



FRANKFURT

LAHORE

DELHI

MULTIDIMENSIONALITY

Diaspora communities are not fixed and homogeneous. Instead, they are evolving sites of sociality and belonging – and the identities of their members are being constantly renegotiated. In Nijhawan’s research, the multidimensionality of precarious diasporas is a key concept, encapsulating different layers of socioeconomic, sociolegal and religious precarity, which exist alongside high levels of endurance and resilience.

The innovative part of Nijhawan’s work in this area involves interpreting and understanding the precarious marginalisation of Sikh and Ahmadi communities in the context of insecure immigration status, a lack of secure income and being subject to different power brokers. For example, he is exploring how individuals who came as refugees understand and articulate their suffering through ethical concepts and practices of religiosity as well as their aspirations for future change. He demonstrates how the material conditions of precarious status weigh heavily on the ability to recover from past trauma and on the manner through which religious selves are made and unmade in a situation in which everyday survival is paramount.

MARGINALISATION

Islamophobia is an all-too-familiar term at present, referring to negative sentiments and widespread societal prejudice against Muslims or the religion of Islam. This hostility has existed for a long time but it has been exacerbated by events in more recent years, most notably the 9/11 attacks in the US and the subsequent ‘war on terror’ discourse. Nijhawan shows how right-wing political groups – such as Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the West (PEGIDA) – have capitalised on negative sentiments towards Muslims and other immigrants. He traces the contours of a movement that originally took the form of local anti-mosque protests – specifically targeted at the Ahmadiyya community in Germany in the 1990s – before spilling over into the Europe-wide anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies of today.

The mobilisation of Islamophobia has complex social effects on Muslim and other immigrant communities. Prejudiced discourse brands specific minority religious groups as inassimilable in mainstream society. In extreme cases, this can lead to the political persecution of minority religious groups through state-condoned acts against religious heterodoxy. In other cases, it can lead to a general suspicion about the beliefs of minority groups, consequently unleashing a powerful exclusionary force against the participation of such groups in mainstream society. As a group facing both of these forms of exclusionary violence, Ahmadi have had to constantly negotiate their status as a ‘persecuted group’. This has involved legal debates as to what constitutes a genuine Ahmadi and political claims that call for their recognition as a moderate and peaceful religious minority.

MICHAEL NIJHAWAN is an anthropologist and associate professor in Sociology at York University, Toronto. His Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)-funded research focuses on violence, memory, religion and migration, with a focus on South Asian communities. His forthcoming book is titled *The Precarious Diasporas of Sikh and Ahmadiyya Generations* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

