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PAPER ABSTRACT submitted for presentation consideration at the annual meeting of the Association of Asian American Studies, Seattle, April 25-27, 2024

PAPER TITLE: INTERROGATING WORKING-CLASS AND UNDOCUMENTED SOUTH ASIAN TRANSMIGRANT EXPERIENCES IN A PAKISTANI DRAMA SERIES, JACKSON HEIGHTS

KEYWORDS | *Jackson Heights* | Transnational lives | South Asian Muslim immigrant experience | Pakistani television drama | Pakistan

ABSTRACT WORD COUNT: 298 words

ABSTRACT: In this paper, I examine two intersecting sites for the representation of working-class and undocumented South Asian transmigrants. One, I analyze a critically acclaimed Urdu-language Pakistani television drama titled *Jackson Heights* that is set in the neighborhood of Jackson Heights, a major hub for South Asian life in New York City. *Jackson Heights* explores the lives of working class Pakistani transmigrants who reside in Jackson Heights. Two, I draw on ethnographic research among working-class and undocumented South Asians in Los Angeles County and refer to the life history of an undocumented transmigrant to illustrate the hopes, fears and struggles that are depicted in the drama series. A consideration of these sites enables due consideration of textual and extra-textual modalities of transnational lives and eschews the privileging of ethnographic representation over media representations.

Referring to storylines in the drama series and to the life history narrative of an interlocutor in Los Angeles, I critically discuss the fractures in the maintenance of transnational familial relationships in the homeland, and the everyday negotiations of racialized marginality, exclusion and elision in the United States. Yet, perpetuating the myth of the American Dream and material success in the United States, South Asian transmigrants selectively share information with family members in the homeland. Geographical distance, coupled with remittances and gifts sent to family on a regular basis enables working-class transmigrants to perpetuate the myth of success and hide their struggles in the United States.

In spite of scholarly attention to transnational South Asian media circuits in the last two decades, Urdu-language television dramas that are produced in Pakistan and circulate globally among *desi* and international audiences, are conspicuously absent in such analyses. A scholarly focus on Pakistani television drama is a corrective to such omissions and contributes to interdisciplinary literature on contemporary transnational experiences.

AUTHOR CV

Ahmed Afzal (he/him/his) completed his undergraduate education at Vassar College (BA, Self-Designed Major: Third World Cultures, 1992), and his graduate education at the London School of Economics (MSc, Cultural Geography, 1996) and at Yale University (MPhil and PhD, Cultural Anthropology, 2005). Afzal has taught at Colgate University, State University of New York at Purchase, and California State University, Stanislaus. Afzal is currently Associate Professor of Anthropology, and a contributing faculty in the Department of Asian American Studies at California State University, Fullerton. Afzal is the author of *Lone Star Muslims: Transnational Lives and the South Asian Experience in Texas* (NYU Press, 2015). Afzal's research interests include ethnographically grounded research on globalization, transnationalism and cosmopolitanism; gender and sexuality cross-culturally, and mass media industries.