are rarely seen working in non-family owned stores. Yet, in New York, they are a familiar presence in the service economy. Differing migration patterns are a bigger influence than religion. The bulk of the Pakistani and Bangladeshi migration came from rural and working-class communities in underdeveloped areas (Pakistanis from Mirpur and Kashmir, Bangladeshis from Sylhet).[5] By contrast, the Asian migration to the US went through a restrictive filter of job categories, student visas, or family reunification, resulting in a more educated immigration pool.[6]

The *Economist* recently concluded that, even after 9/11, Muslims have better opportunities in the US than in Europe. In line with its ideological stance, the magazine lays the blame for Europe's "Muslim problem" on the mammaries of the welfare state.[7] The problem, it seems, is the "excessive generosity" of the European state, which "encourages" Muslims to be lazy loafers. Dutch law professor Afshin Ellian posits:

Five years ago, my Afghan sister-in-law emigrated to the United States, where she now works, pays taxes and takes part in public life ... In Europe, she would still be undergoing treatment from social workers for her trauma -- and she still wouldn't have got a job or won acceptance as a citizen.[8]

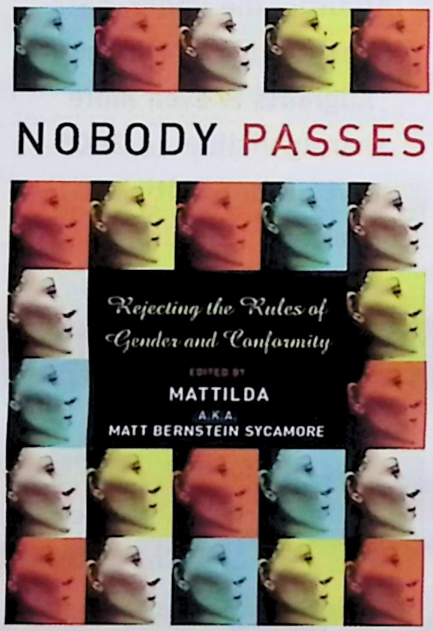
These formulations fit smoothly with the apocalyptic fears of British journalist Melanie Phillips, who talks about the growing danger from "home-grown Jihadis."[9]

More nuanced writers, such as Sukhdev Sandhu, also detect signs of a transcontinental divide in opportunities. Exploring the devastated town of Manningham (scene of 1995 and 2001 race riots with Asian youth fighting police and white gangs), he documents the pervasive sense of dead-end life for Pakistani migrants:

"Ambitious local kids feel themselves orphaned, doubly anachronistic ... So they flee ... In New York last year I found myself in a cab driven by a Bradford Pakistani who had spent the previous four decades working in a factory [in England]. 'Why did I stay so long there?' he cried. 'No opportunity, no future. Pure waste.'"[10]

Maybe things will be all right for Mahmud, after all? At least he's not in Europe? More of a future on this side? American dream, land of endless opportunity?

Mahmud's would-be profession is one rare time that being a woman could reduce potential friction. In spite of the example of Leila Khaled and other female hijackers, the "terrorist profile" remains the Muslim male. This is not to say women are not checked at airports, but within a different calculation -- an "unknowing" mule or a seduced naif. So a Mahmuda may have a slightly easier time becoming a pilot. But then again, crazy patriarchy and power insecurities will trip up a female pilot in other ways.



Back to our dinner. The evening ends well. We have a nice bit of banter with Mahmud and promise to return. Yes, please make a reservation in advance. I'll make sure you get the best table. We move on in search of nightspots. The out-of-towners want to go to a club. The rest of us pooh-pooh the idea of paying to get in. Only tourists do that. Our splendid unity is abruptly broken up by the cool factor.

Meanwhile, what about Mahmud? Is he a crucible or an exception? Will he sail ahead unencumbered by a name, a presumed religion and national origin, or bump into a glass ceiling? If there is a growing societal consensus that Muslims, especially men, cannot be trusted with jobs in national intelligence, biological research, airport security, or air travel, how will he even know? Job discrimination no longer needs to be clearly enunciated. Quiet execution and a gradual sidelining is more likely.

To take the long view, systematic race-based discrimination did not begin in 2001. Anti-black profiling is the original, well-worn template. The addition of a new "other" is only a slight variation in the formula. There is a slight shift in context as well. From drug dealer, criminal, and lazy worker to security threat, disloyal citizen and ticking time bomb. From driving while black to flying while brown. A short, strange trip.

How does it feel to be a problem?

1. Michael Lewis, Liar's Poker: Rising Through the Wreckage of Wall Street, W.W. Norton, 1989.
2. Rescue Mission, Time, April 3 2006.
3. For one example from Silicon Valley, see backtobangladesh.blogspot.com.
4. SAJA.org, interview by Deepti Hajela, April 14 2006.
5. Research by Tariq Modood and Richard Berthoud.
6. Until 1972, no visa was required for those coming to England from Commonwealth countries (this law was changed when Uganda's expelled Asians started arriving en masse).
7. The Diversity lottery visa that began in the 1990s widened the immigration pool from Asia, but even here there were minimum educational requirements.
8. Borrowing from the title of Upamanyu Chatterjee's novel in a different context.
9. "Eurabia: The myth and reality of Islam in Europe", The Economist, June 24, 2006.
10. Melanie Phillips, Londonistan, Gibson Square, 2006.
11. Usman Saeed and Sukhdev Sandhu, I'll Get My Coat, Book Works, 2005.

Naeem Mohaiemen *works in New York and Dhaka. This essay is adapted from a chapter in the anthology Nobody Passes: Rejecting The Rules of Gender & Conformity, edited by Matt Bernstein Sycamore, Seal Press, 2006.*