asian immigrants for a period of 10 years, the Act forced Asian immigrants to carry an identity card during their travel within the United States at *all* times (Lee, 2002; Lee, 2003; Daniels, 2005). Lee (2003, 24) notes that the 1882 Act not only worsened the already opaque immigration entry but fundamentally (re-)organized the ethnic foundation of America:

Chinese [and Asian] exclusion, also introduced gatekeeping ideology, politics, law, and culture that transformed the ways in which Americans viewed and thought about race, immigration, and the United States’ identity as a nation of immigrants.

Further, the 1882 Act influenced the spatialities of immigrant America reifying the segregated geographies of immigrant settlement. In other words, ethnic enclaves such as San Francisco and New York’s “Chinatowns” (Yuan, 1963; Loo, 1991), Detroit’s Arab Lebanese enclaves (Abrahamson, 1996), and Los Angeles’ “Koreatown” emerged in urban America during the late nineteenth/early twentieth century. Despite restrictions, Asians found unauthorized routes to enter the Western U.S. coast. By 1890, there were around 15,000 Chinese immigrants in San Francisco alone (Zhou and Logan, 1989, 1991; Foner, 2001; Wong, 2015). Within these ethnic enclaves, Asians constructed new immigrant lives, that Mazumdar *et al.* (2000, 320) refers to as having “many spatial characteristics that are either similar to or reminiscent of the places left behind, thus enabling them to maintain continuity with

place.” Scholars note early twentieth century Asians constructed socio-cultural resources to remind and connect them to the places they left behind. These include ethnic restaurants, grocery stores, and temples that emerged in America’s largest cities along the Pacific West and Northeast (Jackson, 1994; Bald, 2007; Liu, 2009; Ray, 2009; Mannur, 2011). Within these ethnic enclaves, the sense of community and belonging with co-ethnics created coping mechanisms to combat mainstream racism dominant in the city (Kim and Huhr, 1985; Novac, 1999; Bush *et. al*, 2005).

During the 1920s, Nativist-led federal immigration laws were directed against Asians in the so-called “Progressive era.”<sup>7</sup> First, the 1917 Asiatic Barred Zone Act created multiple barriers for Asians—a literacy test in English as well as a “barred zone” region in Asia that included most of the continent (Schuck, 1984; Bald, 2007; Lee, 2007; Ewing, 2012). Second, the Asian Exclusion Act enacted in 1924 utilized racialized immigration quota based on national origin limiting total worldwide immigrants entering the U.S. to 150,000 (Ngai, 1999; Wing, 2005).

Ngai (1999) notes that the Immigration Act of 1924 generously favored larger immigrant inflows from European nations and solidified the concept of an “ineligible to citizenship” for those Asians who did manage to enter the country.<sup>8</sup> The cases of *Ozawa v. U.S.* and *Thind v. U.S.* during the 1920s were clear examples of various U.S. bodies acting in favor of “ineligible for citizenship” legislative narrative.<sup>9</sup> However, it was not until 1939 the U.S. immigration removed its white-only

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<sup>7</sup> The “Progressive Era” (1890s – 1920s), a period spanning three U.S. Presidents (T. Roosevelt, Taft, and Wilson) aimed to implement political reform and eliminate corruption in the U.S. government. However, some of the most racist immigration laws were also passed during this time making this period anything but “Progressive” (Diner, 1998).

<sup>8</sup> Under the 1924 Immigration Act, just one European nation, Great Britain, was allowed 65,721 immigrants, more than the total number of immigrants allowed from *all* nations from Asia-Pacific, Africa, and South America combined (Ngai, 1999).

<sup>9</sup> The dockets *Takao Ozawa v. United States* (1922) and *Bhagat Singh Thind v. United States* (1923) were two Supreme Court cases that turned down the naturalization applications of a Japanese (Ozawa) and an Indian (Singh) due to the ineligibility of their applications on the grounds of the “free white persons” citizenship clause used in most of the immigration Acts during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (See Kim’s (1992), *Asian*

citizenship laws (Hess, 1969). As the 1930s rolled in, America's dual crises of the Great Depression and the looming Second World War paved the way for a new climate of immigration laws.

### Immigration during the Great Depression and World War II

Economic consequences of the Great Depression included a great sense of urgency for the U.S. government to preserve jobs for American citizens, and immigration reached an all-time low (Hoffman, 1974). In the mid-1990s, the National Research Council's report, *The New Americans*, reported this urgency as the U.S. prompted a clampdown of undocumented immigrants from non-European nations (Smith and Edmontson, 1997). Balderamma and Rodriguez (2006) call the 1930s a "Decade of Betrayal" for Mexicans in America with over a million Mexicans—including U.S.-born Mexican-Americans—forcibly shipped back to Mexico. Asian immigrants faced similar expulsions as U.S. authorities removed undocumented Indians from California and Oregon in order to keep them away from U.S. jobs (Campi, 2005; Moloney, 2012).

With America's entry into the Second World War in 1941, its role toward immigration was that of simultaneous inclusion of non-Asians and exclusion of Asians. On one hand, as millions of new workers were needed in the nation's farms for wartime food supply, the U.S. initiated the Bracero Program in 1942, authorizing seasonal agricultural workers from Mexico to be admitted temporarily. This reversed their mass deportation and repatriation, which was done just a decade earlier (Scruggs, 1963, Craig, 1971; Bickeron, 2000). On the other hand, and in the same year, suspicion against immigrants from axis nations (Japan, Germany, and Italy) prompted President Roosevelt to pass the Executive Order 9066 that forcibly imprisoned immigrants from these three nations despite their

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*Americans and the Supreme Court* for a more detailed discussion on the legal histories of Asians under the American law).



allegiance to the United States. Executive Order 9066, which passed a day after the Pearl Harbor bombing in 1941, was a pan-racial expulsion; i.e., the Roosevelt administration suspended naturalization process for Italians, Germans, and Japanese (Cunningham, 2006). Over the course of the next two years, 10,095 Germans and 10,000 Italians were interned in various prison camps across the United States.<sup>10</sup> But as Sandler (2013) documents, these numbers were pale in comparison to 120,000 Japanese interned in similar prison camps mostly in the American West.

Among them, hundreds of thousands of persons with Japanese ancestry—including U.S.-born Japanese-Americans—were imprisoned in internment camps across the American West (Conrat and Conrat, 1972; Stanley, 1994; Ng, 2002; Robinson and Robinson, 2009; Sandler, 2013). During the height of the internment, San Francisco Mayor Duval Phelan's comment supporting these camps summarized the Nativist-era sentiment prevalent during World War II America: "Japanese are not bonafide citizens. They are not the stuff of which American citizens are made of" (Sandler, 2013, 9). However, China's role as America's ally, as well as the ally of Asian refugees, especially Filipinos entering America from war-torn Asia, prompted the U.S.'s repeal of the Asian exclusions.<sup>11</sup> In addition, towards the end of the Second World War, contestations concerning this inclusion/exclusion of immigrants soon changed into broad-scale inclusion of immigrants from war-ravaged Europe and Asia (Reimers, 1981; Königseder and Wetzel, 2001; Herf, 2009). Most prominent were Jewish refugees fleeing from the Holocaust, from the Eastern European Baltic nations Russia, Poland, and Germany (Gilbert, 1987; Pells, 2008).

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<sup>10</sup> Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History. URL: <https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/world-war-ii/resources/immigration-policy-world-war-ii>. Last accessed October 16, 2016.

<sup>11</sup> In 1944, Japanese internment was officially terminated following the landmark U.S. Supreme Court case, *Korematsu v. United States* (1944) where Fred Korematsu, a Japanese-American defied federal orders for removal from his home in California. While the case was eventually overturned, the case marked a historical moment in the U.S. immigration with repealing of all anti-Asian immigration laws in the United States. (Rountree, 2001; Serrano and Minami, 2003).

But the greatest beneficiaries of post-War immigration reforms were Asians, specifically East Asians, who created new Asian geographies on the American West Coast (Wong, 2005). As Japanese refugees left war-torn Japan, they sought new homes in the Pacific Rim cities, including Los Angeles and Seattle. And with the initiation of Mao's Communist China in 1949, a new wave of Chinese immigrants traced a familiar route once traveled by late nineteenth century Chinese into San Francisco (Pan, 1994; Wong, 1998; Peterson, 2004; Kurashige, 2010). Thus, the end of the Second World War witnessed an emergence of a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural urban America in the making.

### Post-World War II Immigration and the makings of a new American pluralism

The 1952 McCarran-Walter Act, the nation's most significant immigration law since the nation's founding (Reimers, 1992; Rumbaut, 1994; Marinari, 2012; Chung, 2014), encouraged foreign workers to aid America's post-World War II reconstructions. Specifically, the 1952 law removed some racial or national origin quotas as well as putting an end to Asian exclusion (Ngai, 1988; Arnold, 2011). As Arnold (2011) notes, the benefits gained by increased productivity from the War-era Bracero program enabled the 1952 Act to gain traction, letting immigrant farm labor enter the United States. However, while McCarthyism<sup>12</sup> cast a shadow on Eastern European immigration, the ending of the Korean War in 1953 created new mobilities for Asians as they moved into the U.S.'s suburbs, helping lay the foundation of a new American pluralism. With post-World War II suburbanization, many sought available cheap land and federal subsidies for suburban housing (Jackson, 1985). Accordingly,

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<sup>12</sup> Promoted by U.S. Senator Joseph McCarthy (R-WI), "McCarthyism" was a widespread "witch-hunting" of Communist sympathizers during the height of the Cold War in the 1950s. While the 1952 Act was the most progressive law in centuries, Asian immigrants, particularly from the newly formed Communist China and immigrants from Communist Eastern Europe were targeted under the pretense of the "Red Scare" (Ngai, 1988). Also see Fried's (1990) *Nightmare in Red* for a detailed discussion on how McCarthyism influenced immigration.

many Asian immigrants took these suburban routes to establish new residential geographies, in part creating the “new racial frontier” on the Pacific West Coast (Kurashige, 2008).

Brooks (2009) documented a duality within the emerging geographies of post-war Asian suburbanization. On one hand, the author argued that Asians who came before the 1952 Act were “alien neighbors,” many subjected to anti-Asian laws or deemed suspicious (in case of the Japanese during the Second World War). On the other hand, Asians who benefitted from the 1952 Act were moving into America’s suburbs were seen as “foreign friends” as white Californians “felt obligated to welcome [Asian Americans], if only for the good of a nation” (Brooks, 2009, 7).

This sentiment was because American missionaries rescued thousands of Korean children from the Korean War and found new homes in White American homes creating the foundations of a new transnational America. As Lee puts it, “The incorporation of Korean children into White middle-class families and the positive coverage of these adoptions received, signaled more accepting attitudes about the place of Asians in America and by extensions the possibilities of pluralism” (Lee, 2013, 245). Further, as Brooks (2015) notes, increasing mobilities into suburbs among Asians also meant that many Asian immigrants formed alliances under the banner of “Oriental” minorities within white middle-class majority. Thus, the 1950s, in combination with a progressive immigration law and prevailing pro-Asian residential mobilities signified an emergence of a post-binary immigrant America. By post-binary, I am signifying the moving beyond the White/non-White America that began during the 18<sup>th</sup> century to an emergence of a pluralistic and multicultural narrative emerging in the 1950s.

## Beyond the Binary: Civil Rights Era and the 1965 Immigration Act

Despite legislative progress made to improve Asian American experiences, institutionalized racism against African-Americans due to Jim Crow<sup>13</sup> laws was widespread across America. However, a massive groundswell of activism led by African-American leaders during the 1950s and early 1960s positioned “Civil Rights” as front and center of American social reform that 1920s Progressive-era activism failed to achieve (Morris, 1986; Berger, 2011; Crosby, 2011; Francis, 2014; Hinnerhitz, 2015). Alliances formed among Asians, predominately in White American suburbs during the 1950s, gained strength during the Civil Rights era as Black Power movements energized “the consciousness of Asian Americans, sensitizing them to racial issues” (Uyematsu, 1971, 3). Other groups including Latino immigrants from Central and South America inspired by the Civil Rights movement sought to seek the federal government’s response for the marginalization of the immigrant worker in the 1950s (Ramakrishnan and Gunasekaran, 2014).<sup>14</sup> These social movements aligned with international demands for United States to step up its immigrant acceptance, creating an urgent need for U.S. Congress to make the United States more inclusive for immigrants.<sup>15</sup> Reimer (1983) notes that the

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<sup>13</sup> Tischauser (2012, 1) defines the term “Jim Crow” as “a series of laws and ordinances passed by Southern states and municipalities between 1877 and 1965 legalizing segregation (the physical separation of individuals based on race, gender, religion, or class) within their boundaries.”

<sup>14</sup> In 1954, “Operation Wetback,” synonymous with the racial epithet “wetback” for Mexicans, was an infamous deportation program initiated by the Eisenhower Administration to forcibly remove undocumented Mexicans from America’s farmlands who despite their entry via the 1942 Bracero program were pushed out of America for dangers of replacing native-born American workforce. See García and García (1981) as well as Astor (2009) for a more detailed discussion.

<sup>15</sup> The early 1960s set legislative groundwork guided by international and national movements. In 1960, the United Nations declared the year as World Refugee Year enabling immigrants fleeing war torn Cold War nations to seek new homes in Western nations. In 1963, President Kennedy invoked Executive parole power to accept Chinese refugees from Hong Kong setting a precedent for U.S. lawmakers to create a more sweeping immigration reform (Reimer, 1983).

failure of historically racialized basis of a national quota system, as well as success of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, provided a natural course of action to pass a more sweeping immigration law.

Thus, President Johnson signed the 1965 Immigration Act, also known as the Hard-Cellar Act, into law. The law abolished national racial quotas that prevented immigrants from entering the United States. In his remark during the signing, President Johnson summarized the Act, noting it fundamentally transformed the narrative of the American immigrant:

Now, under the monument which has welcomed so many to our shores, the American Nation returns to the finest of its traditions today. The days of unlimited immigration are past. But those who do come will come because of what they are, and not because of the land from which they sprung.<sup>16</sup>

In one of the first studies on the consequence of the 1965 Act, Keely (1971) noted that while the Act removed racial restrictions, skill-based bias persisted. Indian engineers, Filipino doctors, and Korean beauticians are some examples of skill-based entrants that created a sort of “class system” among various post-1965 immigrant groups (Brojas, 1987; Liu, et al., 1991; Kanjanapan, 1995; Chellaraj, 2005; Shachar, 2006). Broadly, however, the 1965 Act helped facilitate multi-racial and multi-ethnic immigrant geographies. Suburban trends following the Second World War created opportunities for post-1965 immigrants to seek new settlement frontiers.

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<sup>16</sup> President Lyndon B. Johnson’s Remarks at the Signing of the Immigration Bill, Liberty Island, New York. October 3, 1965. Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library Online. URL: <http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/archives.hom/speeches.hom/651003.asp>. Last accessed October 16, 2016.

### Post-1965 suburbanization and immigrant “ethnoburbs”

The 1965 Act significantly increased the total inflow of immigrants. Specific to Asian immigration, Hatton (2015) notes that the percent of Asians to total immigrant population went up from 5.4 percent in 1950-59 to 33.7 percent between 2000 and 2009. Many Asians took various paths to enter the United States, from refugees coming out of the Vietnam War in the 1970s to Indian engineers finding employment in California’s “Silicon Valley” in the 1990s. Lee (2015, 285) goes as far to note, “In fact, it can be argued that no group benefited more from the act than Asian Americans.” Availability of land further influenced immigrant, including Asians, inflows for new suburban residents. Land availability in America’s urban frontier and post-war real estate opportunities created a massive upswell of suburban preferences for many Americans (Jackson, 1985).<sup>17</sup>

However, as with most people of color, Asian immigrants benefiting from the 1965 Act entered the suburban landscape. Scholars have documented the increasing diversity of suburbs because of immigrants bypassing cities, settling directly into the suburbs—a departure from pre-1965 European immigration and their assimilation into America’s central cities (Massey and Denton, 1987; Massey and Denton, 1988; Waldinger, 1990; Alba and Logan, 1991). Further, the Immigration Act of 1990 raised the immigrant inflow numbers as well as allowed children and spouses of immigrants to obtain permanent residency.<sup>18</sup> This created additional inflows of immigrants from developing nations—particularly India—seeking opportunities in America’s suburban areas.

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<sup>17</sup> Suburbanization of American cities was by no means spatiality just. Out-migration of urban white Americans or “White flight” and the steering away of people of color from prime suburban properties are well documented (Frey, 1979; Galster, 1990; Frey and Liaw, 1998; Avila, 2004; Boustan, 2007; Kruse, 2013).

<sup>18</sup> The Immigration Act of 1990 created special work visas called ‘diversity visas’ for immigrants who had at least two years of work experience, thereby enhancing the labor workforce in urban America, including its suburbs. See remarks by the President George H.W. Bush during the signing of the Act. URL: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=19117>. Last accessed October 16, 2016.

Alba and Logan (1991) used their training in the Chicago School of Urban Sociology<sup>19</sup> to theorize this suburban-facing movement within a “spatial assimilation” model. Specifically, minority members make a spatial decision in settling to settle in cities as “they attempt to leave behind less successful members of their groups and to convert socioeconomic and assimilation progress into residential gain.” (Alba and Logan, 1991, 433). Geographer Li (1998) calls these new emerging spatial manifestations as *ethnoburb* (Li, 1998)—signifying ethnic manifestations in suburbs. As Li (1998, 479) defines this term:

Ethnoburbs are suburban ethnic clusters of residential areas and business districts in large American metropolitan areas. They are multi-ethnic communities, in which one ethnic minority group has a significant concentration, but does not necessarily comprise a majority.

Li provides the example of Los Angeles’ “ethnoburbs” as the demographic and economic context of Asian influx due to “White flight,” denoting the racialized re-making of ethnic suburbs. Advancing Alba and Logan’s (1991) “spatial assimilation,” Li (1998, 499) argues:

The tightly-knit character of the ethnoburb and its relatively self-contained nature, slow the process of immigrant assimilation both for the marginalised groups and for the affluent segments of the population.

Since the 1980s, with improved economic opportunities and investment along major suburban corridors, Asian immigrant inflow has been on the rise.<sup>20</sup> Thus, majority-Asian “melting pot suburbs” (Frey, 2000) emerged in several metropolitan frontiers including New York and San Francisco, and

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<sup>19</sup> “The Chicago School” of Urban Sociology emerged from the University of Chicago in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century with Park and Burgess’ (1925) *The City*. It was among the first to situate the linkages between the ecological makeup of an American metropolis to the sociological positions of (European) minority groups, i.e., the city as an organic structure gradually giving rise to suburban extremities as it assimilated incoming people. This organic view of a city in the “Chicago School” remained as a foundational model for urban sociology and geography through most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>20</sup> Several cities invested heavily into highways that radiate outward to enhance suburban development. For example, Chicago’s “Golden Corridor,” was built along U.S. Interstate I-80 (Jin, 1998).

immigrants in many of these suburbs found themselves in conflict with other racial minorities (Alba *et al.*, 1994; Phelan and Schneider, 1996; Skop, 2002; Skop and Li, 2005). Towards the turn of the new century, scholars documented that despite their multi-ethnic, multi-cultural makeup, American suburbs acquired polarized racialized geographies where racial cleavages created ethnic enclaves within suburbs (Frey and Farley, 1996; Charles, 2000; Raphael *et al.*, 2000; Orsi, 2008). Even within immigrant groups, smaller sub-groups form ethnic enclaves. As Jacobsen and Raj (2013) show with respect to Tamil Christians, a smaller ethnic group within the larger Indian immigrant population. These racialized immigrant geographies in urban America form a key backdrop to the geographies of post-9/11.

#### The 9/11 Attacks and the PATRIOT Act: (Un)intended racialized consequences on immigrants

In the months following 9/11, the U.S. government's responses profoundly affected Arabs and non-Arabs who were stereotyped as terrorists. Scholars addressed these responses as a continuation of socially constructed racism embedded within the U.S. immigration history in the decades, even centuries, before the attack (Akram and Johnson, 2001; Chishti, 2001; Johnson, 2001; Lebowitz and Podheiser, 2001; Meissner, 2001; Reza, 2001). For Cainkar (2002), 9/11 rendered Arabs and Arab-looking south Asians “hypervisible,” which created unintended vitriolic consequences for their life in America. In a survey conducted shortly after the 9/11 attacks, “66 percent of Americans said it would be acceptable for law enforcement officials to stop and search anyone who looked Middle Eastern in order to prevent another attack, and in another, 31 percent said that they would support putting Arab Americans in camps until their innocence could be determined” (Schildkraut 2002, 12). For Cainkar (2002, 22), these post-9/11 racialization of immigrants also meant that their everyday life was influenced by a constant xenophobic gaze:



Whether traveling, driving, working, walking through a neighborhood or sitting in their homes, Arabs in America—citizens and non-citizens—are now subject to special scrutiny in American society. The violence, discrimination, defamation and intolerance now faced by Arabs in American society has reached a level unparalleled in their over 100-year history in the U.S.

These post-9/11 discriminations, as Chandrasekhar (2003) has pointed, extended to “Arab-looking” South Asians, essentially re-creating anti-Asian sentiments seen during the early twentieth century. As he explains, “Indeed, the post-9/11 rollback of the civil rights and civil liberties of South Asian Americans, Arabs, and Muslims evokes frightening memories of prior waves of anti-Asian sentiment” (Chandrasekhar, 2003, 226). And, similar to early twentieth century, federal legislative response exacerbated public fears in the days following the 9/11 attacks (Sinnar, 2003).

The 2001 USA PATRIOT Act<sup>21</sup> emerged as the most significant post-9/11 legislation in targeting immigrants (Cainkar, 2002; Romero, 2003; Sekhon, 2003). The Act gave disproportionate powers to the hands of local law enforcement officials to carry out instant deportation as well as arrests of immigrants, in some cases, without due process (Naber, 2006). Scholars studying the effects of this Act report violations of civil liberties, racial injustice, as well as illegal overreach of U.S. government in everyday activities of immigrants (Osher, 2002; Shulman, 2002; Cole, 2002; Cole, 2003; Adler, 2006).

In a post-9/11 context, Naber (2006) argues that the Act empowered the racialized construction of the “Other” energizing anti-Muslim, anti-Arab exclusion rendering an “internment of the psyche” in the minds of Arab and Arab-looking immigrants. Consequently, post-9/11 scholarship has shown the difficult task of immigrants to justify their allegiance as a “good immigrants” in order to

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<sup>21</sup> H.R. 3162 – The 2001 Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act or U.S.A. P.A.T.R.I.O.T. Act (<https://www.congress.gov/bill/107th-congress/house-bill/3162>) was passed by the U.S. Congress and became a public law on October 26, 2001.

distance themselves from terrorists. This has emerged due to post-9/11 “moral panic” toward immigration (after Hauptman, 2013) as well as racial profiling created (un)intentionally by the PATRIOT Act (Nguyen, 2005; Abdo, 2006; Bakalian & Bozorgmehr, 2009; Schildkraut, 2009; Hauptman, 2013). To avoid collective generalization of immigrant identities, it is therefore necessary to approach identities at a more nuanced level. One of the ways this is made possible is by way of looking at day-to-day interactions and everyday life.

### Everyday basis for the social construction of transnational identities

The first thing I ever learned about India was that my parents had chosen to leave it. They had begun their American lives in a suburb of Cleveland, Ohio, called Shaker Heights. In Shaker Heights the rituals of my parents’ youth quickly confronted new ones. Suburban Cleveland was not a place where one could easily cling to the Old Country or take refuge in multiculturalism. So they dug in, assimilated, gave my sister and me childhoods with all the American fixin’s. Making snowmen with carrot noses. Washing our Toyota Cressida on Sundays, me in diapers working with a watering can. Playing catch with a vinyl baseball mitt. [...] Shaker Heights was a warm and generous place. Family was the only community that had mattered in India; in America, my parents discovered the community itself: the people who shared recipes, gave them rides, taught them the idioms they didn’t know, brought them food when they were sick. It was perhaps the grace of this welcome that inoculated them against defensiveness and nostalgia that so often infect immigrants. They still loved India, but they never looked back. (Giridharadas, 2011, 5)

Giridharadas gives voice to, and offers a window into, the day-to-day or everyday interactions of America’s 2.2 million Indians and Indian-Americans. For Indians in America, “the crosshatched trajectories of colonization and globalization as they come to demarcate quotidian understandings of postcolonial identity, which is to say, within the recurrent practices of everyday life” (Ganguly, 2001, 2). These everyday interactions occur within individuals interacting with other members of their communities. As Joshi (2006, 11) notes in her work on Hindus in America, “In everyday social

situations, we use culture to express and give meaning to our identity, which in turn is used to construct affiliations with and boundaries between other individuals and groups.” Thus, in actuality, what Giridharadas exposes are the everyday interactions as a way to interpret the social constructions of identities. In recent decades, scholarship from various disciplines explores everyday interactions and the resulting social identity of individuals (Widdicombe, 1995; Kleine *et al.*, 1999; Edensor, 2002). However, Erving Goffman in the 1950s was among the first to theorize from the smaller, more nuanced and finer micro-interactions to the overall interactions within their society and community.

As Collins (2005, 129) notes, “Goffman provides a micro-sociology capable of giving a refined theory of social selves in all their situational variations.” Thus, in order to interpret attributes of Indian identities within the context of American society and the transnational connections beyond the Atlantic, I review Goffman’s work and how scholars have carried his work to address post-9/11 challenges to immigrant identities. Here, I first highlight the role of Goffman’s early work *The Presentation of Self* (1959) to help place *everyday performances* as a theoretical narrative to interpret immigrant post-9/11 realities. Specifically, I detail three particular attributes of transnational identities that immigrants negotiate. These three attributes of transnational identities are the following—everyday identities, racialized identities, and identities, all emerging from networked aspects of transnationalism.

“All the world’s a stage”: Erving Goffman’s *Presentation of Self*

*“Choose your self-presentations carefully, for what starts out as a mask may become your face.” (Goffman, 1959)*

When Erving Goffman completed his dissertation at the University of Chicago in 1953, the “Chicago School” of Sociology was already well established as the premier American center for urban studies.

The most significant work coming out of this tradition, *The City* (Park and Burgess, 1923), was a ‘top-down’ approach to examine the first modern cities of America—and its people. Modeling Chicago as *The City*, Robert Park theorized that American cities were akin to an ‘organic being’ wherein people lived as part of a larger organic being (Park and Burgess, 1923, 17). However, in his dissertation—written in the very department that Park and Burgess conceptualized *The City*—Goffman explained ‘bottom-up’ approach to people living in communities, namely, the everyday, so-called mundane interactions (Goffman, 1953). His dissertation ‘Communication Conduct,’ for example, is a critical call-to-action for the use of participation observation, which is widely used today as a key methodological tool in qualitative research (Goffman, 1989; Jorgensen, 1989).

After his dissertation, in one of Goffman’s most significant works, *The Presentation of Self* (1959), he nuances an interactional approach to everyday social behavior. Specifically, Goffman was drawn to theater and stage performances to interpret everyday life and to use drama as a theoretical apparatus on which his interactional analysis was built. Because for Goffman “aspects of the theater creep into everyday life” (Goffman, 1959, 254). Denzin (2002, 130), however, offers a caveat that Goffman’s use of theater was to “remind his readers that the dramaturgical framework was a scaffold, built to be taken down, that he was only interested in studying the “structure of social encounters” (Goffman, 1959, 254). In other words, Denzin and Goffman were cautioning us that people were, in fact, part of macro-interactions and, to get a more fine-grained analysis, the micro-interactions are more useful to interpret social behavior.

For Goffman, social behavior is comparable to a performance on a stage, because as in a theater, the impression that people make on each other in everyday life is useful to interpret their roles (Gunn, 2012). Specifically, for Goffman, the “impressions” one has of another during these interactions has a bearing on the relational aspects of social behavior. As he notes, “in everyday life, of

course, there is a clear understanding that first impressions are important” (Goffman, 1959, 5). The way Goffman uses the term ‘impression’ throughout his work is built around what he refers to as the ‘art of impression management’ (Goffman, 1959, 132), which he offers as a way to interpret the mechanism by which impressions are made. These impressions are enacted, in turn, by way of what Goffman refers to as *performances* which he defines as:

all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers (Goffman, 1959, 32).

Therefore, performance of an individual, according to Goffman, occurs when the individual makes an impression to the observer as well as “how social performance is recognized by society, and how it functions within society” (Carlson, 2013, 35). According to Goffman, this “impression management” lies at the core of hiding or revealing performances. To be more specific, as Goffman (1959,10) explains, performances as outcomes emerge from interactions due to the impressions made on individuals. Thus:

When an individual plays a part he implicitly requests his observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them. They are asked to believe that the character they see actually possesses the attributes he appears to possess, that the task he performs will have the consequences that are implicitly claimed for it, and that, in general, matters are what they appear to be. In line with this, there is the popular view that the individual offers his performance and puts on his show 'for the benefit of other people.'

Social interactions as performances, according to Goffman, constitute how identities are produced on a grander scale by fully employing the mechanism of dramaturgical metaphor, “actors in the theater have to conduct themselves in ways that meet the requirement of real situations, which are theatrical-like in their construction” (Goffman, 1959, 255). Denzin (2002, 130) notes that the performances of individuals in a social setting is made possible by various roles and settings that they belong to. Thus, persons-as-performers, as Denzin notes, create meanings within their social settings:

Whenever, they come into another person's presence, persons-as-performers manage impressions, contrive illusions, keep front – and backstages separate, deploy various dramaturgical skills, thereby turning each interactional episode into a tiny moment of staged, dramatic theater. Disclaimer aside, for Goffman “all the world's a stage.” (Denzin, 2002, 254).

By using these dramaturgical devices, Goffman's interpretation of performances is an interpretation of identities. As Gunn (2012, 188) notes, “for Goffman the theatre was more than a metaphor for social life; it was the key to understanding both personal identity and social behavior.” Therefore, identities, when seen as emergent from performances as theorized by Goffman are a culmination of roles from various social settings. Van der Berg (2008, 63) summarizes, Goffman's definition of identity lies at the center of what emerges from the performance of roles during social interactions:

For Goffman, identity literally *comes about* in and through social interactions—it is the *dramatic effect* of such interactions. In the eyes of Goffman, identity is simply the sum of all the roles we play in our lives. Thus, identity is not some innate quality, nor a physically localizable property. Also, identity is not an essence in itself. Rather, Goffman views identity as the socially constructed result of all our engagements with others.

By incorporating the social construction aspects of identity, Goffman shows that identities are formed through performances. Therefore, looking closely at identity-as-performances, Goffman's work points to a more nuanced understanding of identities.

### Early applications of Goffman's *Presentation of Self*: Identities as performances

Goffman extended his theater conceptualizing to include the “scene” to look at behind-the-scene-workings of performances. A theater, as per Goffman has a backstage, “a realm of authenticity, a place where people are most likely to be “themselves” (Prasad, 2005, 46). These are done by way of giving “cues.” As individuals, according to Goffman, give behavioral responses to interactions. Every

person, as he notes, sends two forms of behavioral “cues” that are either “given or given off” by the person: "The expressiveness of the individual appears to involve two radically different kinds of sign activity: the expression that he *gives*, and the expression that he *gives off*" (Goffman, 1959, 2).

Accordingly, a person’s behavior can be seen with respect to these two types of “cues”—and that the people try to control the two types of cues, to play a role and give an impression, which in turn leads to performances as discussed in the earlier section.

Cumulatively, the cues that lead to performances, and as Goffman (1959, 35) noted, "When an individual presents himself to others, his performance will tend to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of the society, more so in fact, than does his behavior as a whole." More recently, Johansson (2007, 277) details the micro-sociology of cues, namely, how cues form the basis of micro-interactions:

Accordingly, small cues in written and spoken interaction, for example hedges and qualifiers introduced in the form of performative modal verbs (I wish, think, could, hope) are creating intimacy or distance between speakers and utterance. Trustworthiness can be severely damaged by these small cues, something that analyses of interaction may reveal.

Goffman further theorized various modes within cues including “minor cues” (Goffman, 1959, 33), “misrepresentable cues” (Goffman, 1959, 38), “advanced cues” (Goffman, 1959, 94), “staging cues” (Goffman, 1959, 113), and “informal cues” (Goffman, 1959, 116) as various ways in which individuals “gives or give off” expressions of their interactions. Thus, Goffman’s contribution in bringing together impression management, performances, and cues asserted a distinct relationship between social interaction and identity formation (Bergen and Braithwaite, 2009).

Early studies that applied Goffman’s work were particularly interested in notions of multiple subjectivities. By placing social interaction at the center of identity formation, early adopters of

Goffman's work, especially Berger and Luckmann (1966, 174), confirmed that "identity is a phenomenon that emerges from the dialectic between individual and society" (174). Accordingly, Bergen and Braitwaite (2009, 167, emphasis in original added) explain that the contribution of Goffman on identity understands as not fixed, but instead a set of performances "*negotiated* in social interactions." In the subsequent decade, scholars engage other facets of Goffman's work including "cues."

Lyman and Douglass (1973), for example, were one of the earliest to apply Goffman's "cues" to examine racial identities as "impression management." This application in immigration studies marked an early use of cues to elucidate behavioral aspects of everyday immigrant life. For them:

If ethnic cues belong to that category of information that Goffman refers to as "given off," ethnic cues are those bits and pieces of information that an actor consciously provides for another in order to project a particular image, present a specific ethnic self. Since cues are often insufficient or ambiguous, a person may seek to aid his own purpose by providing further cues to his ethnic identity. Moreover, since fellow interactants usually feel the need to ascertain another's ethnicity in order to know how to proceed in any situation, they may seek to elicit more information by a selective reference to an interpretation of available cues. (Lyman and Douglas, 1973, 287)

Identities, and their assumptions, are constructed via mutual exchanges of cues. Subsequent scholarship follows Lyman and Douglas during the mid-1970s through the 1980s and applies Goffman's (1959) *Presentation of Self* by engaging the social construction of identities in their studies within narratives of personal identity constructed through "roles" played by various actors. Two of these studies—Gordon's (1976) "role identities" showed how roles link persons to social systems and Feldman's (1979) "nested identities"—provided new theoretical narrations of social identities. For example, according to Feldman, an individual can be inside a building, within a particular neighborhood, inside a city, all "nested" within a larger identity of being part of a country.



Beginning from the early 1980s, immigration scholars applied Goffman's work to address issues pertaining to interactive constructions of immigrant's social and cultural behaviors. For example, Buchignani (1980) and Miller and Van Maanen (1982) applied Goffman to interactional analysis in locating ethnic identities of immigrants between Suva (Fiji) and Vancouver (Canada) respectively. Other scholars in the 1980s nuanced social and behavioral constructions including Staub's (1981) work on Yemeni immigrants in New York City (Staub, 1981), Baca-Ramirez and Bryan's (1980) study of Mexican immigrants along the U.S.-Mexico border. In the 1990s, the fall of Communism and increasing mobilities among people in the Global South also meant a surge in research on immigrant identities.

#### Goffman in the 1990s: Theorizing multiple subjectivities

Pader's (1993) ethnographic study on Mexican domestic spaces using Goffman's "frontstage" and "backstage" settings to performance is one of the earliest applications of bringing Goffman to interpret immigrant identities in relation to social and spatial settings. In this work, Pader looks at private domestic spaces as a "setting" where the performances of Mexican laborers working in domestic "frontstage" while avoiding the immigration and staying "backstage" from federal immigration policing. In another example, Field's (1994) *Becoming Irish*, an interpretation of self-identification of newer Irish immigrants in America was made possible by engaging Goffman's interactional constructions of social identities: "with immigration, the Irish faced the loss of some former identities and the surfacing of a novel social identities" (Fields, 1994, 434). Here, Field explored the interactive constructions of Irish identities in relation to their interactions to non-Irish to illustrate the contestations in Irish self-identifications.

By the 1990s, scholars turned to Goffman's interactionist approach to understand minority and dominant "race." Young and Craig (1997) used Goffman's "impression management" in theorizing the meanings and contradictions of the Canadian "skinhead" subculture, showing the negotiations between minority sub-culture and its relationship to a dominant mainstream, non-"skinhead" culture. In another example, Ralston's (1999) study on second generation daughters of South Asian women in Canada's Halifax places post-colonial identity "roles" (Goffman, 1959) in context to the interactive ways of how South Asian Canadian identities are constructed.

Since the events of 9/11 and its aftermath, scholars have sought to understand the complexities of immigrant identities as it related to race, ethnicity, and everyday meanings behind what it means to be an "immigrant." Thus, post-9/11 scholars use Goffman's *Presentation* to interpret various aspects of immigrant transnationalism.

#### Using Goffman's work in the (troubled) post-9/11 century

Weigert (2003, 1) uses Goffman's interactional aspects as well as "backstage" and "frontstage" theoretical devices to interpret immigrant behavior to understand public order because, "public order emerges whenever strangers commingle." He employs Goffman's dramaturgical approach to theorize the new post-9/11 (in) securities within public spaces. Marvasti's (2005) work uses Goffman's "cues" on how *being* Middle Eastern in a post-9/11 America represents identity negotiations in a public space due to racialized attributes in falsely constructing Middle Eastern people as terrorists. More recently, scholars using Goffman explored interactionally-borne racialized performances of Muslim identities as they negotiate collective stigmatization as well as racial invisibility of Middle Eastern and people of (brown) color (Ryan 2011; Mills, 2012). In all of the above studies, the emphasis on racial appearance of Muslims utilizes Goffman's "impression management" theoretical device to help explain why

people who are either Muslim or resemble Muslims are more concerned with how they appear publicly.

In another study, day-to-day interactions of Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants in Mississippi and the intersectionality of religion, ethnicity, and gender in a predominately White Christian Deep South reveals how Muslims combat racism (Sham, 2015). They do so through everyday acts of impression management and distancing their religious identities. Bonino (2015) examines everyday social interactions of Muslims within the indigenous Scottish community revealing post-9/11 challenges. However, as the author shows, using a more fine-grained interactional analysis offered by Goffman a different, more promising interpretation of Muslim-Scottish relations:

Muslims' hyper-visibility has triggered ethno-religious discrimination by some members of the non-Muslim majority. However, the daily experiences of life in Scotland, and the social relations with non-Muslims, are more heterogeneous and nuanced; they include overall positive views of, and a certain engagement with, many non-Muslims in a context of relative harmony. (Bonino, 2015, 12)

Bonino is referring to the racist post-9/11 conditions that have influenced Scottish Muslims in their formation of racialized identities. Specifically, anti-Muslim sentiments have rendered their Islamic appearance in a post-9/11 Scotland as hyper-visible. As I show in Chapter 5, this post-9/11 racialization has carried over to OKC Muslims rendering their appearance as more visible than before 9/11. Thus, Goffman's *Presentation of Self* offers more than a methodological apparatus to interpret immigrant negotiations in a post-9/11 America. It calls for a need to engage mundane day-to-day interactions in order to conceptualize how immigrants and native members of their host society negotiate the complexity of a post-9/11 world and their identities.

In the following Chapter Three, I will elaborate the methods, study area, and the study population for this dissertation study.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODS

#### Why Qualitative Methodology?

For my study, I am concerned with the everyday processes that have gone into the construction of transnational identities among Indians in the OKC metro area. Thus, in this chapter, I detail how I collected data using a qualitative methodology framework. A qualitative inquiry allows researchers to interrogate and explore everyday life that differs from quantitative inquiry. Stiles (1999) notes this difference stems from assessing and analyzing information from lived experience:

Qualitative research differs from traditional quantitative research on human experience in several ways. Results are typically reported in words rather than primarily in numbers. This may take the form of narratives (eg, case studies) and typically includes a rich array of descriptive terms, rather than focusing on a few common dimensions or scales. Investigators use their (imperfect) empathic understanding of participants' inner experiences as data. Events are understood and reported in their unique context. (Stiles, 1999, 99)

As a qualitative researcher, I rely on narratives and multiple subjectivities that are co-created with participants. This follows Denzin and Lincoln's (2011) explanation on the role of the qualitative researcher, namely:

Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, 8)

Specifically, with regards to examining the constraints of everyday life, the difference in approach between qualitative and quantitative researchers are wide:

Qualitative researchers are more likely to confront and come up against the constraints of the everyday social world. They see this world in action and embed their findings in it. Quantitative researchers abstract from this world and seldom study it directly. They seek nomothetic or etic science based on probabilities derived from the study of large numbers of randomly selected cases. Qualitative researchers, on the other hand, are committed to an emic, ideographic, case-based position, which directs their attention to the specifics of particular cases. (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, 9)

Thus, a qualitative approach allowed me to study the everyday life situated within the social worlds of Indians in the OKC area with a *nuanced* lens. This is confirmed by DeLyser *et al.* (2010) noting that the role of the qualitative researcher is to actively uncover the complexities of everyday life:

Qualitative researchers work explicitly to explore the world in its found form. We recognize and validate the complexity of everyday life, the nuance of meaning-making in an ever-changing world, and the multitude of influences that shape human lived experience.” (DeLyser *et. al*, 2010, 6)

Further, qualitative methods bring meaning of the everyday as experienced *by* the participants to the surface. As Valentine (1997) explains, “the emphasis is on considering the meanings people attribute to their own lives and the processes which operate in particular contexts” (Valentine, 1997: 126). Moreover, Sheehan (2006, 56) explains that, “we [qualitative researchers] seek to listen and give space to multiple voices and ways of knowing.” This requires that the researcher remains open to adaptation during the entire production of research knowledge (Latham, 2003).

### Participant Observations and Fieldnotes

One core aspect of qualitative research is being *in* the field and interacting with people. Participation observation, as Jorgensen (1980) states, creates possibilities in deconstructing various aspects of everyday life during the research process:

Participant observation, whereby the researcher interacts with people in everyday life while collecting information, is a unique method for investigating the enormously rich, complex, conflictual, problematic, and diverse experiences, thoughts, feelings, and activities of human beings and the meanings of their existence. (Jorgensen, 1980, 12)

While traditionally, cultural anthropologists have vast experience in engaging this method, over three decades of geographers have built scholarship utilizing participant observations as a core research method (see, for example, Jackson, 1983; Limb and Dwyer, 2001; Pain and Francis, 2003; Degen and Rose, 2012; Sheehan and Vadjunec, 2016). DeWalt and DeWalt (2010, 5) provide key elements of participant observation:

- Actively participating in a wide range of daily, routine, and extraordinary activities with people who are full participants in that context
- Using everyday conversation as an interview technique
- Informally observing during leisure activities (“hanging out”)
- Recording observations in field notes (usually organized chronologically)
- Using both tacit and explicit information in analysis and writing

Writing data from these activities is captured through fieldnotes. In fieldnotes, as Wolfinger (2002, 90) details, the researcher makes a conscious choice to report a particular observation “because it stands out,” thereby making fieldnotes a personal report of observations made during the data gathering stage. Later, expanding upon these fieldnotes, participant observations are entered into a digital format, such as Microsoft Word.

### Semi-Structured Interviews

Among various qualitative methods, semi-structured interviews remains as one of the most widely used and complements participant observation (Kitchin and Tate, 2000; Crang, 2002; Bryman, 2006; Longhurst, 2010). As Longhurst (2010) notes, semi-structured interviews are similar to everyday

conversations and, “allow for an open response in the participants’ own words rather than a ‘yes and no’ type answer” (Longhurst, 2010, 105). She explains,

A semi-structured interview is a verbal interchange where one person, the interviewer, attempts to elicit information from another person by asking questions... semi structured interviews unfold in a conversational manner offering participants the chance to explore issues *they* feel are important. (Longhurst, 2010, 103)

While in the past researchers have argued, “The interview context calls for the interviewer to play a neutral role, never interjecting his or her opinions of the respondent’s answers” (Fontana and Frey, 1994, 364), today most assert that the interview process (and participant observation) are far from neutral; various notions of positionality as a researcher inevitability play a role in the research process (Limb and Dwyer, 2001; Crang, 2003; Ganga and Scott, 2006; Crang and Cook, 2007). Thus, researchers, particularly qualitative, stress the role and significance of reflexivity in the research process (England, 1994; Rose, 1997). In the subsequent section, I introduce the research question and the study area, including the study population.

### Research Questions

The research questions that guided my work include:

1. How do Indians negotiate their identity through everyday activities within OKC?
2. How has post-9/11 Oklahoma influenced Indian identity?
3. How have social networks influenced Indian identity?

### Study Area

The 2010 U.S. Census shows that Oklahoma, Canadian, and Cleveland counties together account for 60 percent of the Indian population in the OKC metro area. Moreover, with 3,800 Indians, Oklahoma county leads this tri-county area with the largest Indian population (Source: U.S. Census, 2010). Thus,



these three counties form my study area, henceforth I will refer to this area as the “OKC metro.” (Figure 1).

In order to gain access to the Indian population in the greater OKC area, I initially visited three Indian-specific places to conduct participant observations and interviews, namely, The Hindu Temple of Oklahoma City, *Gopuram* Indian Restaurant, and Spices of India grocery store that primarily cater to Indians in the OKC area. I visited these sites (Table 1) between January 2012 through May 2013 during regular business hours between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. I also visited 14 other locations, for participant observations (Figure 1 and Table 1). These sites were chosen based on information provided by key informant contacts and from subsequent interviewees that participated, via snowballing obtained via snowball sampling. In my study, I interviewed participants at public and private locations within the three-county study area.

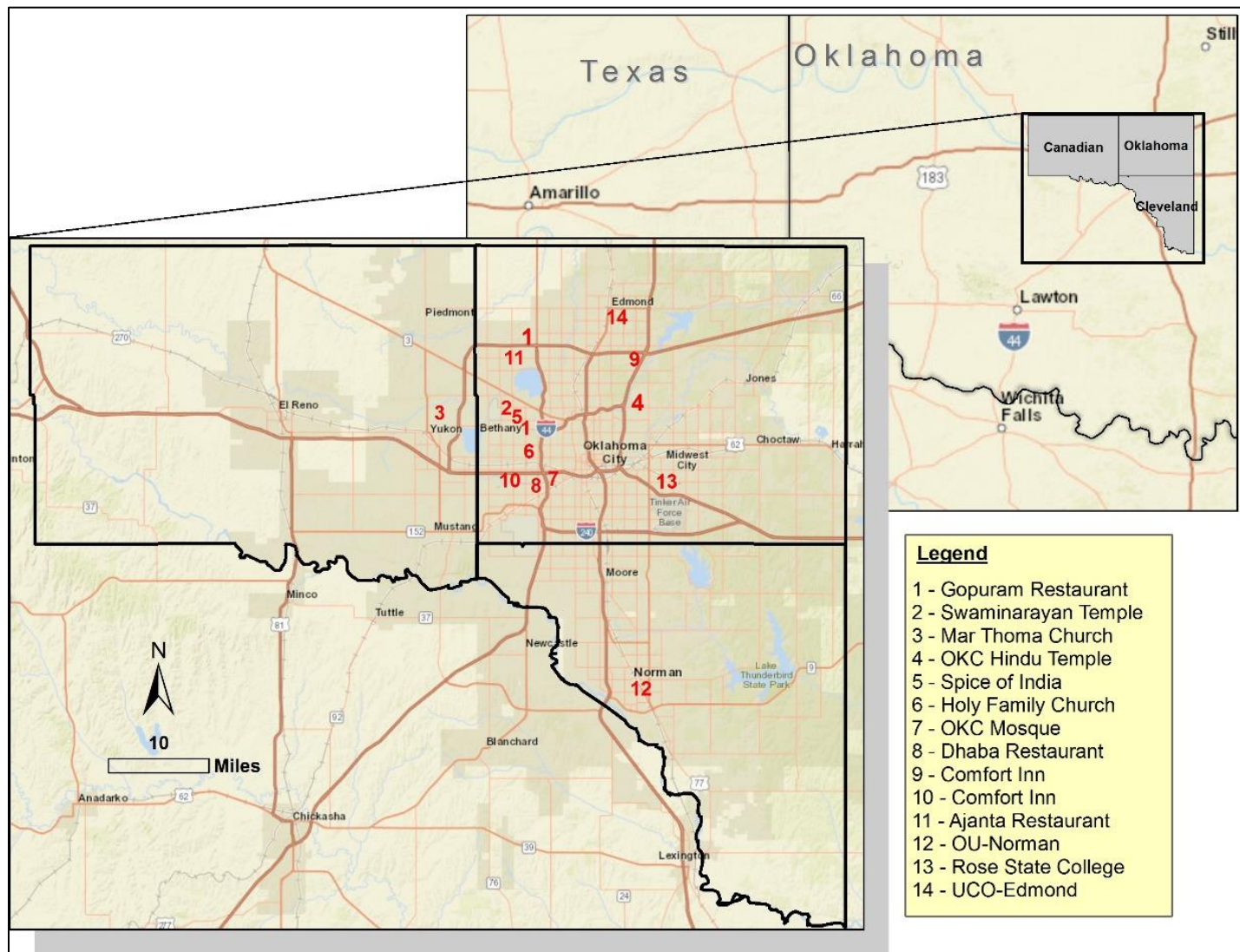


Figure 1. Map Showing Participant Observation Sites (Map by author)

**Table 1.** List of 14 participant observation (P.O.) sites. Starred (\*) locations are key informant sites.

No.	Place	Address	How often of conducting P.O.
1	<i>Gopuram</i> Restaurant*	4559 NW 23rd St, Oklahoma City, OK 73127	Once every week for six months.
2	BAPS <i>Swaminarayan</i> Temple	3500 N Meridian Ave, Oklahoma City, OK 73112	Once every two months for one year.
3	Mar Thoma Church	5609 N Mueller Ave, Bethany, OK 73008	Once every week for one year.
4	OKC Hindu Temple*	7200 N Coltrane Rd, Oklahoma City, OK 73121	Once every week for one year.
5	Spices of India Store*	3810 NW 39th St, Oklahoma City, OK 73112	Once every week for one year.
6	Holy Family Church	3400 S Highland Park Dr, Oklahoma City, OK 73129	Once every two months for one year.
7	OKC Mosque	3815 St Clair Ave, Oklahoma City, OK 73112	Once every week for one year.
8	Dhaba Convenience Store	4600 NE 120th St, Oklahoma City, OK 73131	Once every week for one year.
9	Comfort Inn	795 S MacArthur Blvd, Oklahoma City, OK 73128	Once every six months for one year.
10	Ajanta Restaurant	12215 N Pennsylvania Ave, Oklahoma City, OK 73120	Once every two months for one year.
11	OU-Norman	660 Parrington Oval, Norman, OK 73019	Once every six months for one year.
12	Rose State College	6420 Southeast 15th Street, Midwest City, OK 73110	Two times in a one year period.
13	UCO-Edmond	100 N University Dr, Edmond, OK 73034	Three times in a six month period.
14	Sikh Gurudwara	4525 NW 16th St, Oklahoma City, OK 73127	Once in two months for one year.

### Summary of Participant Observation Sites

Three categories of sites emerged during data collection:

#### 1. *Grocery stores and restaurants*

I visited four sites in this category: Spices of India grocery store, *Gopuram* Taste of India restaurant, Dhaba Indian restaurant, and Rasoi Indian restaurant (located inside Spices of India store). In these locations, I met with the customers and owners and requested interviews with them. On many occasions, I was also a customer in these sites, for example, either purchasing grocery at Spices of India or eating Indian food at *Gopuram*. I recruited participants in this way by conversing with other customers who were sitting near me.

#### 2. *Religious sites*

I visited four religious sites: Sikh Gurudwara (Sikhism), Mar Thoma Church (Christianity), OKC Mosque (Islam), and OKC Hindu Temple (Hinduism). In each of these sites, I met with devotees and participated in their religious services. In addition, I met with the leaders of the respective religious institutions and requested their participation in an interview.

#### 3. *Public Event Halls*

I visited three sites to observe participants and recruit them for interviews. These sites hosted public Indian events that were organized by OKC Indians but open to the public. The three sites were the University of Central Oklahoma in Edmond (UCO-Edmond), the University of Oklahoma in Norman (OU-Norman), and Rose State College in Midwest City. In one of the sites, Rose State College, I participated in the annual Diwali night festivities.

## Participants

Between 2012 and 2013, I interviewed a total of 25 participants during various times of the day, mostly in the afternoons and some in the evening but no interviews after 8:00 p.m. In the 14 public and eight private interview sites, I met with people at their convenience. The method I used to facilitate the recruitment of interviewees was through snowball sampling.

## Snowball Sampling

Key informants, online searches, and interactions with Indians during participant observations led to snowballing to recruit research participants. I relied on this approach because I was not able to recruit participants using flyers that I posted (see Appendix III) in the Spices of India store and at the OKC Hindu Temple. First, my three key informants were the male *Gopuram* India Restaurant owner, the male head priest at the Hindu Temple of Oklahoma, and the male owner of Spice of India grocery store. All three gave me potential contacts they knew who spoke the same language or belonged to their same religious community. For example, the Hindu Temple priest was able to introduce me to a Hindu family who were regular visitors to the temple. And the owner of *Gopuram* Indian Restaurant informed me on the *Swaminarayan* Hindus—the religious sect to which he belonged.

Second, I used an online web search as well as driving around neighborhoods to locate businesses catering to Indians. Online, I went to an India-specific website, [www.sulekha.com](http://www.sulekha.com), and looked under classifieds that lists various businesses and cultural interests for Indians in the United States, including OKC. I validated these addresses on Google Maps ([maps.google.com](http://maps.google.com)) and went to these stores (Table 1). In every location I visited, I obtained additional participants through snowball sampling.

Through the owner of *Gopuram* Indian restaurant, I established a connection with the *Swaminarayan* Hindu Temple, and during my interview with one of its devotees, I sensed an increased interest in his participation when I mentioned that I had previously talked to *Gopuram*'s owner. However, I was careful not to focus on any one ethnic group but included a variety of ethnic/linguistic/religious groups by remaining flexible in the field (see Table 2 for various groups). As Yeoh and Willis's (2005, 213) show, this flexibility centers on participants, where "the choice of interviewees is ultimately made in alignment with the 'fluid dynamics' of the field." During my participation at a Pentacostal church service in Bethany, I truncated this flexibility. What started as an exploratory trip in order to recruit additional participants became an opportunity for the pastor to convert me to Pentacostalism, singling me out. I left the church soon after, and did not pursue obtaining participants from that church community.

#### General characteristics of participants

Gaskell (2000) explained that sampling size is not merely counting opinions but exploring the range of opinions and different narratives of a particular issue. Thus, in a qualitative study sample adequacy is linked to having reached an appropriate breadth and depth obtained (Brown, 2008). In qualitative research, Glaser and Strauss (1967) were among the first to call this adequacy as "data saturation," more recently defined by Francis *et al.* (2010, 1230) as follows:

The idea of data saturation is a very useful guide for such research, in which the appropriate sample size is a function of the purpose of the study and the complexity, range and distribution of experiences or views of interest, rather than of the statistical parameters used in quantitative research (e.g. in the form of a power analysis).

In my study, data saturation emerged from the information through 25 interviews and participant observations at 14 sites.

About sixty percent of interviewer participants were in their early 30s, included Hindus and Muslim, and belonging to North Indian Hindustani ethnic heritages speaking Hindi. About ninety percent of them were male. In the remaining forty percent, about twenty percentage of them belonged to Gujarati speakers, 10 percent were Malayalee speakers, and the remaining 10 percent spoke other Indian languages including Telugu and Bihari (Table 2).

Table 2. Table Showing the ethnic, linguistic, and geographical background of participants.

Number of participants	Ethnic identity	Linguistic identity	Indian state of origin	Religious identity
15	<b>Hindustani</b>	Hindi	Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra	Hindu, Muslim
5	<b>Gujarati</b>	Gujarati	Gujarat	Hindu
3	<b>Malayalee</b>	Malayalam	Kerala	Hindu, Christian
2	<b>Tamil</b>	Tamil	Tamil Nadu	Hindu

#### On Indian identities and the spaces in-between

Within “Indian” identities, immigrants self-identify with more detail. Ethnic labeling of immigrants while important, becomes complicated when identifying different Indian groups within the Indian diaspora in the United States. This is because self-identification is based on multiple subjectivities, especially those of religious, linguistic, and regional affiliations, which in many cases are complementary (Kurien, 1999; Leonard, 2006). For example, the respondents in my interviews in Bethany, Oklahoma, while belonging to the “Indian” population of OKC metro referred to themselves not as “Indians,” but as “Pentecostal Christian Malayalees” first, thereby self-identifying their religious (Christian, and within that, Pentacostal) and regional/linguistic identities (Malayalees belong to an ethnic group who speak Malayalam language who are primarily from the Southwestern Indian state of Kerala).

### Positionality and Situated Knowledge within Reflexivity

With the emergence of the “cultural turn” (Scott, 2004), scholars note that the researchers subjectivities were associated with gender, class, religion, race, age, sexuality, and personal history, affect the research process because the researcher is always “in the field.” (Duncan, 1980; Haraway, 1988; England, 1994; Ortner, 1995; Nagar and Geiger, 2007; Soni-Sinha, 2008). McDowell (1992) states, “We must recognize and take into account our own position, as well as that of our participants, and write this into our research practice” (McDowell, 1992, 409). These attributes in part render the identities of both researcher and participants as situated, and accordingly, as Rose (1997) points out, “identity to be situated does not exist in isolation but only through mutually constitutive social relations” (Rose, 1997, 314). Therefore, positionality affects the research process in that data is collected, analyzed, and interpreted.

### Positionality during interviews

Researcher membership, as Dwyer and Buckle (2009, 55) explain, constitutes one of two forms in relation to the participants—either that of insider or an outsider:

Whether the researcher is an insider, sharing the characteristic, role, or experience under study with the participants, or an outsider to the commonality shared by participants, the personhood of the researcher, including her or his membership status in relation to those participating in the research, is an essential and ever-present aspect of the investigation.

However, as, for example, Burns *et. al* (2012) note, research position is not such a neat binary. My membership role with respect to the OKC Indian population involved a constant shifting between that of an insider and outsider. In my interviews in OKC, my positionality as an Indian, male, with an identifiable Hindu name influenced my interviewees, who were similar and different from me. For example, when I interviewed a Malayalee Christian woman, I perceived some tension when



discussing the generational context of religion. The interviewee, while trying to communicate a difficult phase in her life growing up as an Indian-American, even went as far as saying, “You probably don’t understand this, but this is what I went through...”

While I was an outsider, in the sense of being a non-Christian, non-Malayalee male, I was simultaneously an insider of being an Indian immigrant. I reflexively navigated our discussion by gently steering the interview away from her difficult phase of growing up with conflicted Indian/American identities and to her current involvement with mentoring young Indian-American children. I did this to reduce her psychological stress. While I did lose the opportunity to gain information about how her identities changed while growing up, I did gain by learning about other identities that mattered to her. The trade off, therefore, was that I was able to ask her about topics that gave insights into her identities as a Christian. Her response became enthusiastic, and within minutes she was expressing her true calling in empowering a new generation of American immigrants. Thus, empathy, among other emotional engagements, is fundamental to data production (Crowles, 1988; Holland, 2007).

Several aspects of my positionality affected the research processes; the most significant of these I illustrate in Table 3.

Table 3. Changes in Aswin’s positionality and how they affected the research process

Positionality Attributes of Aswin	How positionality attributes affected the research process
<b>Gender:</b> Male	Issue(s): Interviewing women was a challenge as many women deferred my requests for interviews to male relatives.

	<p>How this affected the research: An overwhelming number of my interviewees are men. This greatly genders my study, and gives my study a predominately male voice leaving behind women's voices.</p>
<b>Age:</b> 32	<p>Issue(s): Some of my interviewees were middle-aged (35 years and above), and my relatively younger age was at times a disadvantage to gain access into the field.</p> <p>How this affected the research: Some people were calculated in the way they answered me. They seemed to be careful in how they chose their words: conscious, measured, and punctuated. In other instances, I was able to prolong my conversation on education, growing up in Oklahoma, and even talked about college options. For the data collected, this meant that I included the generational context in my analysis.</p>
<b>Marital Status:</b> Single.	<p>Issue(s): This proved to be one of the biggest obstacles in talking with married couples. And, interviews with single women were completely inaccessible. This greatly affected a more complete set of interviews, and for this reason my study has a gender bias towards Indian men. Gendered aspects of Indian culture, and the relative higher privacy of women due to patriarchal tendencies by Indian men, created these obstacles.</p> <p>How this affected the research: Most of my respondents were married men. This left out many married women and single women.</p>
<b>Religious belief:</b> None.	<p>Issues(s): Several respondents were religious and in some cases I was asked about my spiritual background.</p> <p>How this affected the research: With my Hindu interviewees, there were clear junctures in my interviews where the tone/response of interviewees changed as soon as they realized that I was not a practicing Hindu. I sensed a definite "turn off" when I did not get too much into my personal religious preferences. For example, the Hindu priest was surprised, showing with his facial expression, that I was not visiting the temple often despite being raised as a Hindu.</p> <p>This did, however, allow me, to compare various responses I received from Indians belonging to different religious communities.</p>

<p><b>Ethnic/linguistic heritage:</b> Ethnic Northern Indian raised in Southern India</p>	<p>Issue(s): Most of my respondents were either northern Indian or southern Indian. Knowledge of language was key to “go deeper” into the interviews.</p> <p>How this affected the research: In most cases, I was able to go between Hindi (north Indian), and in one instance Tamil (south Indian) to communicate. But with the Malayalee Christians, I could not speak Malayalam, a southern Indian language that I do not comprehend. Rather, I used English for communicating. This affected my research in ways. There were words in Malayalam that I could not find an English translation for, so I had to call my mother in India, who is a fluent speaker of Malayalam.</p> <p>This allowed me to gather information on how languages created subjectivities for various Indian communities.</p>
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## Recording Data

### *Semi-structured interviews*

I audio-recorded each semi-structured interview (See Appendix I). Participants chose mostly public places, and interviews lasted between 30 minutes to one hour. Before the interviews, I went over the Informed Consent Form (See Appendix IV) as well as the protocol pertaining to OSU’s Institutional Review Board authorization (See Appendix II). I recorded eighty percent of the interviews using audio recording while I took notes for the remaining 20 percent at participants’ request.

### *Fieldnotes*

I used two 3.5 by 5.5 dimensioned 48-page notebooks to pen my fieldnotes. During my participant observations, I kept the notebook handy and kept writing even the smallest observation that I deemed important. I expanded these fieldnotes digitally into 68 pages in Microsoft Word software. I then transcribed each interview, creating 85 single-spaced pages of data.

### *Transcribing*

I used pseudonyms in both the fieldnotes and interview transcriptions to maintain anonymity. During the transcribing, I took a note of the pauses and exclamations, as well as tonal changes in discussing sensitive topics such as post-9/11 life, or how religion played a role in participants' identities.

### *Coding*

Bernard (2006, 452) states that analysis of data, "is the search for patterns in data and for ideas that help explain why those patterns are there in the first place." In this search, the ways to organize data, therefore, is paramount. The first step towards analysis and interpretation, for most qualitative researchers, is coding. Richards and Morse (2007, 137) explain that coding "leads you from the data to the idea, and from the idea to all the data pertaining to that idea." At the core of this process is a "code," which Saldaña (2009, 3) defines as: "a word or a short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (Saldaña 2009, 3).

Themes emerge as qualitative researchers organize data, extract codes, and re-arranged codes to generate patterns, and then obtain categories from coded patterns. Themes are contextualized within supporting literature. To code my data, I used Saldaña's (2009) model (see Figure 1) in moving from the "particular" to the "general," thereby inductively moving from coding to theory. I used NVivo software to organize the audio files as well as auto-generate codes that I used for comparison when I manually coded the interviews.

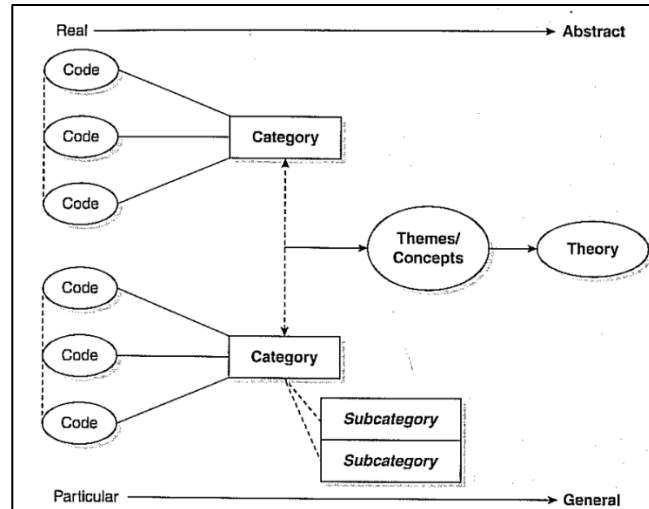


Figure 1. Saldaña's coding model (Saldaña, 2009, 12)

For example, in my interview with the Imam at the OKC Mosque, the code POST-9/11 IDENTITIES emerged when the Imam was telling me how Muslims in his congregation became more aware of how they appeared in public:

<sup>1</sup>Before 9/11, we were in our own cocoons, Arabs fought with Pakistanis and Pakistanis fought with Arabs. And come 9/11, that kind of put us all under a microscope. And we had to find common ground. Our Islamic faith was all we had. And so it [9/11] was constructive to the Muslim community. It brought us together as Muslims and the fighting among various groups stopped.

<sup>1</sup>POST-9/11 MUSLIM IDENTITIES

The coding process, as Saldaña recommends, should be iterative; a process that requires at least two-cycles of coding. In the first cycle, as Saldaña (2009, 3) notes, "The coding processes can range in magnitude from a single word to a full sentence to an entire page of text." In the second cycle, he continues, "the portions coded can be exact same units, longer passages or text, and even a reconfiguration of the codes themselves developed thus far" (Saldaña 2009, 3). Thus, codes emerging from these iterative cycles are meant to "summarize or condense data, not *reduce* it" (Saldaña 2009, 4).

### *Coding Filters*

Describing the purpose of filters, Saldaña (2009, 6) explains, “The act of coding requires that you wear your researcher's analytic lens. But how you perceive and interpret what is happening in the data depends on what type of filter covers that lens.” What Saldaña (2009) refers to is the type of subjective lens that can be used as a filter during the coding process. In the example shown above, “POST-9/11 MUSLIM IDENTITIES” came to the forefront based on my research question. Another filter I considered using was “UNITY.” However, I wanted to name a code with a greater context to 9/11, since the Imam referred to the changes in appearance as a post-9/11 response. I chose this coding filter because, during the course of my interviews, 9/11 attacks emerge as a lens that participants use when talking about why they changed their appearances. I discuss these changes in detail in Chapter 5.

However, as Saldaña (2009, 6) warns, “the researcher’s analytic lens,” might interfere with generating the codes themselves. My own positionality as a transnational immigrant who faced considerable racism in Oklahoma soon after the 9/11 attacks is a contributor to coding filters. For example, when coding the interview transcript of the Imam, two different filters emerged; both reminded me of the post-9/11 challenges. The Imam was talking about how post-9/11 changes influenced Pakistani Muslims and their relationship to the broader American society:

	Coding Filter 1	Coding Filter 2
<sup>1</sup> A few soldiers are second generation Pakistani Muslims who have full- fledged loyalty to the United States of America. They are very loyal to Islamic identity in terms of culture. The two are very compatible – American and Muslim identities - here in the United States.	<sup>1</sup> “LOYALTY TO AMERICA”	<sup>1</sup> “HYBRID IDENTITIES”

In this case, I went with the second coding filter “HYBRID IDENTITIES” because I am aware of the role transnationalism plays as a primary analytic lens in my research. Thus, the context of my research was key in adding meanings to my coding process. As I began organizing these codes based on coding filters, I developed categories (and subcategories) because this process organizes codes into “families, because they share some characteristics” (Saldaña, 2009, 8).

### From Codes to Categories

To illustrate how I created categories from the patterns that emerged from codes, I use the example interviewees from the Kerala Christian community in Bethany. Initial coding revealed CHRISTIAN, FROM KERALA, BORN IN INDIA were categorized under the major category, **Kerala Christian**. But another category **Non-Kerala Christian** emerged due to the code WHITE OKLAHOMAN as a code for race. Since Kerala Christians were in a predominately Christian Oklahoma, I placed **Kerala Christian** as a sub-category under the category **Oklahoma Christian** in order to differentiate Kerala Christians from non-Kerala Christians while simultaneously acknowledging that both of these Christian groups fall under the category Oklahoma Christians.

#### **Category: Oklahoman Christian**

##### ***Sub Category 1: Kerala Christians***

Code: FROM KERALA

Code: CHRISTIAN

Code: CAN SPEAK MALAYALAM

Code: BORN IN INDIA

##### ***Sub Category 2: Non-Kerala Christians***

Code: NOT FROM KERALA

Code: CHRISTIAN

Code: CANNOT SPEAK MALAYALAM

In another example, I worked between two meanings for **Food**, as they had different contexts for people who ate either at *Gopuram* in downtown Oklahoma City compared to the people who ate at Dhaba, the roadside Indian restaurant located on Interstate 35. In the case of *Gopuram*, codes included NOSTALGIA, HOME, INDIA. While for Dhaba, the codes that emerged were ROADSIDE, QUICK EAT, TRUCKSTOP. Thus, **Food** emerged as a category with sub-categories based upon how participants related to the food, and the location they enjoyed it. In the example below, the codes WEEKEND, NOSTALGIA, HOME, INDIA are related to each other and give meaning to the sub-category **Home food**. This is in contrast to sub-category **Roadside food**, which has its own unique set of inter-dependent codes, ROADSIDE, TRUCKSTOP, among others. Nonetheless, both sub-categories fall under the major category **Food**.

### **Category: Food**

#### ***Sub Category 1: Home food***

Code: WEEKEND

Code: NOSTALGIA

Code: HOME

Code: INDIA

Code: FRIENDS AND FAMILY

#### ***Sub Category 1: Roadside food***

Code: ROADSIDE

Code: TRUCKSTOP

Code: QUICK EAT

Code: MEETING PLACE

Code: IMMIGRANTS



## Recoding and Recategorizing

As Saldaña (2009) recommends, repeated iterations of coding cycles leads to refinement of codes and categories. I ran three coding cycles and in doing so, new subcodes and subcategories emerged which refined my data even further. To show this progression, I use the example of the interviews I conducted with Rose State College participants at the annual Diwali Night held in Midwest City. By the third cycle, new subcategories revealed more subcategories that gave meaning to Diwali Night as a transnational event.

### FIRST CYCLE

#### **Category: Diwali**

Code: INDIA

Code: ETHNIC DRESS

Code: COLORS

Code: COLLEGE

Code: INDIAN FOOD

### SECOND CYCLE

#### **Category: Diwali**

##### ***Sub Category 1: Youth***

Code: INDIA

Subcode: YOUNG

Code: HANGOUT

Subcode: FRIENDS

Code: DANCE

Subcode: HIP HOP

##### ***Sub Category 2: Culture***

Code: TRADITION

Subcode: VALUES

Code: RESPECT

Subcode: PARENTS

### THIRD CYCLE

#### **Category: Diwali**

##### ***Sub Category 1: Youth***

Code: INDIA

Subcode: YOUNG

Subcode: FUN

Code: HANGOUT

Subcode: FRIENDS

Subcode: SIBLINGS

Code: DANCE

Subcode: HIP HOP

Subcode: CLUB

##### ***Sub Category 2: Culture***

Code: TRADITION

Subcode: VALUES

Subcode: FAMILY

Code: RESPECT

Subcode: PARENTS

Subcode: INDIA

##### ***Sub Category 3: Americans***

Code: FRIENDS

Subcode: CONNECTIONS

Subcode: CO-WORKERS

Code: GUESTS

Subcode: NEW FRIENDS

Subcode: OKLAHOMA

During the first coding cycle, the codes INDIA, ETHNIC DRESS, COLORS, among others, became unique to the category **Diwali**. During the second cycle, by carefully examining the interviews, sub-codes began to emerge. Within INDIA, the sub-code YOUNG appeared in several interviews. Thus, the new sub-category “Youth” resulted under the category Diwali. During the third cycle of coding, several sub-codes of “Youth” revealed the “youthscapes” (Appadurai, 1996) of the Diwali event that I illustrate in Chapter Four. By this re-coding/re-categorizing process, I created a nuanced analysis by extracting deeper information from the data.

#### From categories to themes

As the final step in the analysis process, the categories with their subcategories were collated and compared in ways that transcend the “reality” of data and progress toward the thematic, conceptual, and theoretical” (Saldaña, 2009, 11). As themes began to emerge, they also began to “interrelate and lead toward the development of theory” (Corbin and Strauss, 2008: 55). In developing new interpretations of this “reality” in the data and by situating these data interpretations within research literature, contributions to the discipline emerged (Mason, 2002; Saldaña, 2009). Using the example of Diwali above, I produce a discussion on the inter-generational aspects of Diwali youthscapes in Chapter Four.

In reporting the analyses, starting with Chapter Four, I show, with evidence, the various practices of everyday aspects of transnational identities.

## CHAPTER IV

### EVERYDAY TRANSNATIONAL IDENTITIES

#### Introduction

As shown in the literature review, expressions of immigrant identities in America emerged from historical as well as spatial negotiations. These identities, as Vertovec (2001, 578) explains, “play out and position individuals in the course of their everyday lives within and across each of their places of attachment or perceived belonging.” Indians in the OKC metro practice transnational identities within the context of everyday life in public and private places that remind them of India. This includes, for example, weekly grocery runs to buy food at Spice of India, weekend hang outs with family and friends in *Gopuram* Indian restaurant, weekly gatherings at Indian homes to prepare for the annual Diwali event, and Sunday worship service in a Malayalee Christian church in Bethany. These sites serve as “settings” (Goffman 1959), where Indians perform “acts” of everyday Indian identities.

While I have defined “identity” in Chapter 1, I reflect on the caveat provided by Brubaker and Cooper (2000) on the pitfalls of what they refer to as an “identity” crisis. This crisis, as the authors note, has risen from “a crisis of overproduction and consequent devaluation of meaning” of the word “identity” (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000, 3). This leads to what they refer to as “clichéd constructivism,” i.e., a general sense of losing the purpose of using the term “identity” amidst using other words, and thereby masking its purposeful use, even rendering it “opaque” in its discussion

(Brubaker and Cooper, 2000, 3). To elaborate on this issue, they provide examples of clichéd words, and then their pitfalls in using them (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000, 11):

Weak or soft conceptions of identity are routinely packaged with standard qualifiers indicating that identity is multiple, unstable, in flux, contingent, fragmented, constructed, negotiated, and so on. These qualifiers have become so familiar – indeed obligatory – in recent years that one reads (and writes) them virtually automatically. They risk becoming mere place-holders, gestures signaling a stance rather than words conveying a meaning.

To remediate this issue and in the interest of not falling into this “identity” crisis, words that would obscure the intent of the word “identity,” I follow Brubaker and Cooper’s (2000, 12) alternative to use identity as a “category of analysis.” In that, the authors rely upon various aspects of identity (for example, “Indian” in my study) as “an analytical category to understand.” However, as Naujoks (2010, 2) explains, depending on the way analysis emerges, identity finds its analytical purpose:

If we think of ‘identity’ as an analytical tool, we have to recognize that terms can have different meanings in different contexts and that our research purpose is likely to affect the tools and terms we use.

Thus, with Brubaker and Cooper’s (2000) caution in mind, I sometimes do use qualifiers, but do so quite purposefully, showing the process embedded in these terms.

Additionally, within a transnational context, as Ganguly (2006, 11) notes, culture and identity are interwoven within the realm of connections to home:

In everyday social situations, we use culture to express and give meaning to our identity, which in turn is used to construct affiliations with and boundaries between other individuals and groups.

Similar to Ganguly (2006), I use the term “Indian culture” broadly generalized for publically available resources such as an Indian grocery store or an Indian restaurant. But at a more nuanced level, as I show in this chapter, transnational Indian identities are negotiated through various attachments and visits to these places in the OKC metro. Specifically, three categories have emerged

in this analysis, to create the theme of everyday transnational identity. These categories include: 1. Food and groceries; 2. Leisure.; and 3. Religion.

### Research Question

Indians in the OKC metro create meanings for their transnational experiences by engaging in daily experiences within various public sites that signify Indian culture. Thus, transnational experiences include the interactions Indians have engaged in with others in these public sites, and how, by performing these daily activities, they co-create transnational experiences with others.

The pertinent research question is therefore:

*How do Indians negotiate their identity through everyday activities within OKC?*

In this chapter, I show how restaurants and Indian groceries not only contribute to various transnational identities but within these identities, how regionalities (for example, northern Indian, southern Indian, etc.) emerge from interactional consequences amongst Indians. Then, I show how public sites of leisure and recreation create inter-generational contexts for first and second-generation Indians. Also, I analyze how religious sites became a part of the everyday-ness of OKC metro Indians who adhere to Christianity, Islam, Sikhism, and Hinduism. Within each of these sections, I use sub-themes, providing detailed analysis to demonstrate how mechanisms of everyday-ness enable the larger narratives of “Indian-ness.” Finally, I summarize my findings, as well as provide a transition to the subsequent analyses chapters.

### Indian grocery store as transnational space

Indian stores in America are sites of transnationalism and form *crucial nodes* for transnational meaning making (Mankekar 2002). Specifically, Mankekar (2002, 92) notes that these stores find themselves “in the transnational circulation and consumption of commodities and discourses about India.” In a similar vein, the *Spices of India* grocery store is a site where Indians in the OKC area create transnational identities. Two aspects of these identities, namely gender and regionalized identities appear in my study.

By gender, I am pointing to the patriarchal Indian structure among immigrants, where Indian men dominate the workforce creating barriers for Indian women to enter the workforce are (Dasgupta, 1998; Dasgupta, 2007). As a result, women spend their day organizing homecooked food for their families (Vallianatos and Raine, 2008). Consequently, their role in shopping at grocery stores, as Vallianatos and Raine (2008, 371) note, speaks to one of the greatest facets of their identities and maintenance of their immigrant ethnicity as homemakers:

Food conveys meanings that are actively used by immigrant women in the construction of self. By means of menu planning, grocery shopping and cooking, women assert their individual connotations of womanhood and ethnicity.

By re-creating a taste of “home,” immigrant women performing the role of homemaker continue the regionalization of their familiar Indian cuisine.

By regionalization, I mean the regions within India that have distinctive ethnic and linguistic identities that are reflected at Spices of India. Specifically, in India, northern Indian and southern Indian food choices vary—while northern Indians prefer wheat based food, southern Indians prefer

rice based dishes (Nagar, 2015, 288). Mankekar (2002) explains that Indian store owners are cognizant of the habits of their customers:

They [store owners] were all too aware that they had to cater to a regionally and culturally heterogeneous [Indian] community. For instance, while earlier, most stores only sold ingredients used in North India, they now made it a point to offer products used in southern Indian cuisines. Store-owners were proud of their niche-marketing practices shaped, in turn, by their knowledge of local demographics and patterns of settlement (Mankekar, 2002, 84).

OKC's Spices of India store is a multi-regional Indian grocery store, meaning that foods from all over India are grouped in their respective isles, with the isles arranged based on the popularity of items. Grains, rice, and spice—three of the most popular elements of Indian food—are stacked in numerous quantities on isles at the front of the store. As shoppers walk around the isles looking for items, many of them converge at the rice and spice sections. Most of them are women, who meet others and converse in Hindi about the rising food prices or their newfound recipes.

As Mankekar (2002, 91) notes concerning Indian women, the Indian store “represents an extension of the surveillance exercised within the community.” Specifically, “they [women] are ‘allowed’ to go by themselves to Indian stores even when they are prohibited from going to ‘regular’ stores, because Indian stores are deemed ‘safe’ by their husbands” Mankekar (2002, 91). For example, Ms. Malathi shops at Spices of India during early afternoon when “it is free of traffic,” and with enough time to buy groceries before her husband arrives from work. As a North Indian, Ms. Malathi appreciates the selection from this Indian region available at Spices of India enabling her to make “home-style” food at home. At the same time, she enjoys shopping at Indian stores to meet other Indian women home keepers:

I am happy that I am able to shop in a store where I can obtain food that connects me to home back in India where I grew up. Spices of

India is a good store. I am able to socialize and meet women who go through the daily routine of taking care of home.

This sentiment is shared by Ms. Divya, a regular “shopping friend” of Ms. Malathi who shops at Spices of India to keep up with Indian celebrity “news and gossip”:

I think meeting other Indian women while shopping is very important for me. I end up spending more time talking than shopping! [laughs] I am a big Bollywood<sup>22</sup> fan, so I get the latest scoop from Mumbai. We [women] are so spread across in OKC, so this place is a nice way to interact.

Thus, Spices of India serves as a “crucial node” (Mankekar, 2002) where Indian women interact on an everyday basis. By connecting with Bollywood news and Indian food items, Indian women access India with others who share similar responsibilities as homemakers. The store, therefore, as a transnational site, allows daily opportunities, and possibilities, for construction of transnational identities.

#### The transnational setting of ‘Spices of India’

Spices of India is part of a larger shopping complex that includes the actual grocery store and an Indian restaurant *Rasoi* (Figure 2). The restaurant’s cooks prepare mostly northern Indian meals and serve food to customers seated in various configurations, mostly accommodating small families (Figure 3).



Figure 2. Spices of India store with “Rasoi” sign to the left of this image. (Photo by author)

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<sup>22</sup> *Bollywood* (*Bombay+Hollywood*) is synonymous with India’s movie industry based in Mumbai, India’s largest city (formerly, Bombay).



Customers at *Rasoi* order food at the cash register and the staff brings the food to the customers at the tables. This restaurant setting is modeled after *chaat* houses in India where light snacks and tea are served for the busy urban Indian life. At *Rasoi*, customers stop by after their grocery shopping in the Spices of India next door, and in some occasions swing by *Rasoi* to grab a cup of *chai* before heading out to carry on with their day. On several occasions, young children and teens find entertainment on the TV mounted on the restaurant's wall. Often, the owner of Spices of India, Mr. Patel, takes a break from managing his store and instead drops by *Rasoi* customers for casual conversation and to obtain feedback on his store. I participated in some of these conversations, ranging from small to elaborate talk, everything from Oklahoma weather to a much deeper conversation on politics in India. For Mr. Patel, these conversations form the core of not only connecting with his customers but to find the meanings of home:

I connect with customers in a way that bonds us to India, not only with the food, but also with their lives and how they connect with their home. I am also always finding ways to find new customers too, and the best ways to bring the experience of shopping in India, right here in Oklahoma City.



Figure 3. Customers in *Rasoi* restaurant. (Photo by author)

In establishing rapport with the customers, Mr. Patel helps Indians to maintain connections with home through his store and their relationship with him and other customers; the customers and Mr.

Patel give meaning to one another's lives through shared everyday experiences. Evert's (2010) research on small ethnic shops in Europe reveals a similar relationship between the storeowners and their customers signifying fluidity of immigrant encounters:

People are becoming themselves through their engagements in the shop such as the personal communication, the sensual experience of objects or the negotiating of household chores, routines and food-related anxieties (Evert 2010, 860).

In OKC's Spices of India, everyday-ness of what it means to be Indian in the OKC metro emerges from interactions. As Evert (2010, 860) argues, the everyday geographies of ethnic identities emerge:

Thus, tracing the everyday life geographies of specific places can yield insights that do not only inform us how ethnicity is constructed and used but also how it is sometimes reworked, downplayed or ignored (Evert 2010, 860).

In the case of OKC Indians, the role of food and Indian groceries available at Spice of India forms the transnational basis to connect "home," thereby providing a sense of nostalgia "that is more important than the culinary re-enactments of ethnic origins" (Evert, 2010, 859). In other words, nostalgic remembrance of place, and connecting with India, is a way of "being" Indian in OKC.

#### "This place reminds me of home": Memory and everyday transnational identities

In *India Shopping*, Mankekar (2002) titles her study based on the significance of the terms "India" and "shopping" among the patrons because for the patrons, "They come for the whole package. They come for India shopping" (Mankekar, 2002, 20). The (transnational) meanings behind "India" in day-to-day experiences signify a sense of familiar connections to the homeland:

The 'India' that is produced and consumed in these stores is a highly contested construct; the kinds of affect this 'India' arouses range from fond nostalgia to ambivalence, sometimes even antagonism. I'm especially concerned with how some of the commodities

displayed and sold in these grocery stores facilitate the production of the modality of the familiar which, in turn, reveals a complicated set of discourses about nation, community, gender, and family (Mankekar, 2002, 81).

For Ms. Priya, a regular customer at the store, shopping at Spices of India “brings memories of home.” Ms. Priya is a twenty-something northern Indian, newly married housewife who takes care of the home while her husband works in the nearby University of Central Oklahoma, located in Edmond, as a computer technical assistant. She explained that after she purchased the regular grocery items needed for cooking, she always stops to pick up a candy bar or a *Gulab Jamun*<sup>23</sup> treat because it reminded her of the days when her father back in India used to buy it for her after his grocery shopping trip:

When I was growing up in India, every time my parents used to take me to our local grocery store in Mumbai, my father would always make sure that he would stop for a quick last minute purchase of a “5 Star” candy bar which used to be my favorite growing up. Sometimes my mom used to get *Gulab Jamuns* as my reward for being a good girl during the shopping [laughs]. When I first started to shop in Spices of India about two years ago, I was almost in tears to find that they carried “5 Star” and *Gulab Jamun*! So since then I have always treated myself to one of these goodies. Because it reminds me of a time when I was young and free in India. Because this place reminds me of home.

Memories, according to Mankekar (2002, 87), when seen with regard to consumption, “might lead to an individual to remember the warmth and laughter surrounding family gatherings and celebrations in the homeland (rather than the conflicts and family policy surrounding them).” For Ms. Priya,

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<sup>23</sup> *Gulab Jamun* (Hindi = “Rose-colored balls”) is a popular milk-based sweet dish prepared in northern India made of fried dumplings dipped in rose scented sugar syrup.

these special commodities carry meanings of daily home life, belonging, and contribute to the ongoing construction of her transnational identity.

As Davis (1979, 31) notes, the significance of the value of memory forms a part of the “never ending work of constructing, maintaining, and reconstructing our identities.” As a northern Indian, the availability of north Indian food at ‘Spices of India’ helps Ms. Priya in making choices that give meanings to her “Indian-ness.”

During Hindu festivals, Ms. Priya prepares food with some of her “special favorites” in hopes of connecting with new friends with common tastes. After the festivities, Ms. Priya carries any leftovers to her co-workers; many of them white Americans, who appreciate her offer to share sweets. Other Indians in OKC, particularly women as Ms. Priya explained, share this practice of preparing and sharing food, particularly during religious events, and with non-Indians. These public and private day-to-day experiences in connecting with food is symbolic to the choices made by Indians in maintaining transnational linkages. Other Indians share similar connections even though the particulars of meaning vary.

Mr. Ganesh, a thirty-something student at the University of Oklahoma, stopped at Spices of India, despite the distance from Norman. He spoke highly of how the store attracts “some of the coolest people” in the OKC area. Mr. Ganesh is a regular at the store, while a self-proclaimed “happy-go-lucky bachelor,” he always buys nearly the same items every time—some *chai masala*,<sup>24</sup> fresh *naan* bread,<sup>25</sup> a dozen ready-to-eat Indian entrees: “That is all I need. I am single, so why make

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<sup>24</sup> *Chai* (Hindi, “tea”) *Masala* (Hindi, “spices”) is a mixture of powdered tea leaves, spices, cardamom, and cloves.

<sup>25</sup> Hand-made flattened oven-baked bread popular in northern India.

life complicated? [chuckles].” For him, his interactions in the store usually start after paying for the groceries:

Usually, I am by myself, and I like to hang out in the store and have a chai with the store owner or meet up with new people of my age group and just talk about what is new in OKC. I never know whom I am going to end up meeting, and so I return back to this store to have a good time. It’s just like back home, grocery stores are good for meetups. Spices of India for that reason, it is nice and I like the people who shop here; I have some good friends, many of them non-Indians, whom I met here!

Both Ms. Priya and Mr. Ganesh’s experiences and relations with food and group identity are what Srinivas (2007, 86) refers to as part of the “Indian social-scape,” which, in America, takes on a transnational context. For Mr. Ganesh and Ms. Priya, their everyday transnational connections to other patrons during their visits to Spices of India is made of interaction with food and people that ultimately connect with India. Moreover, in all these experiences, the role of the storeowner is vital in facilitating these connections.

On several occasions, after customers make their purchases, they make it a point to talk to the co-owner of Spices of India, Mr. Indrajit. A mild-mannered man, possibly in his fifties, he greets every customer when they enter the store and makes sure to catch up on their life during checkout. Some of the regular customers usually chat for a longer duration to request special items, particularly during festive seasons.

Moreover, not just the store, but Mr. Patel and Mr. Indrajit serve as a “crucial nodes” for the changing construction of Indian identity (Mankekar, 2002). During one of these seasons, the store was particularly busy with Mr. Indrajit working the cash register with two of his assistants. “We are really here to serve and connect with our customers,” Mr. Indrajit quipped. He is especially pleased with the turn-out during the “busy season” as he gets to interact with non-Indians, and in doing so, he extends the store’s offerings to a larger client base. For example, several White Americans and

members of the Latino/a community visit the store on a regular basis. Mr. Indrajit guides them to the appropriate shopping isles. On many occasions, he takes time to ask what they are looking for and provides them with recipe tips. He explained, “I try to make sure they get what they want and I try to make them feel comfortable in my store.”

These interactions contribute to the transnational aspects of the store and the role played by its owners to monitor, maintain, and co-create identities with his customers. In doing so, the store is a transnational site which connects its customers to India. This is done through their practices between nostalgia of home and food in what Srinivas (2007, 97) terms as “gastro-nostalgia”— “the nostalgic and self-conscious return to the eating of food of one’s particular ethnic, caste, or kin group (Srinivas, 2007, 97). In addition to Spices of India, Indian restaurants in the OKC metro enable these connections for Indians, as well as non-Indians.

#### Restaurants as sites of transnational ‘gastro- nostalgia’

The *Gopuram* Taste of India (henceforth, *Gopuram*) is one of the most popular Indian restaurants in Oklahoma City.<sup>26</sup> During lunch time every Sunday, *Gopuram* is particularly busy as the buffet lines resemble factory assembly lines—customers wait as the restaurant waiters scurry to refill the emptied buffet pans with freshly prepared Indian food. Hot food emerges from the kitchen as a medley of north and south Indian food finds its place in the restaurant within a predominately meat-and-potato mid-America.

The word *Gopuram* translates to “temple tower,” a south Indian Hindu temple architecture. Its original owner, a south Indian, transferred the management in 2008 to the current owner, Mr.

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<sup>26</sup> Gopuram Taste of India website: <http://www.gopuramtasteofindia.com/>. Last accessed October 16, 2016.

Rao, a north Indian Gujarati. Despite his ethnic background, Mr. Rao offers dishes from all over India—even Pakistani meat dishes to appeal to the larger South Asian and non-South Asians craving meat-based Indian dishes. “I am happy to play the role of a culinary ambassador,” Mr. Rao told me when I asked about what drove him to enter the Indian restaurant business. What drives Mr. Rao is the authentic “Indian-ness” in Indian food that he literally brings to the table. He explained, “By bringing Indian home food to Oklahoma City, I am proud to bring the dishes and delicious food my mom used to prepare for me when I was growing up.”

Mr. Rao, now possibly in his late forties, started out as a cook in India in his father’s restaurant business. During the 1980s, demand for Indian food outside India grew as more Indian immigrants moved overseas. Mr. Rao was drawn to a restaurant business opportunity in OKC thanks to his Gujarati friends who migrated to OKC in the late 1980s. When I asked him why he chose OKC, Mr. Rao noted, “I am really lucky for coming here [OKC] at the right time when there was a demand for Indian food all over the U.S.” Showing the lunch buffet lineup he said, “I am very proud to represent *all* of India through my cooking, “whether it is *dosa*<sup>27</sup> or *paneer makehani*<sup>28</sup>, we have it all!” Through his vision, the pan-Indian in his buffet lunch draws a variety of customers.

*Gopuram*’s transnational appeal extends from the buffet line and into the setting of some of its specialty rooms. Mr. Patel is proud of his “themed dining rooms”—each inspired by India’s historical and colonial influences—French, English, Portuguese, and even Chinese dining rooms greet customers as they walk into *Gopuram*. He explained, “These rooms are very popular for party events, particularly non-Indians who like to get a global feel.” Mr. Patel indicates *Gopuram*’s broader, transnational appeal, not only for Indian food, but for its globally-informed customers. On their website, *Gopuram* prides its “Fine Indian Cuisine” on relationships with global appeal:

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<sup>27</sup> A southern-style Indian crepe made with mild spiciness. It accompanies well with coconut chutney, also a popular southern Indian choice.

<sup>28</sup> *Paneer* is a northern Indian variety of cottage cheese, usually made with whole milk and seasoned with spiced and curry paste. *Paneer makehani* or “battered” paneer is one of the most popular dishes of North India.

Over the years, *Gopuram* Taste of India, located in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, has honed our culinary staff to handle any type of Indian cuisine, suiting the palates of people from all over the world. Our expert staff can specialize in Indo-Chinese as well as Indo-European styles of cooking.<sup>29</sup>

In 2015, *Gopuram*'s popularity and a growing Indian population enabled Mr. Rao to establish a second restaurant north of the OKC metro. With its two locations and the variety of food offered, *Gopuram* performs the role of a transnational "gastro-nostalgic" site and enables Indian immigrants to return to a food that reminds them of home.

For one of *Gopuram*'s regular customers, Mr. Das, the restaurant is probably his only connection to home. After losing his family members during the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, Mr. Das moved to Oklahoma to start a new life. "India offers no hope for me anymore, I lost everything there," Mr. Das remarked when I asked him about his background. Now, his newly adopted home in the U.S. offers resources and opportunities to connect with India. "To me, *Gopuram* is not only a casual dining place, but a place that reminds me of home, a place I can no longer go to," Mr. Das reminisced. He is a regular at *Gopuram*, usually spending a little extra time after eating to talk with the owner, and often spending some time with other friends he has acquired over the years.

The role of memory through the connections made within the spaces of food and home is significant for others in the OKC metro. For example, in the case of Mr. Goyal, a professor of Indian origin at the University of Oklahoma—Norman, the *Himalayas* Indian restaurant, located in downtown Norman, is his favorite Indian restaurant because its head cook and founder was trained

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<sup>29</sup> Gopuram Taste of India. "About Us" URL: <http://www.gopuramtasteofindia.com/Belly-Dancing-Shows-Oklahoma-City-OK.html>



at the original OKC *Gopuram*, and he trusts the taste of the food: “I know that when I go to Himalayas, I get a taste of *Gopuram*, and so instead of traveling nearly half an hour to OKC after a long day at work, I can get a nice home cooked meal right here in Norman.” He shared with me how his recent divorce was a painful experience and how that led him to eat out more often. With Norman’s Himalayas only 15 minutes from his work, Mr. Goyal “never misses home.” A sentiment similar to Mr. Goyal’s experience was shared by Ms. Reena, a long-time resident of Norman who has seen her share of changes and growth within OKC’s Indian community since the mid-1980s. “It feels as if I have literally seen OKC grow in front of me,” she recalls from her days moving to OU—Norman as a graduate student. She was also reflective of a time when there were virtually no Indian restaurants in the area, before *Gopuram* opened in the mid-1990s. “Before *Gopuram*, I never ate Indian food outside, because there weren’t any. So I used to cook a lot at home. But after *Gopuram* opened, I was a bit skeptical because I thought the best Indian food in Oklahoma was found in my kitchen [chuckles].” Over the years, Ms. Reena said she has grown accustomed to *Gopuram*, “impressed by Mr. Patel’s insistence on home flavor.”

By seeking *public* restaurants for Indian food, Indians in the OKC metro are able to experience food that “intrinsically traverses the public and the intimate” (Holtzman, 2006, 373). For Mr. Ritesh, a twenty-something newly arrived resident of OKC, buying Indian food or eating at an Indian restaurant is not only “something to do to fill the stomach,” but an important connection to his home in India where his wife and two children live. Mr. Ritesh was on a two-year contract when we met for our interview and he took me to his home in southeast OKC where he lived in a one-bedroom apartment. We chatted over some *chai* and Indian snacks he was proud to share, having tried preparing *chai* for the first time since he moved to OKC. “Sometimes, I am too lazy to cook at home, it gets lonely,” he was quick to respond as I appreciated his cooking. “So I abandon my

kitchen sometimes and I go to *Gopuram*. And sometimes, I am just too lazy to drive [chuckles], so I make some snacks at home. One way or other, I find a way to connect to my home food,” Mr.

Ritesh affirmed. Other single people I interviewed narrated similar traversing between the public and private notions of Indian food. For Mr. Gopal, a thirty-something software engineer based out of Oklahoma City, *Gopuram* offers a convenient lunch option suiting his vegetarian preference. As a practicing Hindu, Mr. Gopal refrains from eating meat, and the dearth of vegetarian options within a close driving range from his office makes *Gopuram* an ideal choice.

While Mr. Gopal appreciates *Gopuram*’s offerings, he is also wary of the waning of vegetarians in the area due to *Gopuram*’s appeal to a wider meat-eating customer base:

It is very hard to find good vegetarian food around where I work let alone good Indian vegetarian. When I was working in New York, it was so easy to find both, but here in OKC, I have just one or two options. I just hope that *Gopuram* continues to keep serving vegetarian food for folks like us because I know that there are a lot more meat lovers in Oklahoma, like my Okie colleagues, for example! [laughs]. I am glad that, however, there is an option for me here in *Gopuram* for the near term.

The appeal for patrons such as Mr. Gopal speaks to a broader significance of an ethnic restaurant—in this case by way of its branding—to OKC’s position in the American restaurant scene. *Gopuram*’s vegetarian options are key to establishing Indians like Mr. Gopal, who chose to live near a restaurant that serves food appropriate to their religious and dietary preferences. The location of *Gopuram*, inside a strip mall in OKC’s busy Northwest corridor, and the access to this location from suburban Yukon and Bethany where many Indians live, provides evidence of the appeal of *Gopuram* to OKC’s Indian community. As I observed a large number of customers choosing vegetarian dishes in the lunch buffet, and given how many African-American, White, and Hispanic customers I saw at the restaurant, *Gopuram*’s role extends into re-making the urban food scene, i.e., an Indian restaurant that appeals to non-Indians. Not all spaces need to have only “ethnic” qualities to make them significant

for Indians. In other more mainstream public spaces, Fraser (1992) notes “stakeholders interact and meet in these places making these locations part of a larger public realm where ethnic worlds intersect mainstream landscapes, and global culture is articulated in local forms” (Fraser, 1992, 196).

In this regard, the Dhaba Indian Restaurant (henceforth, Dhaba) located off southbound Interstate 35 towards Oklahoma City represents an example where everyday transnational experiences are formed from a mainstream gastronomic experience. *Gopuram* and Dhaba contrast in their location as well as their function. On the one hand, *Gopuram* is an established formal sit-down restaurant with a regular offering of standard delicacies from India, as well as themed-rooms for upscale visitors. Dhaba, on the other hand, contrasts as a restaurant tucked inside a gas station convenience store on the busy Interstate-35 freeway. Dhaba mainly serves a grab-and-go variety of Indian food, suitable for the busy truck driver stopping by for a quick bite.

With no indication, or a sign for this restaurant on the freeway, or any mention of this place from any of my research participants, Dhaba is akin to what Sen (2012, 196) mentions as an emerging common recurrence for ethnic restaurants: not to be seen in their location but seamlessly integrated within regular mainstream landscapes since “hole-in-the-wall eating spots, gourmet ghetto, and foodie places have become part of our urban experiences.” Truck drivers recognize Dhaba not by a restaurant sign but instead by the Exit number 137 on I-35. Unlike *Gopuram*, which has an established and well-recognized patronage as an ethnic restaurant, Dhaba’s position—both in its physical locational sense and its context of a non-descript Indian restaurant—is part of an emerging everyday multicultural public spaces in OKC metro.

Sen (2012, 196) defines multicultural public spaces as seamlessly integrated contact zones where various cultural and ethnic identities interface:

[Such] ethnic culinary spaces in urban America cannot be read as part of a landscape that is segregated, circumscribed, and distinct from mainstream. Rather these are sites of hybridity and cultural contact where multiple worlds, networks, processes, and agents interact with each other. These spaces are indeed contemporary multicultural public spaces.

Further, the owners describe the primary patrons for Dhaba in such a way that indicates that the restaurant is constitutive of everyday transnational experiences. Its two owners, originally from Pakistan, purchased the gas station and its 5 Star Travel Plaza from a Middle Eastern owner during the late 1990s (Figure 4). One of its owners, Mr. Khan established Dhaba as an ideal restaurant business for truck drivers and casual diners for ‘grab-and-go’ type food. He explained, “We really got lucky to find such a good spot to serve some hot meals to weary travelers as they take a break from long journeys, plus I know that the *dhaba*-type food is quick and easy for travelers.”



Figure 4. Dhaba Taste of India restaurant's location inside 5 Star Travel Plaza (photo by author).

By *dhaba*-type, Khan is referring to the cultural and geographical significance of *dhabas* as a roadside culinary experience—featured in Mr. Khan’s Pakistan and neighboring Punjab region of India. By availing the *dhaba* experience on I-35, Mr. Khan has enabled a culinary transnational performance that serves a “setting” for everyday interactions. This is significant because Indian people who stop by Dhaba, interact with other drivers, who like them, are immigrant drivers from different nations.

Many of Dhaba’s truck drivers found these interactions as key moments of re-connecting with other immigrants who share similar life in America as temporary workers on a work visa. For example, Mr. Malik, a forty-something year old truck driver from Somalia, told me that Dhaba is a place for connecting with other truck drivers; many of them share stories from their home country. Like Indian immigrants, Mr. Malik relates to life as a minority living in the U.S. Some of these stories include recollecting scenes of growing up in the “old country” or stories of working for rude American bosses. Sometimes humorous, yet dangerous, stories of American college students who “just don’t how to drive on the highway or understand why they need to be careful not to piss-off a semi that is transporting methane gas!”

As Mr. Malik shared his experiences on the road, again and again he returned to his experiences in Dhaba, and its food that helped him to connect with other immigrants:

Whenever I come here for a lunch, I just enjoy having the company of my fellow truck drivers on the road who eat with me. Somehow I feel Dhaba’s *chicken tikka masala* has helped us all bind together [laughs]. Plus, as a Muslim, I know that brother Khan is always making sure that I get an extra free helping of his tasty chicken! [he waves to Mr. Khan who is behind the counter helping another customer]. Am I right, Khan *bhai*? You always take care of your customers, right? [as he laughs, the busy Mr. Khan signals a ‘thumbs up’ to Mr. Malik].

In doing so, Mr. Malik, other immigrant truck drivers, and Mr. Khan, engage in everyday transnational experiences in this space despite their different backgrounds. Dhaba is also a place of

transnational “gastro-nostalgia,” a place where everyday meanings of connecting with home are constructed, giving a sense of belonging to the transnational lives of people who traverse the public space of Dhaba.

Other locations where OKC Indians negotiate their transnational everyday identities are places of leisure that I elaborate on in the next section. Specifically, I show how for Indians, spaces of leisure in OKC have an inter-generational, as well as a gendered, context.

### Leisure, youthspheres, and inter-generational panethnic alliances

Spaces of leisure are venues for making and expressing identities, including those emerging from inter-generational interactions (Williams, 2002; Jokovi, 2003). In its regular usage of the term, ‘leisure’ corresponds to free time. However, as Nagamoto (2014, 40) notes, it is not simply “free time” but when seen in terms of everyday activities, “both leisure and work are perceived as social practices and social, identity-related and life-defining processes” (Nagamoto, 2014, 40).

Opportunities for immigrants belonging to different ethnicities, in participating within leisure activities within an urban setting, contribute to their transnational everyday experiences because as Peter (2011, 50) notes, “Ethnicity is an explaining factor for understanding the use and meaning of public spaces for leisure activities.”

Further, the complexities of transnational identities make leisure activities within an immigrant setting “constructed and negotiated in a complex interplay between ethnicity, religion, and gender” (Peter, 2011, 58). Indians in OKC, as I show in the subsequent section, negotiate their leisure spaces through inter-generational and gendered contexts.

### Annual Diwali night and inter-generational youthscape

The annual “Diwali Night” celebration, college students from the University of Oklahoma—Norman and Oklahoma State University—Stillwater and sponsored by the Indian Association of Oklahoma and held at Rose State College in Midwest City, marks the beginning of Hindu religious festivity in India when people of all ages celebrate the victory of good over evil. As a regular routine, dancers usually perform a fusion sequence of Western hip-hop and traditional Indian music in the background—an eclectic mix that is gaining popularity among Indian youth culture, both among immigrants in America as well as in India. During the main Diwali dance at Rose State College, twelve performers on the stage, seven girls and five boys, in their late teens and early twenties, wearing traditional northern Indian dress, danced seamlessly to Jay-Z’s “99 Problems,” Naughty By Nature’s, “Hip Hop Hooray,” and Punjabi MC’s bhangra track “*Mundian To Bach Ke*.” Scanning the audience, the only bodies that were moving to the performance were youth and children while their parents seemed to be disinterested or transfixed to their phones. Clearly, a generational distinction in how older and younger Indian immigrants responded to the music emerged in this event.

Speaking to one of the parents, I found that the negotiations between generations is not easy. For example, for Ms. Rekha, a resident of Norman and a mother of a 19-year old daughter, Diwali is a time when she lets her daughter “have fun” while under her watchful eyes. Monitoring her daughter while simultaneously interacting with other families is one such negotiation that Ms. Rekha accomplishes during Diwali Night. The event is also a time for leisure, Ms. Rekha recognizes, “I try to have my own fun with the ladies, chit-chatting on gossip, comparing our jewelry [chuckles], and talking about our children’s career options.”

Together, the adults and their children are part of what post-colonial anthropologist Appadurai (1996) refers to as “youthscape,” signifying the rising youth culture in the 1990s among Indian American youth. Maira (2002, 17), while applying Appadurai’s definition of “youthscape,” explains that for Indian youth it manifests as an Indian-American youth culture. This manifestation, however, based largely in hip-hop, is formed within conflicting subjectivities:

Indian American youth culture brings to light the often hidden contradictions of citizenship and belonging, work and leisure, multiculturalism and education, that second-generation youth manage daily, and it points to a larger, material and historical context that structures this youthscape.

In the case of Diwali Night, parents and their children co-create an inter-generational youthscape as they interact with each other in ways that are mutually affecting each other’s involvement in the event. However, when looked at more closely, the Diwali youthscape is a constructed form, a culmination of daily activities throughout the year that lead up to the main event.

The preparation leading up to the Diwali event is a year-long process. This includes a concerted effort by Indians leveraging their relationships with their fellow immigrants as well as mobilizing cultural resources including food, decorations, sweets, and party favors that are needed. For example, Mrs. and Mr. Partha, a young first generation Indian couple in their twenties, live and work in OKC. They recently bought a home just off Northwest 23<sup>rd</sup> expressway that they use to organize and plan meetings, dance rehearsals, and even store decoration items used for Diwali Night. Speaking about how they use their home for planning, Mr. Partha explained:

The Indian Association of Oklahoma (IAOK) is our parent organization, which has a list of almost all the Indian families who live in the OKC area. When they see members wanting to volunteer for the Diwali night, they send out emails up to a year in advance and ask them to start organizing. So we start planning, create benchmarks for deadlines, assign roles to perform among members, including the type of food, decoration items, even list of guests from outside OKC. My wife and I have an empty basement and we use



this space for meeting. It is really a team work among Indians to make Diwali night a grand success.

The India Association of Oklahoma (IAOK) is responsible for this event from the beginning until the end, taking advantage of partnering with decoration vendors, restaurant owners and grocery store owners to help families such as the Partha family in assembling the resources they need. This also includes the planning and catering of Indian food from *Gopuram*, as well as ordering sweets from Spices of India—in many cases commissioning the owner, Mr. Patel, to import specially made food items from India. In doing so, the activities surrounding the occasion are managed over a longer period, nine months in some cases. The actual celebration itself lasts for over three hours with a well-planned sequence of festivities neatly outlined in a program of events distributed to participants before the main evening.

In addition to mobilizing resources among adults, arranging youth participation particularly for the variety dance portion, is a year-long process. In this case, the role of adults forming alliances with their children is significant. For Mrs. and Mr. Jeet, this is one of the most important ways in connecting with their son as they allow him to bring his high school friends to practice Diwali dance in their backyard. Ms. Jeet explained, having their son “chill out” in expressing his music and dance is a great way for them to bond with other Indian “kids who are just like him.” For the youth, the process of planning is an important way to connect with their peers. Among them, Mr. Purvesh, a young Indian-American in his early twenties and born in Edmond, relates to this event as a way to unite people:

We bring guests from different ethnic backgrounds as well as non-Indians who wish to learn about Indian culture attend the Diwali night. It is the biggest party of the year for me, and it's pretty cool that it is an Indian event.

For Mr. Purvesh, Diwali Night is a way of bonding with Indian culture while “hanging out” with his Indian-American friends. He talked about his friends sharing music files during the year to play Diwali Night. “It’s like our secret project that we keep talking about all year round,” he noted.

In order to make the event appealing across generations, as one of the Diwali event volunteers, Mr. Nikhil explained, involves a concerted effort in bringing all the cultural resources together. He spoke of an almost “military-style” discipline needed to bring the event as he explained, “We are proud that this is an event led by the youth, everyone is young that night, even the older folks [chuckles].” Mr. Nikhil, a senior college student at the University of Oklahoma—Norman is passionate about gathering all age groups together on Diwali Night:

We try to make the dance and music as a key moment of bringing everyone to enjoy the night. It might be a religious event, but it is the celebration of good over evil, right? And there is everything good about music!

Music and dance are a major part of Diwali Night with a multitude of remixes and musical fusion greeting the entourage of guests entering the performance hall. By connecting with Indian music and culture, these transnational performances speak to larger, inter-generational contexts of everyday activities among Indians in OKC. Speaking on the event, Ms. Kumari, the president of IAOK told me that the event is getting more popular every year as youth are getting increasingly active. Her comments spoke to the value added by young men such as Nikhil and Purvesh:

As our younger generation is our future, I am very pleased to see our youth taking charge...and I speak for the older generation Indians when I say that we are thankful for their service. It is nice to see these youngsters contribute to our Indian traditions and values while adding their own youthful energy. It reminds us older folks when we were younger [laughs].

Ms. Kumari reminisced about the time when she first arrived in the OKC metro area during the late 1970s as one of the first Indian immigrants in the region. “Back in those times, the Indian community was much small and Diwali Night celebrations were much more modest,” Ms. Kumari reflected. As she continued, Ms. Kumari reflected on why Diwali Night emerged as a growing success among the Indian immigrant community in the OKC metro area:

Back when I first arrived, the entire Diwali event was usually in the home of one of the Indian families. After the event, we went on a trip to downtown Oklahoma City to take a walk on Bricktown. I think times have changed, Indians speak so many different languages now, there are so many different communities, it is difficult to get hold of everyone together. So we have the Diwali night where the youth take over and all of us come together to enjoy a good time.

Ms. Kumari’s reference in bringing Indians together for Diwali also signifies organizing events among Indians with varied linguistic and ethnic backgrounds. When seen in relation to how Indians practice their transnational identities, these two subjectivities inform the complexities of everyday *Indian-ness*.

#### Language, ethnicity, and transnational identities

The relationship between language and ethnicity among immigrants is inter-linked; as Lytra (2016, 132) indicates, “Language users define and perceive ethnic membership.” The Indian community in OKC is made of members who speak various Indian languages, approximately seven. Each linguistic community within the OKC metro Indian population is supported by associations that help in their everyday life.

For example, in the case of the Tamil<sup>30</sup> ethnic group in the OKC metro, membership is facilitated by the Oklahoma Tamil Sangam (OTS) which operates Sunday language classes for young Tamil American children as part of their leisure activities for the weekend. In 2005, the Oklahoma City Tamil School was founded by OTS and in their mission statement, the need to bring young Tamil youth within the larger Tamil ethnic membership is clear: “Mission of the Oklahoma Tamil Sangam is to teach our children to speak, read, and write Tamil language at a fifth grade level.” As the founding president of the Oklahoma Tamil Sangam, Mr. Kumar, a forty-something first-generation Tamil American, told me that Tamils in the OKC metro, while few and far between, keep Tamil language central to their ethnic community. He recognizes the importance of Tamil language instruction and the role of the Tamil School:

We are very proud of our Tamil children and want them to maintain our Tamil culture by learning Tamil. Most of these children cannot speak Tamil because they are born in America and speak like Americans. But we also know that children today are very busy and don't have time between their homework, swimming lessons, violin lessons, etc. So many of the Tamil Sangam members got together and we formed the Oklahoma City Tamil School. The parents of these children are always finding ways to keep them occupied during the weekend, so we decided, why not start a Sunday school so that they can have some fun and learn Tamil at the same time? On Sundays, we get about 10-20 students, and we teach them basic Tamil and use cartoons, music, and other forms of entertainment from YouTube to make learning fun. We want our children to learn our culture, so by having a leisurely learning experience during Sunday, it really makes Tamil learning enjoyable. We have games, and sometimes we even take the children for ice creams.

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<sup>30</sup> The word “Tamil” refers to both the language as well as an ethnic group. Thus, Tamilians (the people who belong to the Tamil ethnic group) speak Tamil language, and all of them can trace their ancestry to the southeastern Indian state of Tamil *Nadu* (Tamil, “the land of the Tamils”). My background, as a person raised in Tamil Nadu, enabled me to gain access to the Tamils of OKC.

And while understanding that imparting Tamil language might be difficult, Mr. Kumar is also mindful of the transnational lives they create through everyday activities. “Young Tamils are really caught between two social worlds—Tamil and American,” Mr. Kumar explained to describe Tamil youth negotiating transnational lives. These lives are constructed as transnational “selves” with the Tamil Schools as a “setting” where everyday interactions with Tamil teachers and their fellow Tamil American students emerge (Goffman, 1959, 23).

These Tamil lessons, in a leisure setting, provide a bridge between worlds. “The children make choices, they are really trying to please parents and still be free to do what they like,” Mr. Kumar mentioned when I asked him how young Tamils negotiate their lives.

Other non-Tamil organizations show how interactions between Indians and their organizations represent the means of creating transnational identities. The Indian Association of Oklahoma’s (IAOK) *Bal Vikas* (Hindi, “children’s development”) programs are another example where Hindi language lessons are used in an inter-generational leisure setting to incorporate “Indian cultural values.” According to IAOK president Ms. Kumari, , these programs take place in the Hindu temple of Oklahoma City, about four miles north of downtown Oklahoma City. In *Bal Vikas* programs, parents and IAOK combine forces to create programs to help children of Hindi-speaking parents learn Indian culture through interactive games, movies, and cultural shows. Despite its initial focus on children, Ms. Kumari indicates that the *Bal Vikas* program has transformed over the years:

Our initial interest, more than 10 years ago, was to educate youngsters with Indian culture using Hindi as a medium of instruction, but over the years, even the parents and young college students in the Indian community have gotten interested in these programs. We have a lot of fun. We meet at the temple, but we do go out to restaurants together and give examples of how things are back home in India. We should really change the name from *Bal Vikas* to “All” *Vikas* ! [laughs]

As Kasinitz *et al.* (2002, 111) notes, these practices for “those who belong to ethnic organizations are more likely to exhibit strong transnational practices.” With an inter-generational context, leisure spaces in the OKC metro are, therefore, “settings” (Goffman, 1959) where first and second generation Indians and Indian-Americans create everyday interactions that are the basis for transnational identities to emerge. These meanings are formed as a result of everyday negotiations between parents and their children, most of whom belong to the Hindi-speaking communities of OKC. For example, Mr. Jay, a forty-something year old software engineer, is a father of a 12-year old son, born in Tulsa. For Mr. Jay, the *Bal Vikas* program is a way for his son “to learn Hindi language and to connect with the homeland of his parents.” Mr. Jay explained that it was very important for his son to learn Hindi to inculcate a sense of continuity of Hindi language in the second-generation Indian American youth. “We really want our children to learn Hindi because that makes our next generation to learn Indian cultural values,” Mr. Jay noted.

These “cultural values” emerge because of the interactions his son has with others in his language class, in addition to the adult teachers, in the *Bal Vikas* program. This program is conducted during Sundays in the Hindu Temple of Oklahoma City. Parents drop off their children in the morning around 9:00 a.m. for their two hours of Hindi instructions and education of Indian culture. The temple’s main worship hall is transformed to a mini tutorial space, complete with makeshift partitions that divide groups of children based on their age groups and grade levels. The teachers, usually women and men volunteers, organize the instructions based on group size. During the next two hours, children communicate in English and Hindi. Through such interactions, Mr. Hitesh, one of the teachers, explained that the *Bal Vikas* program aims:

..to identify the ways in which our children can learn the ways in which they can learn Hindi and Hinduism as a daily part of their everyday life. So that when they get older, they will not forget their

roots. It is very important to make sure that we adults try to make this experience fun for the children. Because we want them to learn in a fun atmosphere. Because we don't want to scare them away from Indian culture [chuckles].

Together, the Hindu temple and the *Bal Vikas* program that take place there instill religious and linguistic qualities into what it means to be an Indian in the OKC metro. In fact, such religious sites feature as spaces where Indians practice a sense of transnational belonging to the OKC metro.

In the subsequent Chapter Five, I will show the re-makings of transnational identities of Indians in the OKC metro due to various post-9/11 influences from non-Indians, particularly White Americans.

## CHAPTER V

### RACIALIZED TRANSNATIONAL IDENTITIES

#### Introduction

When not leading his congregation at OKC Mosque, Imam Enchassi teaches a course on interfaith dialog at Tulsa's Philips Theological Seminary. Since the September 11 attacks, Mr. Enchassi has proactively sought to quell anti-Muslim hate through his progressive teachings on why the appearances of Muslims, as well as non-Muslims, should not be conflated with those of terrorists who attacked on 9/11. The Imam explained why appearance mattered to Muslims post-9/11:

The 9/11 attacks put Muslims and non-Muslims in OKC under a microscope. Everybody began to look at us differently. But we had to get along. We had to find a common ground, personality-wise and appearance-wise. Muslims had to stop appearing as Muslims. And non-Muslims had to prove that they were not Muslims. Even my outfit as a Muslim cleric, it had to change.

The changes referred to by the Imam are a consequence of a broader post-9/11 trend emerging due to conflation of racial and ethnic identities of South and Southwest Asians with those of the terrorists. Nonetheless, by negotiating these barriers, immigrants living in a post-9/11 America have created coping strategies to facilitate their everyday life producing new racial meanings to their identities.



## Research Question

Negotiating within a racialized social landscape within Oklahoma, OKC Indians create meanings through transnational identities. The meanings behind these identities, when understood as racialized performances can be seen as discursively produced through everyday interactions across multiple scales of transnationalism: micro, local, regional, and national interactions. In particular, my data shows that day-to-day micro-interactions, as well as local transnational processes, influence these discursive constructions of racialized Indian identities. Thus, the research question relevant to this chapter is:

*How has post-9/11 Oklahoma influenced Indian identity?*

Specifically, the data speaks to how performative negotiations have emerged as a response to managing the everyday life of living in a post-9/11 Oklahoma. The goal of this chapter is to explain generalized patterns that speak to the racialized constructions of Indian identities. I first define racialized identities and then explore two major themes that inform these racial processes among Indians in OKC: 1) modification of appearance emerging as racialized responses, and 2) labeling and communicating “Indian” identities. Under each theme, I elaborate with sub-themes supported by participant observation and interview data on meanings that signify racial attributes of Indian immigrant identities. Lastly, I summarize the chapter and transition to Chapter Six, where I emphasize local, regional, and global networks in creating identities.

## Significance racialized identities in a post-9/11 America

I show in the literature review that the racial and socio-political bases of American immigration have contributed to the racialization of immigrant identities. The generalization of identity labels assigning Indian immigrants as “Indians” despite the complexities posed by language, ethnicity, and even the

caste system within India is a disservice to any meaningful discussion on the nuances of Indian identities. And in a post-9/11 America, U.S. society has sometimes conflated all Muslims as terrorists. In turn, all Arabs have been conflated as Muslim terrorists. Moreover, all Hindus, Sikhs, and Christian Indians—in fact, all people from South Asia—have sometimes been identified as Muslim terrorists (Chandrasekhar, 2003; Joshi, 2006; Inman *et al.*, 2007; Read, 2008; Sidhu and Gohil, 2008; Iyer, 2015; De, 2016). Violence against Sikh Americans due to their resemblance to Taliban terrorists, for example, represents the significance of post-9/11 effects on Indian identities (Ahluwalia and Pelletiere, 2010; Iyer, 2015).

In the case of Indians in Oklahoma City, these misinterpretations have created conditions that compel Indians to modify their appearances. In the next section, I explore two forms of identity modifications—religious and ethnic appearances—that constitute major responses that Indians have shown toward a post-9/11 social transformation in America. I also discuss the impacts of these responses to racialization.

### Modifying religious appearance

For some Indians in OKC, religion has held a greater significance than ethnicity in their self-identification process; however, participant observation and interview data indicate that OKC Indians following Sikhism, Islam, and Hinduism modify their religious appearance, departing from traditional norms of religious clothing.

### OKC Hindu identities and the fallout due to religious connotations

Appearance of devotees in the Hindu Temple of Oklahoma City (HTOC) include a combination of Western and traditional Indian clothing. Usually, the head priest dresses in a

traditional *dhoti*<sup>31</sup>, and stands in front of the deities ready to offer special *prasadam*<sup>32</sup> to the devotees. As women and men approach to receive his offering, the sight of the devotees in Western clothing alongside the priest in traditional clothing, offers clues to the contestations in the appearance of Hindu identities.

For Mrs. Bala, a homemaker in her thirties, who works part-time at a bank, dressing in her traditional *saree*<sup>33</sup> for her temple visit is very important to her identification as a Hindu:

Sometimes I need to go to the temple directly from work. So I carry changeover Indian clothes, because inside the temple, I want to look more as traditional Hindu. I wish I could wear Indian clothes at work, but I am not too comfortable. I stick to wearing Western clothing when I am working.

Switching between her “Western” and “Indian” appearances in public spaces, as she explained was due to her new life in Oklahoma. “I moved to Edmond (OK) from Edison (NJ) five years ago [2007] where there were many more Indians,” Mrs. Bala noting the significance of Edison, which has one of the largest Indian settlements in the U.S. When I asked her about the significance of her move to Oklahoma, she provided further information as to why she changed when she wore traditional Hindu clothing:

I feel self-conscious when I dress in *saree* in Oklahoma. Particularly when I am around non-Indians, particularly around White Americans. I think this is because compared to New Jersey, Oklahoma has a smaller Indian population so I feel a bit more isolated here than when I was in New Jersey. I feel as though Oklahomans are not as accustomed to seeing Indians often. But that could be just me.

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<sup>31</sup> A *dhoti* is a tube-shaped wrap around the waist worn by men in India, covering their lower body.

<sup>32</sup> Symbolic offerings that are made by the priest to the Hindu deities, usually fruits or vegetables, given to the devotees as “sacred food.”

<sup>33</sup> Similar to a *dhoti*, the *sari* is wrapped around and covers both upper and lower parts of the body. However, unlike the *dhoti*, *saris* are worn almost universally among Indian women.

Instead, Mrs. Bala attempts to negotiate these embodied anxieties by wearing an alternative dress, the *salwar kameez*<sup>34</sup>. Explaining this choice, Mrs. Bala indicated why she started wearing a Muslim *salwar kameez* over the Hindu *saree*:

Within a few months after I moved to Oklahoma, I decided not to wear saree because on my way to the temple, sometimes I had to stop at grocery stores and I was getting stared at. So instead I saw my friends, whom I met in Indian grocery stores who brought various designs of *salwar kameez* from India, and so I bought a few from them and started wearing them. I mean, wearing the *salwar* is popular in India too, so I didn't mind. I do miss wearing *saree*.

Mrs. Bala switched from *saree* to *salwar kameez*, a pan-South Asian clothing (and presumably in her mind less “Muslim-looking” to uninformed Americans) in order to feel less self-conscious. Observing participants, I could see why she made this choice; I noticed nearly all Indian women in the OKC metro wore the *salwar kameez*. However, despite this change, Mrs. Bala continued to feel a general sense of anxiety when appearing publicly. She explained:

I don't think changing from *saree* to *salwar kameez* really made a difference. I continue to get stares. The other day, I was in this restaurant with my husband and after we sat down to order, so many people were looking at us. I first didn't know why, but later I realized because they mistake me as a Muslim woman. Who knows. But I cannot stop wearing Indian, it is who I am. I cannot stop wearing *salwar kameez* even if I continue to get stared at.

Despite Mrs. Bala's attempts to maintain her Indian identity, even while she modified her appearance, a racialized meaning of *salwar kameez* as Muslim clothing still came to the fore, and Mrs. Bala experienced what I term *confusion due to conflation*. Nevertheless, during my participant observations over a one-year period, I noticed a gradual shift of more women, from around 30

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<sup>34</sup> Worn primarily among northern South Asians in Pakistan and India, the *salwar kameez* originated from traditional Islamic clothing. This two-piece clothing set has a *kameez* or the shirt on top and the *salwar*, similar to loose pants in the bottom. *Salwar kameez* is worn primarily among Muslim women in Pakistan and northern Indian Hindu women.

percent in 2012 to around 70 percent by the end of 2013, wearing *salwar kameez* instead of *saree*. This shows that perhaps Indian women were not willing to let go of all the material contributions of their identity despite getting viewed suspiciously by some White Americans. In the case of men, I observed this issue of conflation in many cases, suggesting that post-9/11 issues persisted among both women and men.

For example, Mrs. Bala's husband, Mr. Bala pointed to the changes among men's appearance as a recent phenomenon. When he moved with Mrs. Bala from New Jersey in 2007, he noticed a difference in how Indian Hindus in the OKC metro area were more sensitive and aware of their identity:

I could sense a big difference after arriving into Oklahoma. In New Jersey, we had Hindus and Muslims freely walking without having any worry on how others, particularly Americans. There are so many Indians in east coast. But here in Oklahoma, I think we Indians stick out. My friend who is an Indian told me that after the 9/11 attacks, this situation has been very tense among Indians. It is as if Indians are being constantly watched. Sometimes I can feel that too when I am in public places. So to play it safe, I try not to wear ethnic Indian dress.

Several men, including Mr. Bala, wear blue jeans and T-shirts. Even though the Hindu temple does not have any strict dress code, the contrast between the clothing of the Hindu priest in traditional clothing and the men appearing in Western clothing suggests the differences in embodied practices among Hindus. Experiences of Mrs. and Mr. Bala, both inside and outside the temple, serve as examples that Indian Hindus have modified their appearances to avoid racial anxiety from non-Hindus, particularly White Americans.

Like many other Hindu men, Mr. Raj, when wearing the *kurtha*, a popular northern South Asian men's dress, becomes self-conscious even among fellow Hindus. Similar to the *salwar kameez*,

the *kurtha* is a pan-South Asian men's clothing, popular among Muslims and Indians. A sixty-year old Hindu resident of OKC metro for over thirty years, Mr. Raj explained:

When I first arrived in Oklahoma in the 1980s, I did not really have any problem wearing any Indian clothing. But since the 9/11 attacks, whenever I wear the *kurtha*, I am sometimes mistaken in gas stations, even movie theater. The other day, somebody asked me if I was from Pakistan. And I thought that was odd and in those cases, I have to explain, that no, I am not a Muslim, I am a Hindu from India.

Mr. Raj's comments reflect a case of *confusion due to conflation*, where Mr. Raj senses he is confused as a Muslim because he wears the *kurtha*. However, this has not deterred Mr. Raj. He is a regular worshipper, often seen helping the temple volunteers with arranging floral decorations for the deities. "I try to visit the temple in the evenings, once every three days, because no matter what people say, my religion is very personal to me," Mr. Raj explained. By consciously being aware of his racialized identity, Mr. Raj continues to wear the *kurtha*, because for him, wearing Indian clothing, regardless of how it is perceived in a post-9/11 Oklahoma, is important to his self-identification.

As Peek (2005, 218) notes, changes to religious identities among immigrants are important in a post-9/11 situation because the very notion of their self-definition is based on their religious status in their homeland:

Religion can assume greater importance for immigrants' definition of self and group affiliations than was the case in their homelands, where religion may have been taken for granted or at least been of lesser importance. This is particularly true if the immigrants come from a society where they were part of the religious majority and then move to a host society where they become a religious minority—for example, Indian Hindus, Israeli Jews, Pakistani Muslims, or Vietnamese Buddhists coming to the United States.

The case of religion as an important definition of the self is true particularly in the case of Mrs. Bala and Mr. Raj, whose embodied responses in wearing Indian clothing is influenced by how they are perceived by others. In a post-9/11 climate, Mirza (2013, 11) calls the embodied practices of wearing

traditional clothing by people from South and Southwest Asia comparable to wearing a “second skin’ through which their ethnic and religious identity was embodied and lived out through their subjectivity and sense of self.” In their embodied practices, OKC Hindus respond to post-9/11 subjectivities, either by wearing *salwar kameez* or *kurtba* as an embodied “second skin” that influence their everyday life in the OKC Hindu community.

Nonetheless, as shown above, racialized responses to Hindus in the OKC metro by way of changing appearances is an outcome of the various contestations due to the pervasiveness of xenophobia. Although Hindus formed the dominant religious group among my participants, other members of smaller religious groups contribute to the overall pattern of OKC metro Indians modifying their religious appearance in the wake of the attacks. Among them, OKC metro’s Sikh men due to their turban and beard, face a unique set of challenges in a post-9/11 America as they are sometimes misidentified as Afghanistan’s Taliban Muslims, whose members belong to the terrorist group Al-Qaeda.

#### The Oklahoman turban: modifying Sikh religious appearances

The Sikh community of the OKC metro congregates at the OKC Sikh *Gurudhwara*, located in the city’s Northwest region, and forms the smallest religious group within the city’s Indian immigrant community. Sikh men traditionally wear the turban and beard as two of the five articles of faith also known as the “5-K’s” with the turban forming the first and the most important marker of Sikh identity.<sup>35</sup> The turban signifies that a Sikh man is modest in his appearance by not cutting his

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<sup>35</sup> The five articles or the “5-K’s” and their respective Punjabi language words are: unshorn hair (*kes*), a small comb to keep the hair neat (*kehanga*), a steel bracelet (*kara*), a ceremonial dagger or sword (*kirpan*), and long underwear (*kaachera*). These constitute the fundamental elements of the “uniform” of the *Khalsa*, the Sikh brotherhood (Gohil and Sidhu, 2008).

hair; the time spent on maintaining the hair otherwise spent in service to the community. However, this fundamental aspect of “Sikh-ness” has been the greatest source of mistaken identity.

For Mr. Manjeet, a Sikh man living in OKC since 2001, appearing in public with his turban is core to his identity. “I see myself as a Sikh first, and an Indian second,” Mr. Manjeet said when I asked him how important his identity was as a Sikh American. However, in 2003, the year when the U.S. military invaded Afghanistan, this self-identification was met with *racism*. Mr. Manjeet emotionally recollected a time when he was shopping in a grocery store:

I will not forget that day, it was like yesterday. I was just making a purchase at a gas station convenience store in downtown OKC, where I usually fill gas after I get done with work. When I was ready to pay, there was a man, a young man, White, yelled at me, “go home you fucking Osama!” At first, I did not know that he was actually yelling at me. I was a bit confused. But then the cashier looked at me, looked at my turban, and just shook her head as if I was the one causing a problem. I immediately understood. That angry man yelling at me was yelling at how I appeared, and not because he knew who I was. Or that I was a doctor working at the hospital.

Mr. Manjeet’s story resonates with the nationwide xenophobia that has struck several Sikh communities since 2001. The numerous cases of hate crimes against Sikh men *confused due to conflation*, and mistaken as Taliban terrorists. As Gohil and Sidhu (2008, 1) argue, this is a result of not understanding Sikhs and Sikh Americans as part of the broader U.S. society because, “turbaned Sikhs in America have been victims of racial violence and have had their identity challenged by calls for immigrant groups to assimilate into Western societies.”

The 2012 Oak Creek (Wisconsin) massacre of seven Sikh worshippers in their *Gurudhvara* during the Sunday *langaar* feast symbolizes the severity of this issue. A lone gunman, mistaking the Sikhs as Muslim Taliban, entered the *Gurudhvara* and subsequently shot and killed Sikhs who were



serving free food (Thobani, 2012). The effects of these attacks rippled to Oklahoma City where local law enforcement were called on to protect the OKC *Gurudhwara*. At the OKC *Gurudhwara*, an Oklahoma City Police patrol guarded the temple until 2015 during their *langaar* Sundays. Notwithstanding the presence of a police officer guarding a place of worship, the responses of Sikh devotees pointed to a deeper, more troubling narrative of being Sikh in a post-9/11 America. Mr. Kripal, a thirty-two-year-old Sikh man arrived in Oklahoma City in 2011, and within a year, he recognized why his turban was problematic:

Around the time the Wisconsin tragedy happened, I was so scared. My wife and I even had a serious discussion on returning to India. We had just arrived into the U.S. a year ago and now we were talking about leaving. It was very tense for us. I knew that my appearance now posed a danger for my family. But I was not prepared to leave. I wanted to stay in OKC because the job I had was good for my family. But I was also scared what if this shooting might happen in my *Gurudhwara*.

For Mr. Kripal, his turban, which was his most important article of faith, triggered racism. He further added a comment that resonated with Mr. Manjeet's view of himself, "the turban is my core identity; it is what I use to recognize as a Sikh man." Nevertheless, since 9/11 and the Wisconsin tragedy, he has been very careful about appearing in public places. "I wear my turban with pride, but I am always looking around myself just to be aware in case something bad might happen to me," Mr. Kripal said, pointing across the window to an Oklahoma City Police patrol car with an officer inside it; he continued, "You can see, I am not safe in my place of worship even with all this pride I have as a Sikh; there is a police officer guarding a place of my peaceful worship." However, despite the police surveillance outside his place of worship and the anxiety inside his home with his wife, Mr. Kripal continued to wear his turban. "Why should I not wear my fundamental article of who I am as a Sikh. My turban is very important to me. If I stop wearing it, I

stop being who I am as a Sikh,” Mr. Kripal noted. By continuing to wear the turban, Mr. Kripal expresses his Sikh identity despite its racialized rendering.

The religious expression of Mr. Kripal and the significance of the turban points to the social transformation of the turban from an article of faith to a marker of racialized identity that has emerged since the 9/11 attacks. The effects of Islamophobia—the general fear of all things Islamic as the unknown—transmitted onto Sikh communities in America is an outcome of this fear. As Joshi (2006, 221) notes, “Sikhism is not itself racialized; rather, the racialization of *another* religion (Islam) results in the victimization of Sikhs.” In this way, Sikhs, such as Mr. Kripal and Mr. Manjeet, are targets for discrimination that directly affects their sense of safety and belonging. In some cases, the severity of racism against Sikh men has forced them to modify their fundamental religious appearance, namely wearing the turban.

In the case of Mr. Singh, a middle-aged Sikh man, the problems he faced with racism directed toward his appearance was too much. “I couldn’t take it anymore. I was getting yelled and screamed at by strangers who seem to have a problem on how I looked with my beard and turban. So I had to cut my hair and shave my beard,” he explained. These incidents and a movie inspired his decision for this drastic transition. Specifically, Mr. Singh watched *Ocean of Pearls* (Neelam, 2008), a story of a Sikh man in Canada who cut his hair and removed his turban in order to succeed as a medical doctor, because he was constantly denied promotions due to racism. “As a physician, the movie hit a very personal note for me,” Mr. Singh explained. The ways his appearance changed affected reactions from people around him. He continued:

Soon after I changed my physical appearance, I began to notice changes from people around me, particularly from White Americans. They began to talk to me more casually, I was getting better service at restaurants, and even my landlord invited me to a Fourth of July Barbeque, an event I was never invited before. It changed my life,

but inside, I am still the same. I am still a Sikh, in how I practice my faith despite my appearance outside changed.

Mr. Singh's response further illustrates the pattern of how conflation of racial and religious identities has formed a "racialization of religion," that Joshi (2006, 222) refers to as posing a unique challenge for Sikhs in a post-9/11 America, a challenge that extends to women as well. For example, Ms. Preeti, a graduate student at OU-Norman told me, "Appearing as a Sikh woman is very important especially inside the temple, because it shows that like Sikh men, we appreciate our religion, and we want to show our support by wearing our religious clothing." For a woman inside the *Gurudhwara*, religious clothing consists of the *salwar kameez* along with a head covering. Ms. Preethi usually carries a changeover with Sikh clothing in a duffel bag; therefore, she can quickly change into traditional Sikh clothing when she enters the sacred space.

Appearing as a Sikh during the *langaar*<sup>36</sup> meal is particularly important for Ms. Preethi who uses this opportunity to connect with her Sikh community members. However, the constant carrying of her traditional clothing and not wearing it more openly has proven to be a challenge. "I have to constantly modify who I am and frankly, it is getting old," Ms. Preethi explained. She continued, "I wish I can wear my traditional clothing when I leave home and outside the *Gurudhwara* and not have to change. Because outside the *Gurudhwara*, I am stared at for wearing it. Changing from Western clothing to traditional clothing gets tiring for me." Nonetheless, as a regular volunteer at the Sunday *langaar* meal service, Mr. Preethi uses the opportunity to meet people who share her faith as well meet other Sikh women who have made similar choices in their appearances.

Community events, such as the *langaar*, form an important backdrop for other Indian religious

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<sup>36</sup> The *langaar*, served every Sunday, is a Sikh religious tradition where free food is served to anyone, regardless of their faith, race, or national background in all Sikh temples worldwide.

communities, including Muslims; many of whose members have negotiated appearance changes similar to the Sikhs.

### Indian Muslims and the re-making of the American Muslim identity

OKC's Muslim community, made of members from diverse nationalities including India, congregate at OKC's Mosque located in the city's Northwest region. For Muslims, Friday is the holiest day, and on this day the Mosque gets especially busy with the faithful arriving as far out as forty miles from Oklahoma City. Men and women gather at the Mosque, led by their Imam, who dresses in a combination of Islamic and Western clothing with the Islamic cap, *teqiyah*, and Western shirt and pants. Men and women sit separately, with women in a section behind men. Most of the men wear Western clothing, many of whom arrive to the Mosque after work for the evening prayer service. Women dress in the traditional Islamic clothing, similar to the Indian *salwar kameez*.

One of the followers, Mr. Tariq, remembers, until very recently, a time "when more men used to wear the traditional Islamic clothing when attending the Mosque, around 2003 when the United States was at its greatest involvement with the invasion of Iraq." Referring to an increasing trend in racism directed to Muslims in the last 13 years, Mr. Tariq gave insights into how these changes affected different generations of Muslim men, particularly during *Ramadan*, the holiest month in the Islamic calendar. "Youngsters are able to change their ways more quickly than older Muslims, some of the young people we see do not wear the traditional Islamic dress anymore. They wear shirt and pants. But the older folks, we want to observe *Ramadan* with tradition, particularly with how we appear," Mr. Tariq noted. This gave insights into the ways in which younger Muslims are able to balance their social worlds between a traditional Islamic way of life and a Western way of life.

In OKC's Mosque, *Ramadan* includes fasting between dawn and dusk, and Muslims are in a self-reflective mood, giving charity to the poor, reading the *Q'uran* every day, and wearing traditional Islamic clothing throughout the day in this auspicious month. Nonetheless, this appearance has been a source of increasing racism for many Muslims in the OKC area. For one of the Mosque's regular worshippers, Mr. Khan, this has been a source of a transformative change particularly in the way he identifies himself as a Muslim. In 2011, Mr. Khan was involved in a hit and run incident when the perpetrator ran over Mr. Khan calling him a "sand nigger" as he was crossing the street after buying groceries. It was during the month of Ramadan when Mr. Khan was wearing traditional Islamic dress and returning home. In the weeks that followed, and dozens of police investigations, it was unclear as to who was responsible for what Mr. Khan referred to as "drive-by racism." Nevertheless, since the attack he decided not to wear the traditional dress. "I had to make a difficult choice the day after I was attacked. I did not want be identified as a Muslim anymore," he remarked.

Choices made by Mr. Khan represent, in part, the significance of a post-9/11 narrative in the ways Muslims, largely in the United States and locally in Oklahoma, have responded to racism. The Imam of the OKC Mosque considers these changes as a part of the ongoing negotiations that Muslims must create on an everyday basis. "Even Imams are not spared in how we look," he noted, as he pointed to what he was wearing: a combination of Islamic and western clothing. He discussed the ways in which Muslims in OKC had to re-think their appearance in public, particularly during the month of Ramadan. "There is a heightened sense of awareness during that month," the Imam said, but he continued, "but we are also seeing an increasing presence of police and law enforcement, as if they are anticipating another terrorist attack."

For one of the Indian Muslims, Mr. Arik, changing appearance during the holy month of Ramadan in OKC is still better than living in a smaller town where the gaze on Muslims is more widespread. Mr. Arik is one of many Muslims, approximately twenty families, in the OKC area who

have recently moved to the city from neighboring towns. In 2011, he moved his family from Edmond, approximately a half an hour from OKC in order to escape Islamophobic violence:

The Edmond Mosque, located right across the University of Central Oklahoma campus, has recently seen its share of racism, with hooligans throwing pieces of bacon in front of the Mosque's entrance; consumption of bacon is forbidden in Islamic faith. So I decided to move to OKC.

Mr. Arik noted that this led him to move from Edmond. Additionally, his decision to wear "mainstream Indian clothing" was his way of coping with the growing racism that he witnessed in Edmond. More significantly, he discussed how such negative experiences might affect the future of his wife and two kids:

I want to make sure that first and foremost, my family is protected. My faith and my family are my highest priority. So if this means that I do not want to be recognized as a Muslim by wearing traditional Islamic clothing, so be it. Allah knows that my faith is strong. And my Imam understands if I do not show up in the Mosque dressed traditionally.

He maintains to "play it safe" despite OKC Mosque's larger and more established Islamic solidarity among its members. Unity, as the Imam mentioned earlier, is made through the OKC metro Muslims modifying their appearance in various ways due to "external changes," specifically racism.

In the OKC Mosque, at the end of the Ramadan month, Muslim communities gather for their celebratory feast called the *iftaar*, a festive gathering recognizing the month-long penance of Muslims. A speech is given by the Imam before the commencement of the feast calling for unity and reverence to core Islamic beliefs, despite the changes that Muslim men make every day.

As Muslims, we are first and foremost loyal to the words of Allah as told to his son, the Prophet Mohammad (Peace Be Upon Him) in the *Q'uran*. We are loyal to the way of life that is Islamic, in every way possible and in all that we do to protect our families and be a good role model to our community we try to be the best Muslims that we can be. We need to stand together in the face of adversity and we pray to Allah that He gives us strength that despite the changes we see around us, despite the name-calling and hate that

is thrown at us, we stand united as Muslims and ever be loyal to the values that we believe in. We pray that we are stronger together and stronger because of one another.

As the sermon ends, men and their sons, dressed in both western and Islamic clothing, pray together one more time before heading to the feast. Across different generations, their prayer for peace symbolizes the core values of Islam—peace and respect above everything else regardless of divisiveness outside the Mosque. Muslims from different ethnic groups praying together despite the racism outside their place of worship signifies what the Imam calls the “constructive” aspects of the 9/11 attacks—a coming together of Muslims unified by faith.

The significance of modifying religious appearances among Indians in a post-9/11 OKC symbolizes the choices that have emerged due to changes in the American social landscape. Naber (2006, 290) notes that such modifications relate to “a post-9/11 backlash” operated throughout the United States that have made South Asians from diverse religious backgrounds, as somehow intrinsically connected to Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism. Specifically, Naber (2006, 291) noted the “bodily stigma” of appearing as “Arab/Middle Eastern/Muslim” is due to a conflation of identities and become “inherently connected to a backward, inferior, and potentially threatening Arab culture, Muslim religion, or Arab Muslim civilization” (Naber, 2006, 280). OKC’s Indians, as shown in the examples above, are subjected to the backlash of a post-9/11 conflation of mistaken identities generating bodily responses by its members. As Roach-Higgins and Eicher (1992, 5) had noted, the meanings of identity are found in the social interactions between individuals:

From the perspective of symbolic interaction theory, individuals acquire identities through social interactions in various social, physical, and biological settings. So conceptualized identities are communicated by dress as it announces social positions of wearer to both wearer and observers within a particular interaction situation.

Since dress and clothing also act as a medium of communicating identity, modifications made by Indians in their appearances emerge in response to, and because of, the unfavorable reactions they receive from non-Indians. Thus by communicating with their modified religious appearances, Indians in OKC give new meanings to their post-9/11 identities. These meanings include new embodied practices of religious subjectivities to combat xenophobia. These include Mr. Singh who had to cut his beard and remove his turban, while still remaining loyal to Sikhism, or Mr. Khan's decision not to appear "Islamic" for public fear of racial violence directed against him. In doing so, two aspects of Indian identities emerge.

First, modified religious identities of Sikhs, Muslims, and Hindus in the OKC metro are appearing as public Indian identities to anyone who is non-Indian. Through 'Westernization' of their public identities, such as wearing shirt and trousers instead of religious clothing, Indians are (re-)presenting themselves by communicating a transformed identity. Second, these transformations are an outcome of racialized responses that provide a new post-9/11 cultural context on what it means to be Indian in Oklahoma. Nevertheless, religious identities do not solely inform the meanings to the overall complexities of racialized Indian identities. For some Indians in OKC, ethnicity has a greater significance than religion. Specifically, for two Indian immigrant groups, namely Gujaratis and Malayalees, ethnic modifications highlight a greater role in their racialization of identities.

### Modifying ethnic identities

#### *Racialized ethnic modification among OKC Gujaratis*

Gujaratis form the largest ethnic group among Indians in the United States. Immigrating from the western Indian state of Gujarat, Gujarati Indians speak the Gujarati language, distinct from Hindi, as well as maintain a collective sense of Gujarati ethnic solidarity through their active



participation in ethnic festivities and events (Changrani *et al.*, 2006). As members of the landowning caste in India, Gujaratis have migrated to the United States in large numbers since the 1990s, with many of them owning hotels, gas stations, and grocery stores in their role as “ethnic entrepreneurs” (Aldrich and Waldinger, 1990). Gujaratis with the last name ‘Patel’ maintain strong ethnic solidarity among Gujarati immigrants, and they recognize their affiliations with fellow co-ethnics as more significant than their identity as Indians (Jain, 1989; Bhakta, 2002; Dhingra, 2012).

Cultural associations known as *Samaj* (Hindi and Gujarati word for “association”) bind them together. These associations are sites where everyday activities and practices of Gujarati identity are performed (Jain, 1989). In the OKC metro, the Gujarati Samaj of Oklahoma (GSO) is the largest association where around sixty families build and maintain relations with their co-ethnics. While GSO is open to all Indians in the OKC metro area, GSO organizes events that are significant to the people of the Gujarat State. Two of these events, *garba*<sup>37</sup> and *holi*<sup>38</sup> form the basis of Gujarati solidarity across the world, including Oklahoma Gujaratis (Source: [www.facebook.com/pages/Gujarati-Samaj-OKC](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Gujarati-Samaj-OKC))

The celebrated events coincide with the beginning of harvest season in India in the month of April. In OKC, the *garba* is held at GSO’s main location. Women and men dress in clothing symbolizing the distinct Gujarati dress, with mirror work, bright pink, and geometric patterns on their dress. Speaking only in Gujarati, they assemble in the middle of the GSO’s main hall holding colored sticks. When music begins to play, also in the Gujarati language, the dancers break into a synchronous dance movement as they swing to each other, tapping the stick of the

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<sup>37</sup> *Garba* is a Gujarati musical dance performance representing one of India’s many ethnic festivals (Sen and Knotterus, 2016).

<sup>38</sup> *Holi* is a festival originating in the state of Gujrat, consisting of throwing colors at each other in a festive celebration to commemorate the victory of mythological Hindu God Krishna over the demons (Khandelwal, 2002).

person in front of them, and later retrieving their step swinging back to their original position.

Children are not allowed to dance due to fear of being hit accidentally as adults perform the *garba* dance for a good hour or so, increasing their dance tempo with the corresponding intensity of music. During this main event, non-Gujarati people are allowed to watch the dance from a distance and are later ushered to the dining area following the ending of the dance. Speaking about the *garba* event, GSO's president Mr. Shah told me that these events are a way to "bind together" people from Gujarat and celebrate among their families and friends.

For ten years, Mr. Shah led the GSO and every year, he saw the GSO membership steadily increase as more Gujaratis arrived from larger American cities, including New York and Chicago, in search of a more affordable quality of life. Nevertheless, Mr. Shah observed changes in the ways younger Gujaratis, those in their early twenties, have modified the *garba* music and moved away from traditional Gujarati music into contemporary American popular music. The changes, as Mr. Shah noted, are emerging in response to the need to bring more non-Gujaratis to the events, particularly non-Indians from Oklahoma. "We need to gain more acceptance," Mr. Shah noted. This is because in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, the lack of awareness among the non-Indian general public of who the Gujarati actually are has devolved into violence. Mr. Shah further explained, "there have been incidents where Gujaratis have been mistaken for Arabs, and we want to make sure that non-Indians understand that we are Hindus and Indians."

As we transitioned from talking about *garba* to changing trends in appealing to non-Gujaratis, Mr. Shah pointed out that the change is part of a nationwide phenomenon. He recollected an event from 2010 that changed the daily lives of OKC Gujaratis:

We Gujaratis stick together, like the Patels, they stick together. But now we're see changes from within our community due to problems with racism. Back in 2010, one of our [Gujarati] hotel owner in Southwest OKC was attacked by some white college kids. They

trashed the hotel room and left a note on the hotel manager's desk,  
I think it said Arab rag head.

The 2010 incident shook the Gujaratis as well as the Indian immigrant communities in the city. "I was so upset, I did not know what to do next, if I should call the cops or just shut down my business once and for all," Mr. Shah said, explaining that he owned a grocery store at the time of the attacks but has since closed it due to fears of racial violence. However, this harassment prompted Mr. Shah to create a new outreach office within GSO to raise "a sense of awareness" among people outside the Gujarati community to gain knowledge so not to confuse Gujaratis as Muslims, since Muslims are conflated with terrorists. One of the ways GSO raised this awareness was through its *garba* festival.

Speaking to Mr. Neeraj, GSO's first public relations officer, raising awareness also involves making changes in the way *garba* is presented to others. One of the ways GSO has modified its offerings is by inviting other immigrant cultural organizations as guest performers to perform as the "opening act" before the main *garba* event. The response to these changes have been significant in creating opportunities for Gujaratis to dialog with other immigrants groups as well as non-immigrants. Although the changes, Mr. Neeraj explained, are unusual for a traditional *garba* offering, he explained, "It has created a greater appreciation non-Gujarati audience members." But, not all Gujaratis have welcomed these changes.

For Mr. Pankaj, a sixty-year-old Gujarati Indian, the changes to *garba* was a "mixed bag." A first-generation immigrant, Mr. Pankaj arrived into Oklahoma in the early 1980s seeking business opportunities in the downtown OKC area. At first he established a grocery store to cater to the needs of other first South Asian immigrants who arrived into the OKC area. He remembered when the first Gujaratis, who arrived in OKC, pooled in their resources through the course of the year in order to organize an event for all Gujaratis. "We used to work very hard to create an identity," Mr.

Pankaj noted, as he reflected on the past while looking at the young Gujaratis dancing to hip hop music during the *garba* event that we were watching. Nevertheless, Mr. Pankaj understood the reasons why the modification to his favorite event was necessary after the 2010 incident, saying, “What to do? We need to adjust with changes.” Specifically, he talked about how the inclusion of hip-hop, an American cultural form of music, was incorporated into the *garba* dance to woo young second-generation Gujarati-Americans. In reference to “adjusting” to changes, Mr. Pankaj indicated the necessity of finding new ways to make Gujarati cultural facets accessible to the greater public.

Modifying ethnic identities is significant to immigrants who associate their communities through symbols and events. Gans (1979, 9) defines symbolic ethnicity as “characterized by a nostalgic allegiance to the culture of the immigrant generation, or that of the old country; a love for and a pride in the tradition that can be felt without having to be incorporated in everyday behavior.” For Gujaratis, modifying their “symbolic ethnicity” (Gans, 1979) by bringing non-Gujarati, and even transnational cultural forms (for example, hip-hop music) to their *garba* signifies an example of a broader ethnic modification as a form of racialized response to their changing Gujarati identities.

However, despite efforts in widening access to *garba* to the non-Gujarati general public, post-9/11 concerns remain to fester. Mr. Pankaj, for example, recounted an incident in 2011 that prompted GSO to make changes:

During *garba* dance, it is customary to use *dandiya*<sup>39</sup>. But during one of my outreach meetings with the OKC police department, I was advised not to use them. This was soon after the [2010] hotel attack. This was because the police were concerned that the sticks could be used as a weapon to hit someone. This was silly. Because the sticks are made of wood, they are delicate. And why would we [Gujaratis] hit others? We are peace loving. The *dandiya* is also part of the *garba*

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<sup>39</sup> *Dandiya* is a decorated stick usually used in pairs by *garba* dancers who gently tap each other’s *dandiya* sticks in a playful synchronous manner in order to make music beats to accompany *garba* performance.

music. But we had to obey the police order. So that year, we decided not to use the *dandiya* sticks.

Even in 2012 when I briefly participated in their *garba* dance for about twenty minutes, the use of *dandiya* was not as widely used as when I was growing up in India. In the 2012 *garba*, there were about twenty *garba* dancers, with only five of them using the *dandiya*. The remaining 15 used their hands to clap the other dancers in the air. This suggested that among OKC Gujaratis, the modification of their main celebratory dance persisted due to the 2010 incident. Besides Gujaratis, modified appearances were also seen among OKC's Malayalee Christians.

#### *Racialized ethnic modification among OKC Malayalees*

Other forms of ethnic modifications among Indians are seen among OKC's Malayalee Christian community. Immigrating from the southwestern Indian state of Kerala, the Malayalees constitute a distinct ethnic community who speak the Malayalam language. People from Kerala are therefore referred to as Malayalees, and their ethnic belonging to Malayalee social life is intimately connected to their immigrant identity. In the United States, Malayalee social life is made of membership to Malayalee cultural associations which organize celebrations of Hindu or Christian events the same time they are held in Kerala.

Malayalee immigrants in Oklahoma arrived during the mid-1990s due the rising demand for health professionals, particularly in the OKC metro area (Williams, 1996). Malayalee nurses, many of them Christians, having been trained in Christian hospitals in India, arrived into OKC's western suburbs of Bethany and Yukon. Their husbands followed their paths and found employment in the area, ranging from grocery store to computer engineering jobs. Today, Malayalee Christians form the largest immigrant community in the OKC metro with approximately 70 families living across

western parts of the OKC metro area. At the center of their everyday social life is their fellowship with ethnic churches which perform services in Malayalam. There are 12 Malayalee Christian churches in the Bethany-Yukon area that cater primarily to Malayalam-speaking immigrants. However, Malayalee Christians align their religious values more closely with the predominately White Protestant Christian Oklahoman social life than with their co-ethnic Malayalees.

Ms. Marion remembered that her faith was one of the most important factors that helped her settle into Oklahoma City. From the day she arrived, she recognized the role of Oklahoma Christians and the Malayalee Christian congregation in Bethany to “anchor my identity as a Christian in a Christian land.” In the years following the 9/11 attacks, she mentioned:

We had a general sense of solidarity among Christians in the area. Malayalee Christians found fellow Christian brethren among Oklahoma Christians. But we also moved away from the closeness with other Indians outside Yukon, many of them were Hindus. We were uncertain what was going on, and as Christians we wanted to be stronger together.

By “stronger together,” Ms. Marion recollected how Malayalee Christians soon after 9/11 turned to other Malayalee Christians both within and outside the OKC metro area as well as non-Malayalee Christians within OKC to gain a greater ethnic solidarity. By identifying herself as a Malayalee Christian above Indian, Ms. Marion referred to the choices of selectively choosing ethnic identification for the coping strategy of Malayalees in a post-9/11 Oklahoma. In many ways, a joint ethnic-religious identification is symbolic to the Malayalee Christians of OKC.

The role played by the Malayalee church in Bethany and Yukon is significant here. Mr. Kurien, for example, who serves as the pastor at the First Pentacostal Fellowship in Bethany informed me that the social life built around Malayalee Christian fellowship has been important since most Indian immigrants in the OKC area are Hindus, and there is a need for Malayalees and

Christians to come together. To this end, Mr. Kurien recognized the role played by networks of Malayalee Christian conferences held in Dallas and Houston that strengthen these bonds (See Chapter 6, Networked Transnational Identities).

As discussed thus far, ethnic modification made by Gujaratis and Malayalees in the OKC metro show internal changes due to external influences (such as the 9/11 attacks). As Sen (2013, 16) explains in her work on ethnic formations of immigrants:

Ethnic groups can change their boundaries and criteria for membership and ethnic groups (and individual members of these groups) are active in re-creating and reinventing the meanings and practices associated with them.

By selecting different modes and negotiations, immigrants in the cases above “mobilized new categories to claim their identities on their own terms” (Naber, 2005, 493). Specifically, the case of Gujaratis and Malayalees show that in their “self-reinvention” (Naber, 2005, 494) process, new categories of ethnic identities emerged. In case of the Gujaratis, self-reinvention includes modification of the *garba* dance with transnational hip-hop to accommodate youth and popularity outside their ethnic community. For the Malayalee Christians, it involves the joint ethnic-religious identities.

However, as Bhatia and Ram (2009) reveal South Asians immediately following the events of 9/11, the significance in making ethnic modifications in order to negotiate immigrant social life spoke to the larger ongoing contestations among immigrants a within post-9/11 transnational narrative. Specifically, for Indians living in America, the aftermath of 9/11 attacks challenged their identities, because for them, the sense of “American-ness” and “Indian-ness” are no longer capable of harmoniously co-existing with each other to produce an “integration.” (Bhatia and Ram, 2005,

144). For OKC Indians, post-9/11 America produced new subjectivities in response to local effects of xenophobia and racism.

### Labeling and communication of “Indian” identities

#### *Being “Indian” and performing “Indian-ness”*

Scholars have established that broadly speaking, any theoretical discussion of identities requires a recognition of its complex, fluid, and unstable social constructions (Waters, 1999; Nagel and Staeheli, 2004; Suárez-Orozco, 2004; Bradatan *et. al*, 2010.) Further, as shown earlier in this chapter, attaching generalized ethnic and religious labels such as “Indian” or “South Asian” or “Hindu” or “Muslim” to individuals contributes to a lack of nuanced identities. This is because for immigrants, labels divorce the complexities of their ongoing social, historical, and racial contestations that modify their lives on a daily basis. Speaking of such labels, Byng (2008, 661) notes, “Religion and ethnicity are not static artifacts of the past but salient social categories of the present.” Thus, in the present post-9/11 America, immigrant labels have undergone racial transformations, from religious/ethnic to racial, due to racism against people who are either Muslims or resemble Muslims from the Middle East. For example, Byng (2008, 662) explains the post-9/11 racialization of the “Muslim” in “Muslim American” label as a reference of identity:

Even though Muslim is a religious label and not a racial one, since 9/11 Muslim American identity has been restructured to reflect the systemic inequality that is readily associated with racial minorities. It is reorganized along essentialist, structural, and experiential dimensions of inequality.

Specific to Indian identities, Bhatia (2008, 38) confirms this notion of fluidity in immigrant labels in his work when interchangeably using various labels for Indians because:



...there is no fixed, static and essential definition of Indianness. These terms have overlapping meanings and are used by participants to invoke a particular form of “Indianness” that is tied to their identity.

Indian immigrants in a post-9/11 OKC make their choices to reveal or conceal their identity using labels they themselves ascribe.

For example, Ms. Anne’s life as an Indian immigrant is made up of day-to-day negotiations working between linguistic, religious, and ethnic identities that have been of great influence after the 9/11 attacks. A second-generation Indian-American, Ms. Anne lives in Weatherford, about 70 miles west of Oklahoma City where she has worked since 2010. She lives with her first-generation Indian parents whom she sponsored their visas after their immigration from India. Speaking about the challenges living with her parents as an American with Indian ancestry, Ms. Anne opened up on the challenges that she faced:

After my parents moved to live with me in 2003, we faced racism. In Weatherford, people are not used to seeing too many Indians. Before my parents arrived, I was the only one in the neighborhood and I speak in American accent, so I guess it didn’t matter. After my parents arrived, we began to get looks from our neighbors, particularly when my parents spoke to me in our native Malayalam language. And these people’s behavior was particularly hurtful for my mother because she did not understand why people were behaving strangely. Maybe because we spoke Malayalam? Maybe because she wore traditional saree and appeared very Indian? Not sure. But I also knew that she would not wear anything else or speak English due to her limited knowledge.

Ms. Anne’s mother continued to wear Indian clothing but it affected Ms. Anne’s identity as an American with Indian ancestry. Working between her “American” identity with non-Indians and “Indian” identity with her parents, Ms. Anne’s “Indianness” is therefore an example of a post-9/11 identity negotiation as an Indian-American. Further, for Ms. Anne, these negotiations emerge between private (home) and public (work) spaces. As explained, “While at home, I speak Malayalam,

the language native to my parents. At work, my co-workers are predominately White Male American staff, so I speak my other native language which is American English.”

Topics of interest at her workplace bring out her “inner American,” as she explained, and Ms. Anne is comfortable being around her fellow American co-workers. After work, she returns home and switches back to “being Indian.” But during walks by her home, she explains, “I see a completely different side to how Americans treat me and my parents.” During these walks, she gets stares and looks. By these active everyday negotiations, Ms. Anne works between—and within—the social worlds of her immigrant as well as American social life. The fluidity associated with this balancing and negotiating her identities involves a self-awareness on the part of Ms. Anne, either while being around her parents, with her co-workers, or her neighbors. The implications of Ms. Anne’s case illustrate the negotiations made within the fluid subjectivities of being “Indian” due to various effects of post-9/11 *confusion*, where Ms. Anne and her parents, when seen together, attract stares. However, in the case of other Indian families, identifying as “Indian” in public life implies a greater role in combating racism.

#### *Identifying as “Indian” in a post-9/11 Oklahoma*

Originally from the Northeastern Indian state of Bihar, Mrs. Payal Shah and her husband Mr. Neeraj Shah moved to New York in the mid-1990s to seek better employment opportunities. In 2002, the Shah family, along with their five-year old daughter moved to Norman (OK). Drawn to a growing Oklahoma economy, lower cost of living, as well as a better school district for their daughter, the Shahs found their move to Norman long-term commitment to “pursue the American Dream.” Unfortunately, within a year, as Mrs. Shah explained, the family experienced racism in their everyday spaces: “From grocery stores, to gas stations, and wherever we went, even parks and movie

theatres.” The Shahs were harassed in these places by rude customer service, at times “slamming the food on our table in restaurants,” Mr. Shah said. Despite their newly acquired status as naturalized U.S. citizens, the Shahs were at first disillusioned with the American Dream and why people around them, even neighbors, were acting with hate. Mr. Shah vividly recalled one of the most important moments that challenged their identification as an Indian:

It was during one of our regular grocery runs to WalMart, sometime around the time when the U.S. was launching its attack against Iraq, maybe early 2003. I will not forget this moment when we were returning back from the store. Our neighbor, a middle-aged man, White, and usually a friendly fellow, asked us a question that made me and my family to just stop and glance at each other. He asked us if we were upset that the U.S. military was attacking our family in Iraq and if we [the Shahs] were angry with America. I did not understand his question at first, but insisting that he needed a response, I told him calmly that we were Indians, and Hindus, and had nothing to do with Iraq or Muslims. He seemed not very attentive to my answer and instead just walked away. I was a bit sad, upset, but more importantly, I was just shocked that things were not the same anymore.

From this moment on, Mr. Shah’s family, decided to publicly highlight their “Indian” and “Hindu” identities. This involved displaying Indian cultural artifacts outside their home, including symbols of Hindu deities as well as applying a sticker of the Indian flag with the word “India” on their car’s rear windshield. More significantly, they used their everyday modes of communicating with their neighbors with a deliberate and active performance of identifying themselves as “Indians,” including inviting them to Hindu festivals in the OKC Temple as well the annual Diwali celebrations at Rose State College.

For the Gujjars in OKC who had recently arrived from Texas in 2010, experiences in living in a socially conservative area of Texas has been useful in their adaptation to Oklahoma. But as Mr.

Gujjar explained, living in Texas helped them cope with their Oklahoma life, “Living in Denton [TX] for over fifteen years, we were too familiar in responding to the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks on Indians. Because we left Texas for this very issue of racism. So we knew how to cope racism in Oklahoma.” Mr. Gujjar recounted incidents in gas stations when people used to spit on his car, sometimes calling him names, including “rag head.” Nonetheless, as Mr. Gujjar continued, they coped with racism in Oklahoma due to their identities as a mixed religious couple. “You see, we are a bit unique. My wife is a Muslim while I am a Hindu. We represent religious solidarity,” Mr. Gujjar explained. Due to geopolitical disputes between India and Pakistan, two nations with Hindu and Muslim majority respectively, South Asians view inter-faith marriages between Hindus and Muslims as religious solidarity (Leonard, 2003). For Mr. Gujjar, this solidarity is also represented in their family business. Mrs. Gujjar, owns a *saree* store and sells both Hindu and Islamic clothing. Mrs. Gujjar’s Muslim customers are able to conceal their identities and clothing choices under the sanctuary of an “Indian Hindu” branding.

As Mrs. Gujjar explained, “The branding of the store with mostly Hindu and a few Islamic clothing in the display outside works well because this is the best form of business. It is a win-win for everyone.” She explained why the store is in effect, an extension of the Gujjar family’s religious solidarity, “I have to make sure that the customer who enters my store is filled with an appreciation for us Indians, and explore our clothing, including Islamic, that we are a diverse culture. We like say that we are an Indian store but really we are trying to promote religious harmony.” By using their religious solidarity and “Indian” identity, the Gujjars are using their “Indian” identity in hopes of reducing racism. Beyond individual efforts, the promotion of “Indian” identity by Indian immigrant associations contributes to the broader analysis of communicating identity with labels.

### *Mobilizing “Indian” identity*

Conscientious efforts to change public perceptions is widespread among other OKC metro Indians through their social/cultural organizations. In particular, and every year since 2004, the Indian Association of Oklahoma (IAOK) organizes an “India” float in the annual Fourth of July parade in Oklahoma City. This float, in addition to the traditional decorations representing the visual imagery of India, such as the tricolor of India’s flag (saffron, white, and green), messages denoting words of unity and solidarity have been a “deliberate attempt to seek unity with Americans,” IAOK president, Ms. Sonal explained. In an effort to bring greater public awareness to the distinctiveness of Indians, Ms. Sonal discussed how the IAOK created a public relations officer to oversee the organization’s outreach initiative in “building partnerships and friendship with non-Indians.” As she explained, “We do outreach by having monthly visits to local churches during Sunday prayer service and offering help from the Indian community to serve the homeless and volunteer food donations.”

By doing so, as Ms. Sonal explained, IAOK uses public outreach to diffuse racial tensions highlighting the “Indian” aspects of its immigrant community:

We are particularly proud of our annual gala held every year where we showcase Indian food and even have Indian dance programs in April when we invite members from the OKC Mayor’s office, as well as Christian and Muslim leaders for a reception dinner to honor various agencies in the government of Oklahoma who help Indian immigrant life in OKC metro.

The gala is held at one of the upscale hotels in downtown Oklahoma and is attended by business leaders, Oklahoma law makers, and law enforcement officials who gather at this by-invitation-only event. In these processes of public engagement, deliberately mobilizing “Indian” identity through food and dance, IAOK maintains solidarity with public officials, and transnational

aspects of Indian identities emerge in relation to non-Indians. For example, Ms. Sonal mentioned that a recurring topic of discussion at these gala nights have been “combating racism against Sikhs,” which is now an annual feature involving a panel discussion made of Indian and non-Indian public officials. Members from the OKC Police Department (OKCPD), Sikh, and Muslim communities discuss how to combat racism in a post-9/11 Oklahoma and to reduce hate crimes on Sikhs mistaken as Muslims. In a series of presentation-led discussions organized by the IOAK’s public relations officer, the “Indian” aspects of Sikh identity are highlighted. “This is our most important event of the year to combat racism, showing that Sikhs are Indians too,” noted Ms. Sonal, who has organized this special gala event for the last ten years. At the end of this event, public statements are released from both the OKCPD as well as the IAOK delegation on the need to build partnerships in preventing hate crimes against anyone, particularly crimes spurred by persons mistaken for terrorists. One of the statements released in 2012, as Ms. Sonal explained, was titled, “Working against racism by building partnerships.” This statement included snippets from members of the Sikh community as well as OKCPD in how partnerships can be built by helping the general public in the OKC metro to better understand that “Sikhs are Indians too,” as Ms. Sonal noted.

In the subsequent Chapter VI, I show how Indians utilize networks both within and outside the OKC metro that construct meanings for their transnational identities.

## CHAPTER VI

### NETWORKED TRANSNATIONAL IDENTITIES

#### Introduction

An observation into a typical day of Indians in OKC include talking to their family in India using Skype video chat, interacting with their Indian friends in other U.S. cities, and shopping for traditional food items at Spices of India. From global to local scales, these day-to-day activities enable Indians to operate within a “social glue” (Vertovec, 2004), connecting them with India while living in Oklahoma. Geographer Ash Amin (2002, 387) termed such scalar relationships as “transnational connectivity,” symbolizing the transcending nature of immigrant links that extends outside their immediate immigrant cohort. OKC Indians mobilize their economic, cultural, and social interests toward maintaining their transnational connections by working within scalar relationships, both within and outside India.

To give a more specific example on the scalar relationship of transnationalism in OKC, Indians shopping at Spices of India (*local*) are connected to bulk retailer *Swad* foods based out of Dallas (*regional*), where food items are imported from India (*global*). In this way, OKC Indians are transnationally connected to India. By doing so, Indians find opportunities within what Portes (1998, 12) referred to as “social capital” or “the capacity of individuals to command scarce resources by virtue of their membership in networks or broader social structures.”

Nonetheless, as Portes (1998, 12) continues to explain that it is not merely the social membership but, “the individual’s *ability* to mobilize such resources on demand.” For OKC Indians, these abilities can include, planning for Skype call time across different time zones between Oklahoma City and India, arranging guest lists and grocery runs to Indian stores to prepare for Hindu religious feasts, and planning with Indian travel agents in Dallas or New York for annual visits to India. Thus, networked connections that OKC Indians maintain with other Indians, non-Indians, and non-immigrants vis-à-vis their social capital enables their everyday *Indian-ness* of their transnational lives. Further, by way of embedding their social capital, such as collaborating with their co-ethnics, OKC Indians are able to find supportive mechanisms in maintaining their immigrant relationships. As Ryan *et. al* (2008, 7) argue, transnational networks ultimately help immigrants maintain their social life: “Social networks are increasingly regarded as important sources of social capital for migrants, allowing them to access social support.”

### Research Question

For OKC Indians, transnational networks offer opportunities to help maintain their daily lives. Portes (1997, 817) theorizes that complex identities of members belonging to transnational communities emerge because “participants are often bilingual, move easily between different cultures, frequently maintain homes in two countries.” OKC Indians maintain complexities by simultaneously connecting with Indians both inside and outside the OKC metro. Thus, through these practices, OKC Indians construct transnational identities that construct networked subjectivities.



The question relevant to the analysis of networked transnational identities is as follows:

*How have social networks influenced Indian identity?*

In this chapter, I answer this question by showing how OKC Indians negotiate subjectivities of “Indian-ness” while operating within transnational networks both within and outside the OKC metro. First, in looking locally within the OKC metro area, I show how religion networks feature as transnational attributes in creating co-ethnic relationships among Indians. Second, I examine the networks outside the OKC metro—but within the U.S.—that contribute to the networking of OKC Indians. Third, looking outside the U.S., specifically to India, I show how transnationalism extend into the global setting while facilitating the mobilization of “social capital” (Portes, 1998) of Indians in the OKC metro. Here, I show the role of the Internet, particularly online video chat, in maintaining “transnational connectivity” (Amin, 2002) that serves in maintaining a long-distance, transnational “social glue” (Vertovec, 2004) among Indians.

Transnational networked identities within the OKC metro

*Malayalee Pentacostal Church as an immigrant “hub”*

Religious immigrant sites are “hubs” (Ley, 2008) for immigrants to interact with their co-ethnics. Ley’s (2008) study of Korean churches, for example, conceptualizes religious sites as immigrant “hubs” that facilitate “co-ethnic bonding.” Ley (2008, 2060) notes that for Asian immigrants the purpose of connecting using religion is because “immigrant congregation is to provide services to co-ethnics.”

Among OKC metro Indians, the Malayalee Pentacostal Church (MPC) shows how religious networks facilitate transnationalism. Founded in 1994, the Church serves 30 Malayalee

Christian families, and its pastor, Mr. Rubin, leads the congregation. A first-generation Indian immigrant, Mr. Rubin leads his Church consisting of mostly first-generation Malayalee Christians. “They identify the Church, not only as a place of worship, but a site of connecting with their fellow Malayalees,” Mr. Rubin explained. Mr. Rubin, appreciative of the Church’s role, noted that Malayalee Christians in Bethany are drawn to his congregation particularly when new members join the Church: “We welcome them as members of our family, they are home away from home,” he noted. The connections Malayalee Christians make in the Church, as Mr. Rubin emphasized, offers opportunities for Malayalees to maintain a relationship with Christians in India:

We are always excited that every year, new members join our church after arriving from India. Old and new members interact in the church and in this way. We are taking care of each other, not only in our faiths, but also in our lives. Malayalee Christians may not be as large a community as Indian Hindus, but by bringing new members from India, we feel like we are connecting with our Christian brethren in India.

On Sundays, the MPC volunteers and their families greet new members in the Malayalam language, welcoming them by the door, offering them coffee, tea, and breakfast, and helping them be seated. As new and existing members congregate inside the Church for service in Malayalam, transnational subjectivities emerge—women wearing traditional Hindu *sarees* pray alongside men wearing formal Western shirts and ties, and their children creating an occasional mischief while speaking in English. For one of the regular churchgoers, Mr. Paul, a first-generation Malayalee Christian and a regular at the Church, attending MPC is his way of connecting with India while congregating with his fellowship in OKC:

I meet a lot of people at my Church, all of them are Malayalees from far and wide, I have a friend who travels from Norman. We are otherwise scattered across Oklahoma City, so it is good that we meet at the Church once a week. We not only talk about all things that matter to our Church, in our native language Malayalam, but also catch up on daily happenings within our Malayalee Christian community and also what is happening in

India. In our church, we take care of each other. Our church is a place where tradition and modern life meets. It is neither a full Indian church nor a full American church. It is a bit of both.

Mr. Paul speaks to the larger significance of the Church that serves as a “hub” where immigrants maintain what Ley (2008) refers to as co-ethnic solidarity. Transnational identities are rendered by Malayalees as they speak their native Malayalam while practicing their faith while simultaneously connecting with India. Thus, as a “transnational space,” (Jackson *et al.*, 2004), the MPC offers opportunities for Malayalee Christians to network with their fellow co-ethnic, co-religious members. Additionally, the MPC is also a “hub” and a “setting” (Goffman, 1959) for Malayalee Christians to connect with others who share the same ethnicity and religion thereby performing their “role” as ethno-religious “actors” to enable transnational connections. Religion-based transnational co-ethnic solidarity within OKC is evident among other non-Christian Indian communities, including Hindus.

#### *The Hindu Temple of Oklahoma City as a panethnic transnational hub*

In 1973, just eight years since the passage of the 1965 Immigration Act, Indian Hindus were among the first to move to Oklahoma City. Among them, Mr. Das, a young college student found the low-cost of living appealing. In the late 1980s, Mr. Das along with other Hindus established the Indian Cultural Foundation (ICF), the forerunner to the Hindu Temple of Oklahoma City (HTOC).<sup>40</sup> Inspired by other Hindu temples in America, including in Pittsburgh and Chicago, ICF made plans to build a traditional Hindu temple for the area’s growing Indian population. In 1992, Mr. Hritik, the chief Hindu priest at Chicago’s Hindu temple was invited by ICF to establish HTOC

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<sup>40</sup> Hindu Temple of Oklahoma City: “History” <http://www.hindutempleokc.org/uvtest/historyuv.shtml>

as a traditional Hindu temple complete with installations of Hindu deities. Mr. Hritik explained the connections he sought in order to consecrate the temple:

The OKC Hindu temple, before it was a temple, was inside a small room in 1987. During the early 1990s, I was transferred from Chicago to the OKC temple. By 1995, I brought stone sculptures in the shape of Hindu deities by using my contacts in Chicago. By gradually adding other elements of architecture to make it appear as an Indian Hindu temple, I wanted to position the OKC Hindu not only for Oklahomans, but for all Hindus in the Oklahoma/Texas region.

Mr. Hritik explained how the temple broadly reached out to other Hindus and the role it played in a predominately Christian city, “We have, in cities and vicinities in Oklahoma, about 1,000 Hindu families. So many of them come not only from OKC, but from vicinity also. Like from Shawnee, Enid, Lawton, Denton (TX), and Ardmore. We even have people coming in from El Reno,” Mr. Hritik explained. He further detailed the network of devotees around the OKC metro who were drawn to his temple:

They are all Indians mostly, but foreigners visit us here. By foreigners, I mean Americans, we are the foreigners here actually [laughs]. So Americans visit us, sometimes even 200 students used to come from OSU, OU, OCU, and some other places, like Shawnee, some Christian university there. They come and ask questions, and I teach them philosophy, theology, and religion.

Mr. Das, an HTOC board member, reflected on how the temple and the Hindu community have grown together. “This is all because of our Hindu community,” he remarked, showing me around the temple, “the devotees have come from all over the U.S. and India to make this temple their main worship place in Oklahoma City.” As Mr. Das told me, during the construction of the HTOC, temple board members personally sought to incorporate facets of other U.S. Hindu temples into HTOC. As a temple board member since the early 2000s, Mr. Harish, a Hindu American businessman based in Oklahoma City, visited other temples in the U.S., comparing their best

practices, bringing them to Oklahoma City, “I went to New York City, Los Angeles, Nashville, Dallas, to their Hindu temples and see how they are doing and what kind of improvements they make, and try to get their ideas and bring them to our community.”

For example, one of the most important components of the Hindu temple includes the *sanctum sanctorum*—the central structure inside the temple that houses the deities. By observing the intricate detail of the Pittsburgh temple, Mr. Harish flew in one of its architects to work on the HTOC. Mr. Harish provided more details about how different aspects from Hindu temples around the U.S. influenced OKC Hindu temples. “It was a very careful process where a team of members from the HTOC Board took notes on how Hindu temples were constructed and the ways in which people used the space both inside and outside the temple premises,” Mr. Harish noted describing the various ways in which the sacred and public spaces were designed in the OKC temple. He continued, “We were very careful to make sure that the OKC temple reflected the ways in which our small Indian community can easily worship while have a good community time.”

Hindu South Asians including Nepalis, Sri Lankans, and Indians form, as Kim (2015, 103) notes, a “panethnic alliance within their religious community.” By attracting people from different nationalities, the Hindu Temple of Oklahoma City is a panethnic transnational site. Meaning, Hindus from their respective Asian nations who are otherwise divided by political borders, interact freely as members of a common Hindu congregation in OKC. For example, one of the Indian devotees, Mr. Tamal, described how the temple served as a way to connect with Hindus from other nations, as well as re-connect with Indian Hindus both from within and outside the OKC area:

I see the temple [Hindu Temple of OKC] as a meeting point of global Hindus. It is great. I can never get this experience in India where I can meet someone from a different country who is also a Hindu. And lately I have been meeting Hindus coming all the way from Denton [Texas], and even Dallas [Texas]. We are very fortunate

that the OKC temple is small enough to accommodate our guests from other places but large enough to have a great community of global Hindus. That's how I describe myself. A global Hindu. And that is because of how I see myself these days.

The transnational meanings that Mr. Tamal identifies emerge from his panethnic religious connections that he co-constructs with his fellow Hindu, both within and outside the OKC metro area.

Similar to the MPC, the Hindu Temple of Oklahoma City (HTOC) serves as a religious immigrant “hub” (Ley, 2008) for OKC Hindus. But in addition, HTOC serves as a *panethnic transnational* site where Hindus from other nations meet. One of the ways this is facilitated is through HTOC's board that includes an outreach committee whose members seek to build relations within Hindu immigrants in the OKC metro area. Speaking on its role, the committee's chairman, Mr. Lal offered evidence on building a network of relationships:

As Hindus, we believe that unless we unite together, we cannot fulfill our religious *dharmā*, that is, the Hindu way of doing what is right. Our outreach committee seeks out to the Hindus who are scattered across the [OKC] city by posting flyers, announcements, and seek volunteer help for our temple events. Unless we [the outreach committee] reaches out to the people, how will they [Hindus] know what can they can do? I am pleased to note that the response is usually good and we get a lot of volunteers to help during our big events, particularly Diwali.

On several occasions, I saw volunteers serving food, setting up floral decorations, and assisting the head Hindu priest. These volunteers, on occasions, interacted with the temple patrons when they seemed to mutually recognize each other. “I was so happy to see the owner of *Gopuram* Restaurant who was volunteering while serving vegetarian food in the temple,”<sup>1</sup> said Mr. Nagraj, a fifty-something regular devotee at HTOC. As a Hindu in Oklahoma, the conversations that Mr. Nagraj enjoys with *Gopuram's* owner outside the restaurant is important to his daily experience in networking with other Hindus. “It means a lot to me to know that we share the same religious

values as a Hindu and also as a vegetarian, right here in Oklahoma,” Mr. Nagraj noted. For Mr. Nagraj, maintaining networks with other Hindus, particularly those who share his dietary and religious preferences, opens up prospects to network with other Hindu communities, outside those associated with HTOC, within the OKC metro. In building his “social capital” (Portes, 1998), Mr. Nagraj is able to participate in other Hindu events and find networked opportunities that help maintain his Hindu identity and happiness. The transnational foundation of HTOC enables OKC Hindus to make these connections.

For Ms. Malini, HTOC’s annual *Ganesh Puja*<sup>2</sup> celebration is one such event that is held within OKC that attracts non-OKC Hindus as well. Every year during the second week of September, Ms. Malini uses her network made up of Hindu women, whom she met over the years. When I asked how she built this network, Ms. Malini explained:

Every time I visit Spices of India, or the Hindu temple, or even visit Indian restaurants, I end up meeting an acquaintance whom I met in some other place. We continue talking where we left off, it is like one continuous conversation. Usually we envision ways to organize events that are religious in nature. Like Ganesh Puja, for example, we like to conduct this event in a home so that it is private and for a smaller group. I have three other ladies who organize this *Puja* and we use our own personal networks to spread the word on this event.

After she gathers the volunteers, resources, and the venue for the *Ganesh Puja*, Ms. Malini explained that these networks prove very important in not only organizing the actual event but also to maintain a “Hindu solidarity,” a term that signifies the pan-ethnic alliance that I discussed in Chapter 5. In doing so, Ms. Malini’s network of Hindu women re-create an event widely popular in India. Thus, the home where *Ganesh Puja* is conducted becomes a “setting” (Goffman, 1959) where Ms. Malini and her volunteers are “actors” practicing networked transnational (Hindu) identities. In doing so, by performing their “roles” during this Hindu religious event, they co-create their Hindu identities with one another. Ms. Malini also discussed the ways *Ganesh Puja* sometimes extended

outside the OKC metro when “the word gets outside OKC.” In this way, as Ms. Malini told me, Hindus from Dallas, even Kansas City, make a trip to attend the *Ganesh Puja*, sometimes in their friend’s home in Oklahoma City. She explained:

We really appreciate when our Hindu friends visit us from larger U.S. cities, because they are able to bring some important religious materials for the *Puja* that are not otherwise available here in OKC. So it is useful to reach outside to have an even grander celebration.

These networked connections outside OKC that Ms. Malini referred to correspond to the next level of scale, the *regional* scale of networked transnational connections with nearby cities.

### Transnational networked identities outside OKC

#### *Immigrant entrepreneurial partnerships*

Transnational networks among immigrants, as Vertovec (2002) notes, includes a recognition of their involvement in urban economies. Specifically, Portes *et al.* (2002) argues that urban “transnational entrepreneurs” in America are members of immigrant communities who are embedded within transnational immigrant communities and facilitate their social relations. For example, Spices of India owner Mr. Patel is a transnational entrepreneur maintaining networked relationships with OKC’s Indian customers as well as bulk retailers outside OKC to meet the demands of Indian groceries in the OKC metro. By facilitating the flow of groceries from bulk retailers outside OKC to the Indian customers within OKC, the store management at Spices of India facilitates immigrant entrepreneurial partnerships. When I asked him how he maintains these connections, he explained:

It is really all about supply-and-demand. We have look outside OKC to meet the needs of Indian customers within OKC. Personally, I like to purchase bulk order from *Swad* food company, based in Dallas.

Mr. Patel went on to explain his preference for *Swad* because the complexities of Indian food require the availability of several ingredients that his store does not normally carry. He explained,



“An average Indian dish requires at least five to seven ingredients, so it is very important for us [Spices of India] to meet the needs of customers who are from different Indian regions.” Going further, Mr. Patel provided an insight into the inner-workings of his relationship with *Swad* and the challenges posed by the market size of Oklahoma City:

Unfortunately, OKC is not New York, California, or even Dallas. In those cities, there are so many more Indians compared to OKC and finding Indian groceries is easy there. But here in OKC, not only is our Indian community small in number but we don't get as many requests for large orders that we can place at *Swad*. So I call my *Swad* guy in Dallas when I think I can actually make some money by getting a large shipment. I have been working with my Dallas retailer for over ten years, and I trust him, and we have a good business partnership going.

These connections between Indians in OKC and Dallas forms an entrepreneurial “transnational space” (Jackson *et. al*, 2004). Working within this space, OKC Indians engage their “social capital” (Portes, 1998), groceries, for example, to develop networks.

In another example, in the case of Indian travel agents in Dallas, the business-customer relationship between OKC Indians and Dallas businesses enables transnational connections for OKC Indians to travel to India. For example, Riya Travels, located near the Dallas-Forth Worth Airport (DFW), is one of the most popular travel agents accessed by OKC Indians. With locations in eight other U.S. cities, Riya Travels offers “deeply discounted rates” to India, said Mr. Tarun who is one of Riya Travels' regular customers. Explaining why he had to go outside OKC to seek a travel agent, Mr. Tarun described:

It is quite expensive to travel to India from Oklahoma City. So if I have to make a trip to India, I don't mind flying out of Dallas because it is much cheaper. And with Riya [Travels], I always obtain a good price, they are deeply discounted and I can use the saved money to buy gifts for my family in India.

Mr. Tarun visits India twice each year to visit his aging parents, and by simultaneously working

across various scales, between OKC (*local*) and Dallas (*regional*) he maintains a transnational connectivity to India. And these connectivities act as “spaces of flows” (Castells, 2001) where information pertinent to India travel, for example, make these connections possible. Further, scholars have noted that aspects of transnationalism and belonging are (re-)constituted through inner-workings of capital through ethnic entrepreneurs (Schiller, *et al.*, 1992; Portes, *et. al*, 2002). Thus, by doing business with Dallas-based Riya Travels, OKC Indians such as Mr. Tarun are able to tap into an ethnic entrepreneurial space, which in this case helps to maintain transnational connections. This was affirmed by Mr. Yoginder, the owner of Riya Travels with whom I talked to briefly: “We want more Oklahomans to use our service because we are able to offer deals to India that no other travel agent in Oklahoma can provide. We are happy to help OKC Indians to connect with their families at the lowest cost possible.” By offering his travel booking services from Dallas, a city with more international flights to India than any city in the Southern U.S., Mr. Yoginder forms a crucial transnational link between OKC Indians and India in helping economical travel options.

The extensions outside OKC are not limited to ethnic entrepreneurs in Dallas. The Mar Thoma Church, a religious institution in the OKC metro, offers a window into such networks with similar adherents outside the metro.

#### *Inter-generational, religious, and networked transnational identities*

The Mar Thoma Church is a Malayalee Christian Church whose followers adhere to the West Syrian Rite of the Syriac tradition. The largest Mar Thoma Church is based in the Southwestern Indian state of Kerala. In the U.S., the Mar Thoma Diocese of North America is based in New York City, which oversees fifty Mar Thoma churches across 12 U.S. states, including the Mar Thoma Church of Bethany (MTCB), a suburb west of Oklahoma City (Source: <https://www.marthomanae.org>). Pastors from within the fifty churches are transferred to other

churches inside the United States under the direction of the New York archdiocese. Bethany's Mar Thoma pastor Mr. Rubin was among those transferred from the Mar Thoma Church in New Jersey.

Transnational identities are integral to Mr. Rubin's own sense of self. His connection extends across three places—*New Jersey*, where he grew up after his parents brought him from *India* when he two years old—and *Oklahoma*, where he currently lives and works. Further, Mr. Rubin is a 1.5 generation—a term used for persons born in one country but moved to another country at a very young age.<sup>3</sup> Mr. Rubin uses his skills in his native English and Malayalam to social network with his congregation. As he explained:

We have Christians coming from all over Oklahoma, across various age groups, including second-generation Indian-American children. We even have an older adult contingent from the Houston Mar Thoma church which is much smaller, they make monthly trips to OKC to visit us. With the children, I talk with a friendlier manner in English, asking them about school and studies. And with the Houston folks, I speak in Malayalam language. So it all depends whom I talk to.

By presenting himself differently with different linguistic identities to these two different groups, Mr. Rubin presents his “self” as per the generational “setting” (Goffman, 1959) with his congregation. Speaking to Mr. John, one of the Houston Mar Thoma Christians, this inter-generational consequence of Mr. Rubin's religious connection, and the way he presents himself to Houston Mar Thoma Christians, is vital. Mr. John, in his seventies, commented on how Mr. Rubin was able to connect across various age groups:

I think brother Rubin is an example of how leaders from larger Indian Christian churches can connect with smaller churches to help them grow. In Houston, our Mar Thoma congregation is very small. And we are older folks too. So coming to OKC and worshipping with brothers and sisters in Bethany is truly a blessing for us.

Through these inter-generational practices, Mr. Rubin connects with Houston Mar Thoma

Christians. Similar to churches, immigrant associations promote transnationalism outside OKC.

*Immigrant associations in promoting networked transnationalism*

Religious leaders and sites of worship as discussed above aid in co-creating transnational identities both inside and outside Oklahoma. In addition, ethnic and linguistic attributes feature in the inner- workings of transnationalism and how Indians negotiate the social fields with agencies outside the state. In the case of the Tamils in Oklahoma, despite their relatively small numbers within the state, a significant role played by the Tamil association, or *Sangams*, outside the state help to unify the community within OKC and Tulsa. The Oklahoma Tamil Sangam (OTS) is one of the 12 Tamil Sangams across the United States. While California and Texas lead the nation with the number of Tamil Indians, many of the Tamil Sangams in smaller states, including Oklahoma, are led by larger Tamil institutions across the nation. In the case of OTS, the state's relatively small Tamil population (around 200 families) seeks guidance from the Federation of Tamil Sangams of North America (FeTNA)—the umbrella organization of all 37 Tamil Sangams in North America, including 25 in Canada, and based in Washington, D.C. and South Carolina (Source: <http://www.fetna.org>).

OTS executive officer Mr. Kumar explained how FeTNA, as a governing body helps, Tamils in smaller American cities to maintain their identities by way of organizing national events. Specifically, FeTNA organizes annual Tamil *Vizha* (Tamil=Event), the largest gathering of Tamils in North America connecting 36 Tamil *Sangams* in the United States:

We are having our inaugural FeTNA Tamil *Vizha* in Toronto this April (2013), and it is pretty exciting for us to have Oklahoma's Tamil community represented and showcase our talent as we are going to have one of our Edmond Tamil girls perform in the song and dance competition.

Larger Tamil associations serve as mentors for this event, including the Texas Tamil *Sangam* (TTS)—the largest Tamil association in the Great Plains.

As Mr. Kumar explained the significance of TTS, he raised a key point on the ethnic linkages

that facilitates the transnational meanings of *being* Tamil in America, which are attributed to the networks that help in the construction of Tamil American identities: “You can find lot of helpful Tamil people in Austin and after all we are all the same—Tamil people—it does not matter if you are from Oklahoma or Texas or even Canada. We are Tamil first, and then American or Canadian second.” The role played by FeTNA in bringing out the role of Oklahoma Tamils in the broader North American transnational “setting” is what Moya (2005, 5) notes as “immigrants’ formal sociability” – a collection of factors that are shaped by voluntary associations to help immigrant newcomers in their pursuits of incorporation into the host society.

Schrover and Vermeulen (2005) further note that the ultimate purpose of these immigrant organizations is in aiding the settlement process of immigrants. Transnational networked identities for OKC Tamils are in part constructed by associations such as OTS and FeTNA that also serve as immigrant organizations for the overall transnational experiences of all Tamils in North America. Immigrant associations play a significant role for other OKC Indians as well, including the *Swaminarayan* Hindus who connect with their fellow *Swaminarayans* in America through their temple. As ethnic Gujaratis originating from the Western Indian state of Gujarat, Oklahoma’s *Swaminarayan* Hindus belong to the Hindu sect that regard the sixteenth century Gujarati Saint Sri *Swaminarayan* as an incarnation of a Hindu God. Before the OKC site, they congregated inside a motel (Budget Inn) for close to seven years. “Yet with our humble presence in Oklahoma, we are supported by one of the largest religious organizations in the world,” said Mr. Patel who serves as a volunteer at the temple. He also explained the connections the OKC *Swaminarayan* temple maintain with other temples in the U.S., “We are part of the global *Swaminarayan* movement that spans across 18 countries including 18 temples here in the United States.” OKC *Swaminarayans* are members of the global *Swaminarayan* movement. The broad global appeal based on service has enabled the

*Swaminarayans* to establish their presence, and as Williams (2001, 2) who summarized *Swaminarayan* Hinduism as “a transnational form of Hinduism while keeping its integrity and strength in the land of its birth.”

For Mr. Patel, the smaller Oklahoma contingent of *Swaminarayan* Hindus is a subset of larger support groups close by to OKC that together create the *Swaminarayan* Hindu experience:

The Hritiknaryan temples is a franchise in the USA. And in India, it started in India and now it is all over, in all different countries. Our closest big temple, very big temple, with all marbles is in Houston. In Dallas also there is also a big one. From commercial standpoint, I am telling you it is a franchise. But it [Hritiknaryan movement] is a big charity organization.

Thus, by bringing various forms of resources to contribute towards the service of people, the network of *Swaminarayan* Hindus in Oklahoma contribute towards collective transnational identities (Schiller *et al.*, 1992; Kivisto, 2001). In doing so, they form a transnational network inside the United States that contributes to their everyday interactions of everyday identities that constitute *Swaminarayan* Hindu, Gujarati, and Indian identities.

These examples show that within the United States Indians negotiate their transnational networked identities both as individuals and as members of voluntary associations. In the next section that follows, I show how transnational networked identities are constructed with those connections abroad while maintaining their identities in their Oklahoman communities.

### Transnational networks outside the United States

In working outside the OKC metro, Indians connect with families and friends predominately through the use of the Internet. In this final section, I discuss how the Internet is used in order to simultaneously connect and construct transnational identities.

*Online constructions of transnational identities*

With the advent of Internet technologies, immigrants' connections to home have been greatly enhanced (Castells, 2000, 2001; Collins, 2009). Specifically, in Adams and Ghose's (2003, 420) geographical study of Indians who use the Internet between the U.S. and India, they call the spaces between "bridgespace" or "a virtual space that supports flows of people, goods, capital and ideas between South Asia and North America." Scholarly attention has been paid to these virtual geographies, and how online spaces have become emergent sites of ethnic identity constructions among immigrants (Adams and Ghose, 2003; Parker and Song, 2006; Skop and Adams, 2009; Christensen, 2012). Additionally, as Skop and Adams (2009, 128) note in their study of Indians in the U.S., the scalar aspects of virtual spaces enable the construction of transnational identities:

Internet is one of many resources at the disposal of Indian immigrants and their American-born children for overcoming separation at intra- and international scales, for creating a variety of connections across space and for constructing a sense of identity.

In the case of OKC Indians, these identities emerge in a variety of virtual "settings" (Goffman, 1959) when they connect with India. For Mrs. and Mr. Prashanth, the Internet offers their twelve-year old American-born son online tutorials to learn Hindi via an instructor based in India. Every Saturday evening, at 8:00 p.m., the basement of the Prashanth family home is converted to "a weekend classroom" when they set up an online Skype video session with a Hindi instructor who is on the other end of the Internet connection. The online tutoring lasts for about one hour with the tutor using video chat to communicate with Mr. Rajesh. Speaking to the reason why they chose Internet tutoring versus in- person tutoring, Mr. Prashanth explained the decision:

With the Internet, what we really have here is an ability for our son to learn Hindi, a language that we speak here at home and with our families in India. The best way to learn Hindi, of course,

is to learn from an instructor who is in India and speaks Hindi on an everyday basis. Here in Oklahoma, I cannot really find anyone who is able to teach Hindi with the fluency and the interest to teach children. Hindi is a way that connects us to home in India. And my wife and I do not have the time to teach because we are busy with our own work lives. We hope that our son will be able to learn Hindi and speak to his grandparents more easily.

By helping their son learn Hindi using online opportunities, the Prashanth family is able to work between local and global scales in order to create a “bridgespace” (Adams and Ghose, 2003) to help construct their son’s identity as a Hindi-speaking Indian-American. Reaching outside Oklahoma, the parents of Mr. Rajesh facilitate “transnational connectivity” (Amin, 2008) to language lessons. In other cases, for OKC Indians, the use of Skype video chat facilitates regular interactions with friends and families in India that construct a “social glue” (Vertovec, 2004) in maintaining this connectivity.

In their research on why immigrants connect with others using video chat, Baldassar and Merla (2013, 52) note that “Skype and the ability to be virtually co-present can compensate (or not) for corporeal absence.” In other words, video chat is able to become part of daily immigrant life as they connect with friends and families from their homeland. As Araset (2015, 13) notes in her study of Muslims using Skype for remote *Q’uran* courses, transnational connections that emerge from daily online meetings speak to “how practices connected to other places, may be intimately tied to the local context of everyday life.” Further, the use of Internet in these everyday online practices, as the authors argue, is central to the ways immigrant families manage their transnational lives. Discussing internet-savvy generation’s interest to connect via online tools, Araset (2015, 440) further notes that everyday online connections are part of “doing family life” because “the organisation and understanding of family – is an important part of this generation’s way of placing themselves in local, national and transnational social fields.”

For the Kiran family based in Oklahoma City, establishing weekly connections with India



using the Internet signifies their transnational relationship with family members in India. Every Friday night, the family of four, Mrs. and Mr. Kiran and their two children, gather around their home computer and establish online Skype video chat with Mrs. Kiran's parents who live in Mumbai, India. Explaining the significance of this conversation, Mrs. Kiran talked about the ways this online connection with her parents helped maintain a "complete" family experience:

When we talk on Skype, I watch my children interact with their grandparents, and it is as if the family is complete, united on Friday night. Distance between U.S. and India is reduced and across thousands of miles, we are connected as if I am able to see my parents right in front of me. Sometimes I get emotional because I miss my parents but I am very grateful to see my parents every week, even if it is online.

These online sessions are especially important for the children, as Mrs. Kiran explained, when they celebrate "virtual birthday parties" with their grandparents who are able to view the children cut the cake via online Skype chat. She detailed these parties in our interview:

We usually have around 15 Indian families who attend our children's birthday parties, and almost all of them have a child that they bring along. We usually assemble in front of the computer along with the cake ready to be cut. Sometimes we have to wait until late night because of the time difference with India. Because we like to see our entire family, it is worth the wait. And because my parents are older, they cannot travel to U.S. anymore, so we connect online.

By bringing the family together online despite the geographic distance, the Kiran family is able to maintain their "social glue" through transnational connectivity with India. Further, this Internet-enabled transnational "spaces of flows" (Castells, 2001) enables the construction of transnational identities. According to Castells (2001, 412) these flows are enabled by what he refers to as social "actors":

The space of flows is the material organization of time-sharing social practices that work through flows. By flows I understand purposeful, repetitive, programmable sequences of exchange and

interaction between physically disjointed positions held by social actors.

When “actors” are theorized the way Goffman (1959) used this term, Indians are therefore transnational actors who perform their identities using the Internet.

In her study on Irish transnational immigrants using Skype, King-O’Riain (2015, 271) has recently referred to the inter-connected aspects of families despite their distances:

transnational families are not emotionally disembedded, but co-embedded in localities facilitated by the increasing use of technologies such as Skype.

The Kiran family maintains online transnational networks simultaneously co-embedding inter- generational identities between their families in the U.S. and India. Outside the Kiran family, and in other cases, other forms of identities are constructed online that contribute to this discussion of networked transnationalism.

For instance, Ms. Shona uses the Internet to connect more deeply with her faith. As a second-generation Indian-American medical student living in Weatherford (OK), Ms. Shona was born in Denver and when she was about five years of age, her parents were drawn to Oklahoma’s appeal to Christians and moved to the OKC metro area. Growing up in Weatherford, Ms. Shona’s identity as a Christian, as she explained, was at odds due to linguistic differences:

As time rolled on, and as I was growing up, I found myself conflicted with my religious identities. As an American, I was drawn to local Churches that offered services in English but my parents insisted that I attend one of the Kerala Christian churches in Bethany that have worship services in Malayalam, a language they could relate to with other Malayalee Christians.

This identity conflict became particularly difficult, as Ms. Shona explained, when she had to rush to India for one full year in 2010 in order to take care of her grandparents’ health. “When I was with my grandmother and to pray, I knew the local Indian churches in India would do little in helping me understand what the pastor even preached. So instead, I turned to the Internet,” she

said. Ms. Shona became a regular “online” follower of LifeChurch.TV—one of the largest Evangelical churches based out of Edmond, Oklahoma (Hinton, 2015). “First I thought I was dreaming, it was amazing to have a live worship service from my home state in Oklahoma while visiting my grandparents in India. It truly connected my two worlds together,” Ms. Shona said. Since her subsequent return to the U.S., Ms. Shona continues to follow LifeChurch, both online and sometimes on site at one of their actual churches in the OKC metro. Commenting on how LifeChurch is popular among young immigrants, she explained,

LifeChurch is beginning to have a major appeal among young Indian American Christians particularly since many of them travel in summer and go to study abroad, they can access Church online. Many of my friends who are also Indian-Americans are able to relate to other young millennials who attend these church services. But I also know that many Indian parents are not too happy about this online worship [laughs].

The virtual geographies of transnational identity, as Appadurai (1996, 1) notes, forms a “global ethnoscape” wherein the “transnational cultural flows” are no longer culturally homogenous, but instead, they are “profoundly interactive.” The interactions between Ms. Shona and LifeChurch.TV through the practice of transnational faith is an example of how the “global ethnoscape” of religious identities, as an example shown above, can constitute the “transnational connectivity” (Portes, 1998) of networked transnationalism for OKC Indians.

In the final Chapter VII, I conclude this dissertation by providing concluding remarks and a broader significance of this study.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

#### “Indian-ness” and the forging of transnational belonging

On my last day of field work at the OKC *Swaminarayan* Temple, I was invited to the temple’s first ever online *Bhajan* (Hindi and Gujarati word for “Hindu religious musical event”). Earlier that week, two priests from the Houston *Swaminarayan* Temple were visiting the OKC *Swaminarayan* devotees. To honor them, the OKC devotees organized this *Bhajan*, in Gujarati language, to broadcast it online via live Internet radio streaming. One of the Houston priests joined the *Bhajan* while four volunteers led the singing. Three of them were younger, maybe in their early twenties, and wore western clothing. The fourth volunteer wore traditional Indian dress and a headphone mic on his head. He led the singing as well as drumming of the *tabla*<sup>41</sup> (Figure 4). His headphone mic was connected to a computer placed behind him and continuously recording the event. The audience included about twenty women and twenty men, likely all of them *Swaminarayan* Gujaratis, and many of whose age ranged varied between 30 and 40.

As the *Bhajan* proceeded, audience members swayed their heads side to side; many closed their eyes and appeared to be in a trance. With the audience for this live *Bhajan* performance inside

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<sup>41</sup> *Tabla* is a popular percussion instrument used in northern Indian music (See Kippen, 2005).

the temple and on the Internet, I was part of a performance where religious identities of *Swaminarayan* Gujaratis appeared “frontstage,” while transnationally located across local (inside the OKC *Swaminarayan* temple), regional (engaging the Houston priests), and global (through Internet radio) scales. At the same time, I recognized that the different types of clothing and languages spoken represented the complex subjectivities of OKC *Swaminarayan* Gujaratis.



**Figure 4.** *Bhajan* at *Swaminarayan* Temple (Source: photography by author).

The *Bhajan* lasted for about an hour, and then the lead singer, who wore a headphone mic, made an announcement in both English and Gujarati. In doing so, he spoke simultaneously to the audience in front of him and to those listening on the Internet:

We dedicate this performance to our *Swamiji*s who grace us with their presence today. We thank them for traveling all the way from Houston. We also dedicate this *Bhajan* to the millions of *Swaminarayan* devotees worldwide. We hope to have a grander *Bhajan*

someday in OKC when we have a more traditional *Swaminarayan* Temple. We wish peace to everyone.

By “traditional,” he referred to the plans to build a larger, grander temple structure on the same site where the OKC *Swaminarayan* temple is currently located. Following the *bhajan* one of the volunteers, Mr. Patel explained that the temple now is inside the former Prince of Peace church building which became available due to the church’s financial difficulties. However, he continued to explain that the reason why his temple was not able to secure funds was due to where they were located in the United States. In part, he was referencing the ongoing struggles in a post-9/11 Oklahoma, “We are having problems to build a traditional temple because we are surrounded by Christian churches, and they are powerful in the city council. I don’t think they want a Hindu temple in this location. I don’t know if we are mistaken as Muslims because the OKC Mosque is only a few miles away from where we are.”

The scene above lends a window into how Indians construct their sense of “Indian-ness” through socio-cultural resources that forges their *belonging* to the wider Indian community both within and outside the OKC metro. The overall goal of this study on OKC Indians has been to highlight their interactions, experiences, and the everyday constructions in order to explain that Indian “identity” is not a homogenous, monolithic phenomenon, but instead multifaceted transnational Indian “identities” emerges from consequences of various subjectivities and practices among its members, both within and outside OKC. I agree with anthropologist Arjun Appadurai that for immigrants, including Indians in the U.S., “the landscapes of group identity—the ethnoscares—around the world are no longer familiar anthropological objects, insofar as groups are no longer tightly territorialized, spatially bounded, historically unselfconscious, or culturally homogeneous” (Appadurai, 1996, 48). In my study, I have shown that OKC Indians negotiate public and private spaces by performing everyday forms of linguistic, ethnic, religious, gender,

among other attributes of their identities, including their racialized identities within a post-9/11 context. Thus, as the example of the *Swaminarayan Bhajan* shows, simultaneous expressions of multiple identities as a day-to-day practice of their faith construct their transnational identities with Gujarati Indians. In what follows next, I synthesize the three analysis chapters to illustrate the unpacking of identities among Indians in the OKC metro and how their “Indian-ness” forges meanings of transnational belongings. Specifically, in these chapters, I have shown that everyday life of Indian immigrants is constitutive of the relationships and belonging to ethnic and religious institutions, cultural resources, and immigrant networks both within and outside OKC. Thus, the subjective experiences of Indians are constitutive of their socio-cultural basis including linguistic, ethnic, religious, and among other attributes.

### Broader Significance

My dissertation contributes to an understanding of immigrants in one of the fastest growing regions of immigrant population in the U.S. In its 2014 report, Washington, D.C.’s policy think-tank Brookings Institution, ranked the OKC metro the nation’s top 25 urban regions for immigrant inflows. With a 78% increase in immigrant population growth between 2000 and 2013, the report placed the OKC metro as one of the 12 emerging immigrant gateways in the nation (Singer, 2015). Further, the report points to this immigrant trend “dispersing to more and smaller places across the country,” denoting the current wave of immigration into U.S. cities with less than or equal to a million residents. At the same time, national news media has reported increasing trends of xenophobia against immigrants in these smaller metros (Mertens, 2015). Thus, my study provides insights into the *ironical* geographies of smaller metro immigration, that despite racism and anti-immigrant sentiments, immigrants continue to settle into smaller metropolitan areas including the

OKC metro. This is because in the aftermath of the 2008 recession, immigrant flows shifted away from larger and into smaller cities as immigrants looked toward better employment opportunities particularly in the American South (Ellis, *et al.*, 2014; Winders, 2014).

Particular to Indian immigrants, this study unpacks monolithic labels associated with “Indian” by nuancing the “Indian-ness” embedded in their everyday experiences. As of 2016, the urgency to provide more insights into immigrant lives is critical to counter anti-immigrant backlash which has arguably worsened particularly due to the mass instigation of racist xenophobic rhetoric from many of the supporters of Donald J. Trump, the incoming President of the United States (Hannah-Jones, 2016; Osnos, 2016). Thus, over fifteen years after the 9/11 attacks, the need to study the social, cultural, and racial geographies of immigrants continues due to the deterioration of public awareness on the vast richness of immigrant identities across various groups in the U.S. (Asultany, 2016; Maira, 2016). Further, besides a few studies on Indians in Oklahoma (Dasaree, 2008; Sen and Kottnerus, 2016) there needs to be additional research that interrogates the micro-interactions of Indians and other under-represented immigrants in Oklahoma.

*“Indian” versus “Indian-ness” and the everyday practices of transnational belonging*

Transnationalism and identity are concepts that inherently call for juxtaposition. This is so because, on the one hand, many peoples’ transnational networks are grounded upon the perception that they share some form of common identity, often based upon a place of origin and the cultural and linguistic traits associated with it (Vertovec, 2001, 573).

By reifying the spatial relevance within transnationalism, Vertovec’s (2001) theorization provides an avenue to interpret the formations of transnational identities.

Indians in the OKC metro, through their everyday constructions of “Indian-ness,” forge *practices of transnational belonging* within and outside the OKC metro. The broader significance of my



research is therefore unpacking the everyday constituent processes and constructions that enable Indians in the OKC metro in their belonging to India while remaining in Oklahoma. In doing so, I advance the literature on immigrant belonging which I review in the subsequent section.

### *Contextualizing transnational belonging*

Barth's (1969) *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* laid the foundation in drawing belonging and identity together. Here, Barth (1969, 14) crystalizes the theoretical relationship by centering the discussion of belonging around the notions of self:

Since belonging to an ethnic category implies being a certain kind of person, having that basic identity, it also implies a claim to be judged, and to judge oneself, by those standards that are relevant to that identity.

Barth's work reflects theorizing *belonging from above*. However, increasing trends in globalization have prompted qualitative scholars to nuance *belonging from below*. Lovell (1998) provides the spatial context of belonging with regards to the self, namely the relationship between place and belonging with respect to personal attributes of the individual. For example, Lovell pointed to the social meanings ascribed in the theorizations of belonging:

...belonging, with all its pragmatic connotations and potential for tying people to place and social relationships, also evokes emotions, sentiments of longing to be in a particular, location, be it real or fictive.

More recently, geographers answered the “spatial” call to put belonging in its place by signifying the spatial significance of everyday-ness inscribed in belonging (Ghosh and Wang, 2003; Devadason, 2010; Dunn, 2010; Walsh, 2014). The 2009 guest editorial *Geographies of Belonging in Environment and Planning A* (Mee and Wright, 2009, 773) remains one of the more concerted efforts by geographers to raise the importance of everyday-ness embedded in belonging:

The geographies of belonging are negotiated geographies, through which diverse actors work to reconfigure notions of who and what belongs through the ontological, epistemological, and material struggles of everyday practice.

And within these everyday practices, as Schein (2009, 774) notes, belonging is a useful theoretical term “because it resonates with people.” Geographer Antonsich’s (2010) advances this discussion by conceptualizing belonging as a multidimensional framework:

Belonging as a personal, intimate, feeling of being ‘at home’ in a place (place-belongingness) and belonging as a discursive resource which constructs, claims, justifies, or resists forms of socio-spatial inclusion/exclusion (politics of belonging).

On the one hand, by placing the notion of “home” central to the discussion on belonging, Antonsich (2010, 646), draws from bell hooks<sup>42</sup> (2009) notion of home as a theoretical device that “stands for symbolic space of familiarity.” And on the other, by denoting the dynamics of inclusion/exclusion or the politics of belonging, Antonsich (2010, 653) specifically calls for “studies on the notion of (territorial) belonging can benefit from a perspective that aims to map belonging at the intersection of these two ongoing dynamics.” Further, the paucity in research on the multiscale dimensions of belonging, as Antonsich (2010, 653) notes, necessitates empirical studies on scales with reference to belonging. Thus:

Although in fact the interrelation between the ‘here’ and ‘there’ of belonging has been largely investigated no studies are available which explore the ‘here’ in all its multiple scales and in their connections.

In what follows, I answer Antonsich’s (2010) call by elaborating how constructions of home, post-9/11 transnational negotiations, and ethno-religious networked life nuance the *transnational practices of belonging* of Indians in the OKC metro.

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<sup>42</sup> bell hooks is the pen name for Dr. Gloria Jean Watkins, African-American author, feminist, and social activist. The use of lowercase in citing her name is a deliberate choice made by her (Source: <http://www.bellhooksinstitute.com/#/about/>).

## Theoretical Contributions

### *Constructions of home through transnational practices of belonging*

In Chapter Four, I show how specific sites in the OKC metro form transnational settings where Indians gather publicly, enabling their identity constructions. Specifically, these sites constitute activities pertaining to food and grocery, leisure, and faith facilitating Indians to connect with familiar representative notions of “home” in India. First, with grocery stores and restaurants, Indians practice transnational belonging through “gastro-nostalgia” using emotional connections evoked by Indian food items that remind them of India. Second, inter-generational “youthscapes” bring together first- and second-generation Indian immigrants by co-producing public events such as the Diwali and *Bal Vikas* programs and re-creating a sense of belonging through religious and cultural events celebrated in India. Third, Hindus from various nations form transnational panethnic alliances at the OKC Hindu Temple, an Indian Hindu religious site, thereby connecting to a transnational belonging to a broader Hindu transnational consciousness.

Thus, in their everyday “transnational pursuit of home” (Taylor, 2015), Indians in OKC connect to notions of India that represent home “as a symbolic space of familiarity” (Antonsich, 2010). Further, these constructions of home are constructed through daily practices of belonging because for OKC Indians, these everyday practices “are not only externally imposed but are internalized” (Carolissen, 2012). In this way, everyday practices enable Indians to re-create and (re-) produce belongings to “home” while remaining in the OKC metro area.

In Chapter Five, I show the negative effects of *confusion due to conflation* on individual as well as group identities of OKC Indians in the aftermath of 9/11 attacks. That is, in order to avoid the risk of being conflated as an Arab terrorist, Hindus and Sikhs make self-conscious modifications to appear less vulnerable to racial violence in the eyes of the predominately white Oklahoman population. However, by doing so, their sense of belonging, i.e., appearing as a Hindu or a Sikh in order to connect with their co-ethnics, is disrupted. First, by modifying their religious appearances, OKC's Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims negotiate what Antonsich (2010) refers to as the "politics of belonging" through "socio-spatial inclusion/exclusion" in hiding/revealing their religious appearances in public places. Second, by modifying their ethnic identities, members from two groups in particular (Gujaratis and Malayalees) have completely different experiences in how they manage public manifestations of transnational belonging. For example, in the case of the Gujaratis, not being able to use their *dandiya* sticks does not only disrupt their connection to *garba* but shows the persistence of anti-Muslim backlash that ripples across non-Muslim communities in OKC. Third, OKC Indians respond to their (mis-)labeled identities in cases when they are mistaken as Arabs and in doing so they are constantly needing to validate and communicate their "Indian" identities to people who might be less informed. De (2016, xii) notes that post-9/11 disruptive experiences affect immigrants' notions of their fundamental sense of belonging:

In the context of 9/11, scrutinous generalizations of the immigrant's body, cultural attire and practices, religious markers, gender, sexuality, and economic spaces become ways of revising and reexamining spaces of their belonging and racialization.

For Indians in OKC, modifying religious and ethnic appearances disrupts their sense of how they recognize “Indian-ness” both individually and among others due to externally imposed post-9/11 racializations.

*Ethno-religious networked life and connection/disconnection with “Indian-ness”*

In Chapter Six, I show the simultaneous networks Indians establish across local, national, and global scales within and outside the OKC metro. Within the metro, religious immigrant “hubs” serve as functional nodes of transnational religiosities. Within the Indian community, Malayalee Christians and *Swaminarayan* Hindus represent two groups where the co-joining of religious (for example, Hindus and Christians) and ethnic identities (correspondingly Gujaratis and Malayalees) can be surmised as *ethno-religious identities*. These groups maintain their transnational lives by maintaining *ethno-religious networked life* through proactive everyday practices of faith and community-building with their co-ethno-religious members both within as well as outside the U.S. However, some of these networks also serve as a source of disconnections with the larger Indian immigrant communities. The case of *Swaminarayan* Gujaratis distinguishing themselves from non-*Swaminarayan* Hindu Gujaratis, as well as other Indian immigrants outside the Gujarati ethnic heritage, points to the deep complexities in these ethno-religious networked lives of *Swaminarayan* Gujaratis. Specifically, *Swaminarayan* Gujaratis through their Gujarati-Hindu (hence, ethno-religious) connections practice transnational belonging within their ethno-religious network.

In the case of Malayalee Pentecostal Church in Bethany, located west of OKC, Malayalee Christians invite recently arrived members from India into their church thereby establishing a transnational connection to their “Christian brethren” in India while remaining in OKC. Levitt (2004) calls the transnational processes that immigrants negotiate between their homeland and their newly adopted nation as “keeping feet in two worlds,” a sort of “dual membership” they negotiate in

order to maintain their transitional lives. This duality is carried out outside the U.S., as OKC Indians connect with their families and friends in India using Internet technologies, particularly Skype video chat. In doing so, they construct online transnational identities that enable their connections to “Indian-ness” through face-to-face interactions in their chat sessions. In her work on Indian-American web, Mallapragada (2006) argues that these online connections “disrupt” traditional notions of belonging among Non-Resident Indians.<sup>43</sup> By “articulating diverse imaginations of home, homeland and homepage to the cultural discourses of family,” the Internet reconfigures transnational connections among Indians by reducing the spatial distance and enlarging the scope of transnational belonging through audio and visual relay of the emotional familiarity connected to people from home.

### Overall Contribution

*“Indian-ness”: the transnational everyday negotiations of belonging through racialized, ethno-religious, and interdependent networks of identities*

While discussing the fluid basis of identity constructions, Carolissen (2015, 635) noted the process to be ongoing and that “during constructions of belonging people constantly create *identities in the making*.” In my dissertation research, Indians in OKC are constantly forming subjective meanings in their daily life through their transnational practices of belonging. Specifically, for Indians these practices constitute negotiations that emerge within three facets of subjective experiences, racialized, ethno-religious, and interdependent networks of identities. In this dissertation, I provide a socio-spatial narrative to explain the inner-workings of everyday transnational practices of Indian identities

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<sup>43</sup> Non-Resident Indians or NRI’s are persons carrying Indian citizenship but living overseas. Typically anyone with a temporary visa living in the U.S. is considered as an NRI (See Moorti, 2005).

and belonging. In doing all this, this dissertation research may serve as a launching pad to inspire other geographic studies on small metro geographies with significant immigrant and ethnic populations.

#### Recommendations for future research

“The unexamined life is not worth living”

–Socrates (as told to Plato in “*The Apology*” in 399 B.C.)

When I first started thinking about this research topic, I was attempting to find answers to my own immigrant life. A life as an Indian on a temporary U.S. visa, living in Oklahoma, and facing a range of responses from non-Indians on who I was. Before I left India when I was barely 21, I was neither questioned on who I was as an Indian, nor did I question myself on how my life fit among other immigrants, including Indians and non-Indians with regards to my adjustments within the American society.

One of the more immediate recommendations of this dissertation research is to extend the urgent call for researchers to bring greater understanding to the inner-workings of identities among under-researched immigrant communities. Specifically, untapped opportunities for geographers to investigate non-major urban areas such as Kansas City (MO), Charlotte (NC), Salt Lake City (UT), and Columbus (OH) where the immigrant population while being smaller, requires greater attention because they simply are not represented in “mainstream” immigration studies, which focus on major urban areas including, for example, New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago. This will not only enrich the collective epistemologies of immigrant research but provide opportunities and possibilities for public policy agencies to gain a greater understanding to help support fair-immigration policies.

As for the Indians in the OKC metro, my research provides access for researchers as well as community leaders to positively engage with the various communities and groups that I describe. By fostering these connections and expanding the transnational limits for Indians, I am hopeful for raising awareness and public outreach to bring Indians and non-Indians together. I am hopeful that this will not only reduce the negative experiences but also foster positive experiences for smaller immigrant and ethnic communities similar to Oklahoma City.



## APPENDIX I

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE GUIDE

Research Question A	Research Question B	Research Question C
<p>1. How long have you lived in OKC area?</p> <p>a. Are you a first generation immigrant?</p> <p>b. Where did you first arrive in OKC?</p> <p>c. Why did you select OKC?</p> <p>d. What are you currently doing?</p>	<p>6. How do you think OKC area has shaped your South Asian identity?</p> <p>a. What do you think are the differences between being an OKC South Asian compared to elsewhere in America?</p>	<p>11. What forms of connections do you maintain with other South Asians in America?</p> <p>a. In which cities do you have these connections?</p> <p>b. How long have you maintained these connections?</p>
<p>2. What commercial resources in OKC area do you access that you consider as South Asian? (Examples: stores, restaurants etc.)</p> <p>a. Do you meet other South Asians in these places?</p> <p>b. How often do you visit these places?</p>	<p>7. Do you identify yourself as a “South Asian,” or “Indian,” or “Indian-American”?</p> <p>a. Why do you think these forms of identification have changed for you?</p> <p>b. Why does being in OKC area help your identity?</p>	<p>12. Do you have connections with South Asian community in nearby Dallas or other large cities in the Great Plains? (Example: Kansas City, Houston, Minneapolis, etc.).</p> <p>a. How do you stay in touch with them?</p>
<p>3. What leisure resources in OKC area do you access that you consider as “typical” South Asian visits? (Example: religious places, community centers, etc.)</p> <p>a. Do you meet other South Asians in these places?</p> <p>b. How often do you visit these places?</p> <p>c. What happens there? What do you do there?</p>	<p>8. Do you have interactions with other South Asians in America, and if so, how is their identity different from yours?</p> <p>a. In your interactions with other S. Asians, why do you think OKC is unique for South Asians?</p> <p>b. As a South Asian, do you miss anything in OKC area that you would like to see?</p>	<p>13. How do you maintain connections with your friends, family, and relatives in South Asia?</p> <p>a. What forms of traditional communication do you use in order to communicate with them? (Examples: phone, emails, etc.).</p> <p>b. What forms of social media do you use in order to communicate with them? (Examples: FaceBook, Orkut, Twitter, etc.).</p>
<p>4. Can you identify some public places important for all South Asians in OKC area? (Example: religious places, stores).</p> <p>a. Why do you think these places are important for S. Asians?</p> <p>b. What do you see here that reminds you of South Asia?</p> <p>c. What do you do there?</p>	<p>9. How do you think non-South Asian institutions such as government help you maintain S. Asian lifestyle?</p> <p>a. Can you identify specific departments or officials who have been particularly helpful or not helpful?</p> <p>b. Can you identify places outside OKC? (Example: OU or OSU cultural events).</p>	<p>14. What forms of resources are available in OKC area to help you maintain your connections with your friends, family, and relatives in South Asia? (Examples: Indian travel agents, stores carrying phone cards to India, etc.).</p> <p>a. Are there specific times of the year when these resources are more utilized?</p>

OSU IRB APPROVAL DOCUMENTATION

**Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board**

Date: Wednesday, May 02, 2012  
IRB Application No AS1252  
Proposal Title: Everyday Spaces and Performances of Identities: South Asians in Oklahoma City Area

Reviewed and  
Processed as: Exempt

**Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved Protocol Expires: 5/1/2013**

Principal  
Investigator(s):

Aswin Subanthor	Rebecca Sheehan
337 Murray Hall	364 Murray
Stillwater, OK 74078	Stillwater, OK 74074

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The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

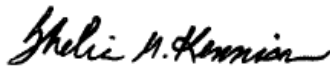
☒ The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Beth McTernan in 219 Cordell North (phone: 405-744-5700, beth.mcternan@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,



Shelia Kennison, Chair  
Institutional Review Board

## APPENDIX III

### FLYER USED FOR RECRUITING INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

#### **RESEARCH STUDY ON ASIAN INDIANS IN OKLAHOMA CITY!**

- Are you an Asian Indian and resident of Oklahoma City area?
- Do you want to share your everyday experience as an Asian Indian in Oklahoma?

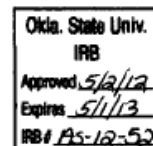
If you answered YES to these questions you may be eligible to participate in one of the first such research studies in the United States. The purpose of this study is to research the geography of Asian Indians and their everyday lives in and around Oklahoma City. You will be expected to be observed in your daily everyday spaces as well as a one-on-one interview based on your convenience.

Asian Indian adults (21 years of age and older) are eligible. There will be no rewards for the participants to take part in this study. This research is being conducted by Mr. Aswin Subanthore, a Ph.D. student in the Department of Geography from Oklahoma State University.

Participants will have access to the final study and made available as a Ph.D. dissertation report from Oklahoma State University.

Please call Aswin at 405-385-3066 or email him at [aswin@okstate.edu](mailto:aswin@okstate.edu) for more information.

*Thank you!*



## APPENDIX IV

### INFORMED CONSENT FORM

#### APPENDIX C: Informed Consent Document.

**Project Title:** Everyday Spaces and Performances of Identities: South Asians in Metropolitan Oklahoma City.

**Investigator:** Mr. Aswin Subanthore  
Department of Geography  
Oklahoma State University

**Purpose:** The purpose of this research is to investigate the geography of everyday life of Asian Indians who live in and around Oklahoma City area. Research on Asian Indians and the places where they live and work has not been researched well. This is because a majority of research has focused primarily in Eastern and Western coast of the United States. Your participation as an Asian Indian is very significant and will help me complete my Ph.D. degree from Oklahoma State University.

**Procedures:** This will be a one-on-one interview. This interview will be audio recorded by the Investigator Aswin Subanthore. A questionnaire guide has been included with this letter. ~~Your answers to these questions will be audio recorded.~~ The interview has questions about your everyday experiences and places that are important to your identification as an Asian Indian Oklahoma City and its surrounding areas.

**Risks of Participation:** There are no known risks associated with this project which are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

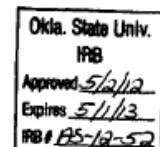
**Benefits:** It is expected that this study will be among the first to signify the importance of Asian Indians in Oklahoma as well as the Great Plains region. My Ph.D. dissertation report will be available publicly through Oklahoma State University. In addition, I will be presenting my research in conferences as well as publishing them in scholarly research journals.

**Confidentiality:** All names and personal information will be anonymous as no names will be recorded since each participant will be identified by a number. All audio recordings will be stored under the watch of Aswin Subanthore under lock and key in his office at room 346 Murray Hall in Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK 74078. The audio recordings will be destroyed after transcription. Your signed copy of this consent form will be stored separately from data and under the watch of Aswin Subanthore in room 346 Murray Hall, OSC Campus. Data will be reported by way of a Ph.D. dissertation report and published articles in journals as well as research conferences. The Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has the authority to inspect consent records and data files to assure compliance with approved procedures.

**Compensation:** There is no compensation for your participation in this research.

**Contacts:** If you have any questions about the research or your rights as a participant in this study, please feel free to contact Aswin Subanthore (Principal Investigator) at 414-208-8372 or email at [aswin@okstate.edu](mailto:aswin@okstate.edu). You may also contact Mr. Subanthore's research advisor, Dr. Rebecca Sheehan from Oklahoma State University at 405-744-6250 or by email at [rebecca.sheehan@okstate.edu](mailto:rebecca.sheehan@okstate.edu). If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact Dr. Shelia Kennison, IRB Chair, 219 Cordell North, Stillwater, OK 74078, 405-744-3377 or [irb@okstate.edu](mailto:irb@okstate.edu).

Updated: May 1, 2012.



## APPENDIX V

### DETAILED LIST OF ALL INTERVIEWEES PARTICIPATING IN THE STUDY<sup>44</sup>

No.	Location	Name <sup>^</sup>	Occupation	Gender	Ethnicity**	Generation	Religion	Approx. Age
1 & 2	Norman	Mrs. & Mr. Raj	Mr. Raj works for an IT company; Mrs. Raj as a health administrator in OKC	Male & Female	Bihari Hindu	First	Hinduism	45-50
3	Hindu Temple, OKC	Mr. Hritik	Head Priest in Hindu Temple	Male	Telugu Hindu	First	Hinduism	Late 40s/early 50s
4	OKC	Mr. Kumar	Founding member of Indo-American Chamber of Commerce of Oklahoma	Male	Kannada Hindu	First	Hinduism	Mid-50s
5	OKC	Mr. Muthu	Member of Oklahoma Tamil Sangham	Male	Tamil Hindu	First	Hinduism	40s
6	Norman	Dr. Suresh	Prof. at OU	Male	Kannada Hindu	First	Hinduism	Mid-50s
7	OKC	Fr. Thomas	Pastor at Syro-Malabar Catholic Church	Male	Malayalee Christian	First	Christianity	Mid-40s
8	OKC	Ms. Mona	President, India Association of Oklahoma	Female	North Indian Hindu	First	Hinduism	Mid-40s
9	Edmond	Imam	Founder and Imam, Islamic Society of Greater Oklahoma City	Male	Palestinian-American Muslim	One-and-half <sup>45</sup>	Islam	Mid-to-late 40s
10	OKC	Mr. Gupta	Worker, BAPS <i>Swaminarayan</i> Hindu Temple	Male	Gujrati Hindu	First	Hinduism	Mid-40s

<sup>44</sup> ^ Names changed for anonymity

\*\*By ethnicity, I am suggesting the regional ethnicity associated with the interviewees. For more on regional ethnicity, see Berger (1977) and more recently Tsui-Auch, (2005). I am a native Indian and because of my experience with a variety of Indians, I felt confident in ascertaining this information. Within the Indian regionalization, I am even able to go a step further and make observations on their ethnic affiliation such as “Gujarti Hindu” or “Tamil Christian,” from the state of Gujarat or Tamil Nadu respectively.

<sup>45</sup> By 1.5 generation, I mean born in India but arrived into United States before 5 years old.

11	OKC	Mr. Sam	Volunteer, Mar Thoma Church of Oklahoma	Male	Malayalee Christian	Second	Christianity	Late-20s
12	OKC	Mr. George	Pastor, Mar Thoma Church	Male	Malayalee Christian	One-and-half	Christianity	Mid-40s
13	OKC	Dr. Singh	Faculty at Southwestern Oklahoma State University (SWOSU)	Male	Punjabi Sikh	First	Sikhism	Mid-40s
14	OKC	Mr. Kaur	Member, Sikh Gurudwara of Oklahoma	Male	Punjabi Sikh	First	Sikhism	Mid-60s
15	Weatherford/Mustang	Ms. Pam	Student, SWOSU	Female	Malayalee Christian	Second	Christianity	Early-20s
16	OKC	Mr. Ram	Owner, Indian grocery store	Male	Malayalee Christian	First	Christianity	Mid-40s
17	Stillwater	Mr. Gopal	President, OSU Indian Student Association	Male	Telugu Hindu	First	Hinduism	Early-20s
18	OKC	Ms. Rani	Devotee, OKC Hindu Temple	Female	Gujarati Hindu	First	Hinduism	Mid-30s
19	Moore	Mr. Shah	Owner, Himalayas Restaurant	Male	Punjabi Sikh	First	Sikhism	Mid-50s
20	Norman	Mr. Ram	Owner, Misal Indian Restaurant	Male	Gujrati Hindu	First	Hinduism	Mid-40s
21	Norman	Mr. Das	Co-owner, Taste of India	Male	Gujarati Hindu	First	Hinduism	40s
22	OKC	Ms. Rita	Customer, Misal Indian Restaurant	Female	Gujarati Hindu	First	Hinduism	Early 50s
23	OKC	Mr. Nas	Customer, Spices of India	Male		First	Hinduism	Early 40s
24	OKC	Mr. Jay	Customer, <i>Gopuram</i> Restaurant	Male	Punjabi Sikh	First	Sikhism	Mid-40s
25	Midwest City	Mr. Ajay	Volunteer, Rose State College	Male	Gujarati Hindu	First	Hinduism	Late 40s

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