

4-1-2012

Junaid Rana. Terrifying Muslims: Race and Labor in the South Asian Diaspora. Durham & London: Duke University Press. 2011.

Mohammad A. Siddiqi Ph.D.
Western Illinois University, m-siddiqi@wiu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/jigs>



Part of the [Anthropology Commons](#), [Critical and Cultural Studies Commons](#), [Environmental Studies Commons](#), and the [Sociology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Siddiqi, Mohammad A. Ph.D. (2012) "Junaid Rana. Terrifying Muslims: Race and Labor in the South Asian Diaspora. Durham & London: Duke University Press. 2011.," *Journal of International and Global Studies*: Vol. 3: No. 2, Article 17.

DOI: 10.62608/2158-0669.1102

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/jigs/vol3/iss2/17>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Digital Commons@Lindenwood University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of International and Global Studies by an authorized editor of Digital Commons@Lindenwood University. For more information, please contact phuffman@lindenwood.edu.

Junaid Rana. *Terrifying Muslims: Race and Labor in the South Asian Diaspora*. Durham & London: Duke University Press. 2011.

This book is about the impact of the “American War on Terror” on Pakistani migrants in the United States in the post 9/11 environment. “In the post-9/11 Age of Terror,” says Rana (5), “[Pakistan] seems to have shifted geographically to become part of the Middle East.” In Rana’s view the entire Muslim world is treated as a single region in the context of the global war on terrorism and in the emerging context of the “American Nationalism.” He argues that “the conceptions of globalized racism are based in the circulation of specific racialized regionalisms that imagines the Muslim world as connected and interdependent” (9).

The book consists of an introduction (“Migrants in Neoliberal World”); Part I (“Racializing Muslims”), consisting of three chapters; Part II (“Globalizing Labor”), also consisting of three chapters; and a concluding chapter (“Racial Feelings in the Post-9/11 World”). In these chapters, the author explores the ways Pakistani labor migrants are made sense of and the ways they make sense of their world in today’s global economy. Racialization is the key term that the author uses throughout the book, and it is the main focus of this study. He defines racialization as generalization in which a vastly different and widely dispersed Muslim population is conceived of as a single entity, a “race” that is considered to pose a major threat to the US hegemony in the world. It is because of racialization, he argues, that Pakistan is considered a “terror” and “trouble” while its neighbor, India, is instead recognized for “Bollywood” and “technology” (6). The three chapters in Part I frame the elaborate process of racialization that treats Muslims, especially Pakistani migrant Muslims, as a threat contributing to the ongoing war on terror. In Part II, the conceptual arguments explored in the first part are further advanced by outlining how South Asian migration and the labor diaspora have historically been a part of the global racial system (18). The author concludes, in the last chapter, that the racism against Pakistani immigrants in the U.S. after 9/11 is state-endorsed and that the United States uses all of its power and might, through laws such as the “Patriot Act,” to racialize Muslims and treat them as terrorists (172). This results in unimaginable problems for Muslims here (as well as in Pakistan) when they are sent back or choose to go back to avoid detention, torture and harassment.

In chapter one, “Islam and Racism,” the author discusses Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism in the context of Euro-American imagination. The Muslim is constructed as a threat to “White Christian” supremacy. The author has provided a detailed review of literature that traces the relationship between religion and race. “From the conquest of the New World to the transatlantic slave trade,” he argues, “Islam figured as an important component in the early U.S. racial formation” (31). Islamophobia, according to Rana, is a particular kind of racism that is grounded in the fear (on the part of the Christian majority) of the perceived threat of social and/or economic deprivation resulting from the “rise” of the Muslim minority (29). The hatred and fear of Islam and Muslims make Muslims in the U.S. simultaneously a religious category and a category that encompasses a broad concept of race (31). The anti-immigrant racism and Islamophobia collapse people of different nationalities, ethnicities and colors such as Arabs, Blacks, Latinos, South Asians and even white Muslims into a singular, threatening and racialized Muslim category. This then disenfranchises the entire community and puts its members at greater risk of violence, and criminalization. The title of the chapter, “Islam and Racism” appears slightly misleading as the chapter really does not explore the Islamic position on racism and

racialization. Instead, what it really explores is Islamophobia, racism and Pakistani migrant labor. In this context, Islam comes into picture as the dominant religion of the people who are being racialized. As such, a better title of the chapter would have been, “Islamophobia, Racism and Pakistani Migrant labor.”

Chapter two, “Racial Panic, Islamic Peril and Terror,” explores the role that panics and perceived perils have played in creating a discourse of fear and terror in formations of race in the U.S., leading to anti-immigrant narratives. The chapter is based on the author’s ethnographic field work conducted in New York and in several locations in Pakistan after 9/11. In analyzing the collected data, the author explains how race and religion are combined in a rhetoric that draws on terror as well as illegality and criminality to police migrants and control them. “Terror,” as defined by the author, “is about manufacturing fear” (55). As such he says, “The ‘War on Terror’ seeks to manage this fear by making the categories of friend and enemy coherent” (Anidjar, 55). Thus, a state of panic is deliberately created to justify illegal detention, violence, and deportation of immigrants who may not have any connection to any terrorist group and who may not have any intention to commit an act of terror. The author provides a number of case studies to substantiate his claim that the so-called terrorist threat is used as a justification for the racial containment of Muslims, their demonization, and the tactics of policing in the U.S. In mapping American orientalism and Islamic peril, the author argues that the American orientalists provided a conceptual basis, a vocabulary and a framework for homogenizing as well as for dividing groups of people who migrated to the U.S. from different parts of the world. “The racial formation of Muslim immigrants,” says Rana “is made apparent in the use of the discourse of terror, racial panic, and Islamic peril” (72-73).

In chapter three, “Imperial Targets,” the author presents data to show the ways in which Muslims—both Arabs and the South Asians—are targeted for racial discrimination, violent hate crimes and state policing and harassment. The author explains through the critical analysis of visual culture, specifically ethnographic cinema, that Pakistani immigrants in the U.S. are understood simultaneously as South Asian and as Middle Eastern by combining national origin, religion, ethnicity, and culture into a single conception of race and racial formation.

In chapter four, “Labor Diaspora and the Global Racial System,” the author answers the question, “of how the migration industry produces migrants.” He also explores the racial and class implications of labor flows in the global racial system. He compares the current situation with those of the labor migration in 19th and early 20th centuries and describes the process of exploitation to which the labor migrants are subjected.

Chapter five, “Migration, Illegality and the Security State,” traces the relationship of Pakistani migrants within the state system of transnational migration between Pakistan, the Persian Gulf countries, and the United States. “The Pakistani migrant,” argues the author, “thus becomes the Muslim migrant and hence, nation and religion are articulated in terms of race.” The author concludes that the United States plays a key role in racializing Muslims as terrorists through its “War on Terror,” immigration laws and the Patriot Act. The author cites many reports including those published by the Amnesty International and the ACLU to document the violent and harsh treatment of the migrants who are detained. Through scores of cases of Pakistani migrants who have been systematically harassed, detained, and/or deported, the author argues that these migrants are victim, in fact, of state-endorsed racism (172).

In chapter six, “The Muslim Body,” the author examines the process of detention and deportation of Muslims and analyzes the impact of these treatments on reverse migration and the criminalization of an entire class of people. The author sees the detention and deportation of

Pakistani Muslims as an imperialistic tool. He argues that in the process detention and deportation, the detainees are subjected to extreme forms of violence. In the post-9/11 U.S., he argues that the Muslim immigrants have become the scapegoats in the U.S. public sphere (158-159). After providing data and detailed analysis of specific case studies, the author concludes that the U.S. has been following a state-sanctioned policy of racism in the post-9/11 era in which extreme forms of violence against detainees and deportees have become a routine. This, according to the author, is the definition of "Sovereign violence" (172).

In the conclusion, "Racial Feelings in the Post-9/11 World," the author suggests the parameters of future research studies about the U.S. racial foundations, the theory of global racial systems, and the future of critical race studies. By examining the critical depiction of Muslim migrants, the author extrapolates the future of labor diasporas in the transnational world. "Labor migration," the author concludes, "is an integral part of the global racial system that historically has combined conceptions of race, class, gender, religion, and sexuality to maintain subordinated subject population" (177). In the end, however, he concludes his work on an optimistic note by pointing out that several NGOs and the global justice movements are growing every day and that they continue to expose global racism as nothing but a system of modern violence, terror, and exploitation.

This detailed study of racialization of Muslims is an important contribution to the ethnographic and ethnic studies in the U.S. as well as in South Asia, from where a large number of U.S. migrant labors have come (the migration of South Asians beginning mainly during the late sixties and continuing through mid-nineties). This study may also be useful in examining how the U.S. treats other migrant populations, especially the rapidly growing Latino population. The anti-immigration laws in Arizona, Alabama, and some other states seem to indicate a similar process of racialization of the Latino population in the name of security and economic downturn. Junaid Rana has done a remarkable job, through both the empirical data and thorough analysis of dozens of cases, of establishing the connection between the state power and racialization.

Mohammad A. Siddiqi, Ph. D.
Western Illinois University
m-siddiqi@wiu.edu