

Presentation Title:

Wearing “Our Sword”: Post –September 11 Activism Among South Asian Muslim Women in New York

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1. Aim

This paper investigates the strategies and forms used in social movement among second-generation Muslim women and how their socioeconomic status and geographical environments influence their choice in the process of their social activism.

2. Data & Method

For this purpose, I conducted my fieldwork with two groups of young women associated with the Muslim Student Association at two public universities in New York: one is located in an upper-middle-class white suburban area and the other is in a lower-middle-class racially-mixed metropolitan area. I also conducted in-depth interviews with three group leaders and 17 other members of each group (totaling 40 interviews).

3. Results

The research shows the ways in which, through the limited options given to them under their ethnic patriarchy and racial status, these women in both areas actively embody the idea of bicultural feminism in their social movement by using what has been a stigmatized image of veiling as a major tool for their activism. While these two groups use different strategies according to the race and religion of the “audience,” both take advantage of the visibility of their dress code and attempt to publicize positive images of Islam, resulting in increasing their solidarity and developing strong pan-Islamic identity.

4. Conclusion

The implications of this study are that the future orientation of political boundaries and activism associated with Asian women, especially Muslims, will be along the lines of their religious identity, in contrast to previous generations, which sought to reduce ethnic and religious disparities among them (Espiritu, 1993; Chang, 2001; Lien, 2001; Wei, 2004). In the aftermath of September 11 the Muslim women studied here believe their social experiences, issues, and consequent political strategies have significantly departed from those of other groups of Asian women. Instead, the emergent generation may expand their membership to other Muslim women’s groups nationally and internationally, as increasing media attention is devoted to the political tension between the Western world and Middle Eastern nations.

References

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