CHAPTER 2

Transcultural Placemaking

Intertwined Spaces of Sacred and Secular on Devon Avenue, Chicago

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Devon Avenue in Chicago is an ethnic and immigrant retail strip home to South Asians, Jews, Russians, Latin Americans, Koreans, and native-born white Americans of various ethnic backgrounds. This cultural diversity belies any attempts to categorize this street as a site of a single community; rather, landscapes of different ethnic groups are interwoven into a complex tapestry. The architectural character of Devon Avenue is similar to many multiethnic retail streets in US cities. Typically, such streets include dense rows of multi-storied mixed-use buildings occupied by sequential waves of new immigrants, for whom the street becomes the initial launching pad into America. Narrow storefronts with eye-catching signage distinguish the buildings along such streets. Examples of such streets include New York’s Lower East Side and Chicago’s Lower West Side. However, the highly visual architectural quality of these spaces makes it difficult for us to see them as lived environments of a diverse group of people. The ephemeral and experiential interpretations of these places by different stakeholders may escape the gaze of a material culture scholar who studies building types. Architectural historians focus on who built a building, the construction technologies, and material details. But what happens when the users of the buildings change and new tenants occupy old buildings? In Devon Avenue we see instances where users temporarily transform parts of a building into very specific kinds of places which after those users leave then revert to what they were before. We encounter situations where one group of individuals uses a space in a certain way while another group simultaneously uses the same space differently.

The geography of Devon Avenue has a long multicultural past (Archer & Santoro, 2007; Jones, 1995; Koval et al., 2006). Jewish families moved into the area after World War II in the neighborhoods between Damen and Kedzie Avenues; by 1963, there were around 48,000 Jews in the West Rogers Park area (Cutler, 1996; Jones, 1995). In the 1980s, the now-aging Jewish inhabitants and their children began moving into suburban locations such as Skokie, Buffalo Grove, Highland Park, and Deerfield, and newer immigrants moved in. The remnants of the old community can still be seen in the remaining Orthodox neighborhoods that surround local synagogues on the western end of the avenue and in the northern neighborhoods of West Rogers Park, Peterson Park, and all of the immediately surrounding areas. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, Russian Jews have repopulated much of the west...
end of Devon. By the late 1970s newcomers of South Asian origin set up businesses that catered to a new ethnic clientele. Initial stores carried spices and clothes; soon stores selling electronic items, bags, and jewelry appeared (Kalayil, 2009). They were interspersed amidst pre-existing Jewish and non-ethnic stores, creating a checkered multicultural street fabric. Today, Devon Avenue serves as a point of entry for many less-skilled or poorer immigrants. A large population of South Asian elderly lives in the immediate vicinity of West Ridge and Rogers Park neighborhoods. Since the late 1990s, Muslim immigrants from Bangladesh and Pakistan and India have settled between North California Avenue and North Ridge Avenue.

This trend was reflected in the Greater Chicago region. For instance, Kniss and Numrich (2007) documented the increase of mosques in the Greater Chicago area from pre-1965, when only a handful served various groups and locations, to over sixty in 1997. In 2008 there were over 100 religious centers, many newly established ones serving the second and third generations of the community (M. Hermansen, personal communication, March 2009; Numrich, 1997, 2005; Schmidt, 2004). In proximity to Devon Avenue, there also developed centers of Islamic worship to cater to the new residents. These worship spaces ranged from the Jama Masjid (mosque) with a capacity of thousands for regular Friday services, to a dozen basement gathering places that attract as many as several hundred male worshippers per location on Fridays, while simultaneously functioning as schools and community centers throughout the rest of the week (M. Hermansen, personal communication, 2008, March 2009). Other services catering to local Muslim residents include legal firms, Islamic bookstores, Islamic schools, halal produce stores, women’s and children’s services, and restaurants with prayer spaces.

Unlike Herbert Gans’s (1982) famous urban villages where immigrants live and interact almost exclusively with members of their in-group within the safe boundaries of their ethnic neighborhood, the situation on Devon Avenue is quite different. For instance, if you step out of the IQRA book center (2749 W. Devon Avenue), an Islamic bookstore, you cross paths with non-Muslim patients emerging from the Prism Medical Center (2744 W. Devon Avenue) or newly arrived Bangladeshis and Russians entering the nearby Reliable Driving School. While the customers in the Tiger International Video store (2750 W. Devon Avenue) opposite may be members of the immigrant in-group, those entering the next door Elita Wholesale Video, Audio and CD store (2753 W. Devon Avenue) or the Russian Book Store (2746 W. Devon Avenue) on the opposite side of the street are predominantly Russian and Jewish. In such an intertwined multiethnic neighborhood, drawing clear spatial and social boundaries is difficult, yet necessary to maintain community turf. In order to understand the culture of this street we may turn to recent theories of transculturation. Theories of transculturation suggest that immigrants switch codes or translate between different contexts and cultures while retaining multiple cultural identities. Transcultural spaces are “contact zones” of the twenty-first century, or “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power” (Pratt, 2002, p. 607).

In 2009 I began a detailed architectural, observational, and ethnographic study of Devon Avenue to document how local South Asian residents (mostly poor, recently arrived, and Muslim), made this retail street their lived environment. I
planned collaborations with Dr. Marcia Hermansen on the cultural practices of
diverse South Asian Islamic sub-communities in this neighborhood. I was specifically
interested in exploring prayer spaces intertwined within the ethnic marketplace
along Devon Avenue. These spaces include mosques and prayer spaces located in
store basements, back rooms of restaurants, and makeshift spaces in residential
units. This chapter focuses on two restaurants that simultaneously worked as
marketplaces and prayer spaces.

Transcultural Public Realm

Hannah Arendt (1989), in her discussion of public realm, identifies two interrelated
phenomena that are necessary for the sustenance of a public. First is the need for
visibility, or as Arendt calls it, “appearance.” According to her, our understanding
of ourselves and our identity is intensely related to the existence and visibility of the
“other” (pp. 50–54). Second, is the importance of the material world that is shared
by many and that acts as something that unites disparate people (p. 52).

Arendt’s public realm exists not simply because of the many perspectives and
differences embedded within that realm, but also because these differences and
perspectival positions are visible and experienced by all. When Arendt mentions
visibility, she is not referring to a uniform ability to scrutinize, see, and discuss the
same reality. She explains that

Being seen and being heard by others derive their significance from the fact that
everybody sees and hears from a different position. (p. 57)

Thus the very act of seeing and interpreting the other is dependent on the viewer
and his or her point of view. This “relational visibility” is interactively reproduced
when individuals encounter each other in specific locations. A visceral yet differential
engagement between people and the public realm ensues. The notion of public
space from the point of view of Arendt is very different from one that assumes
commonality and unanimous identification from all. Arendt’s public space takes the
form of a ground for political exchange where people sharing a common world also
share this common “space of appearance” and where public concerns and issues are
articulated and debated from multiple perspectives. Political engagements of the
public realm in the case of Arendt are contextual, performative, interactional, and
visceral.

In a 2004 article titled “Muslims in the Performative Mode: A Reflection on
Muslim–Christian Dialogue,” Hermansen proposes a theoretical framework for
studying cross-cultural interaction and inter-religious dialogue between Muslims and
other religious groups in the United States that produces engaged transcultural
publics. Hermansen uses the metaphor of performance and her work draws from
the work of performative modes of language and speech acts (Austin, 1975). She
argues that an “emphasis on performance in dialogue among Muslims in America
is partly due to their need not only to assert some sort of authority over an imagined
Muslim space but to claim both the authority and the space” (Hermansen, 2004,
p. 392). We confirmed in our study that such engagement allows immigrants to take
charge of their environment (often temporarily) and claim authority and space in ways mentioned by Hermansen. This is not the same as ownership of land or property or distinct territorial claims and power exerted by state and institutions of power. Rather, these moments of empowerment involve taking over a street corner with friends every evening, marking one’s personal space of praying in a restaurant, using a restaurant as a place to meet, arranging child care, or engaging for a moment with a fellow shopper over the purchase of a common cultural artifact. These moments of interaction are important because they afford opportunities for imagining and experiencing cultural similarities, common interests, and solidarities. It allows people to identify neighbors, co-ethnics, citizens, friends, colleagues, and outsiders. Old stereotypes are broken and new ones are formed. Repeated over time these experiences coalesce and solidify, sustaining friendships, community membership, and interest groups. Yet, at any given moment these interactions are neither binding nor invested. The form, function, and layout of this shopping street encourage such performative affordances of belonging and peoplehood.

As we focused on stores on Devon Avenue that doubled as prayer spaces, we used Hermansen’s emphasis on performance, Arendt’s definition of public, and added Thomas Tweed’s (2008) notion of embodied experience of religion in everyday life as a way to frame our study. Tweed’s spatial metaphors of “crossing and dwelling” include mobility as a central mode of experience in contemporary society. According to Tweed, individuals “dwell” by maintaining boundaries between in-group and out-group. Crossing boundaries is central to the way individuals demarcate places, locate spatial experiences, and maintain (multiple) identities, allegiances, and subjectivities (p. 54). Boundaries, real and imagined, may be ambiguous to an outsider but are easily recognized by an insider. Tweed calls these acts of crossing (real or cognitive) boundaries “terrestrial crossings” (p. 59) and his spatial metaphor rings true for diasporic populations living around Devon Avenue and using these stores.

These embodied acts of crossing domains are made meaningful by what historian Paul Connerton (1989) calls “incorporating practices,”—affective responses to the environment generated from internalized values, accepted maxims, and customs that are deeply cultural in nature. My use of the word “affective” refers to embodied, emotional and pre-cognitive responses to the built world by human users. I refer to Merleau-Ponty’s 1995 work on the role of habit memory and body memory in our perceptions and engagements with the material world, a theme that is continued in contemporary scholarship on “affect theory” (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010, p. 6). According to this line of thought, examining the visceral interactions between humans and their material world is essential for an understanding of transcultural public spaces because those interactions are inflected by our cultural biases and racial, gender, class, national, or occupational backgrounds. Indeed, these everyday, mundane, taken-for-granted embodied acts—opening a door, bending while entering a room, taking off one’s slippers at the threshold, shifting one’s gaze, shunning stigmatized spaces—frame bodily and performative engagement of terrestrial crossings; these acts became central to our reading of place-making on Devon Avenue.
Embodied Placemaking: Case Study of Two Restaurants

Ghareeb Nawaz restaurant (2032 W. Devon Ave) and Tahoora Sweets and Bakery (2345 W. Devon Avenue) are Muslim immigrant-owned restaurants located east of Western Avenue on Muhammad Ali Jinnah Way (2000 W to 2400 W blocks) and Sheikh Mujib Way (1800 W to 2000 W blocks). The owner of Tahoora, Salim Shelia, is from Mumbai, India; Bashir Bozai, of Ghareeb Nawaz, has South Asian roots. Both Tahoora and Ghareeb Nawaz have spaces within the stores that are used for prayers and religious activities.

Crossing the First Boundary: The Façade

Our first encounter with these stores is visual. Even before we decide to enter these stores, their façades communicate to us. Elsewhere I have written about the plethora of signs, advertisements, posters, store names, and images on the ethnic storefronts along similar ethnic retail streets (Sen, 2009). There are many kinds of storefront signage. Tall pylon signs are freestanding signs. Monument signs are shorter freestanding signs, rare on Devon Street. Projecting signs, pylon and monument signs are most permanent indicating a business that has been there for a long time or a more permanent kind of enterprise.

The most popular signs on Devon are wall signs. Wall signs include awning signs, wall posters, and window signs, flat acrylic store names and board signs, and projecting signs. Their location, size, and height target particular audiences—passengers and drivers in fast-moving vehicles, local residents on the sidewalk, insiders and outsiders, and linguistic subgroups. The wall signs along Devon can be categorized by their permanence. The most transient are the wall and window signs that often take the form of posters and painted boards (for example, the façades of Ghareeb Nawaz). By tracking how these signs change we can follow the rhythms of shopping seasons, seasonal merchandise advertisements, and festival sales that animate the street. During Ramadan, the holy month of prayers, fasting and post sundown feasting, the storefront signs advertise Ramadan sales and special events. The two case study restaurants are open late, special dishes are advertised, and local residents attend shura meals before dawn. Participating in these communal festivities reproduces a sense of community and belonging.

For most non-South Asian shoppers the store names and storefront visual imagery advertise the nature of merchandise available in these stores. Names such as Medina, Tahoora, Ghareeb Nawaz, Mehrab, Laxmi, or Devi that have religious connotations to Hindus and Muslims may not have the same relevance to out-group customers. However all these names are uniformly exotic for members of the out-group—subtle regional, religious, cultural, language, and historic references are lost to the latter.

The name Ghareeb Nawaz refers to Hazrat Shaikh Khwaja Syed Muhammad Mu’inuddin Chishti (1141–1230), a Sufi saint of the Chisti order who was known for his charity towards the poor. Chisti’s following is large and includes Hindus and Muslims from the subcontinent. Bashir Bozai, 55, at Ghareeb Nawaz, expanded on this reference to the saint: “Our goal is to continue to provide low-cost Indian food to our customers . . . When people want Indian food, they usually go to Devon Avenue. The food there is very expensive. We want to provide quality, inexpensive
food everyone can enjoy on Devon” (“Ghareeb Nawaz”). In reality, Ghareeb Nawaz caters to a wide range of customers—students, cab drivers, locals, non-South Asians, and takeout customers. Polyvalent signage is central to the success of their business. The storefront of Ghareeb Nawaz communicates low prices, choice, and variety—Indo-Pak dishes, sandwiches, Mediterranean recipes, regional cuisine (Andhra thali), and Greek gyros are advertised with prices noted (Figure 2.1). The Mediterranean sandwiches and gyros are aimed at cab drivers from the Middle East who prefer a quick, easy pick-up lunch. Much of the signage has come down due to city regulations and an awareness campaign spearheaded by the local Chamber of Commerce and South Asian business leaders. However, Bozai has plans to further extend the roof parapet as an advertising space (B. Bozai, interview, February 5, 2011).

Tahoora, the second case, communicates a different image and its name suggests a different genealogy. Its clean exterior façades with minimal advertisements communicate purity. Tahoora means pious and pure in Arabic (or the quality of people and place in paradise or Daar-us-Salaam). The sweetshop and deli are on the street level; on the basement level is a prayer room that also serves as a mosque. Its austere façades stand in stark contrast to that of Ghareeb Nawaz, with the former communicating the purity associated with piety and prayer while the latter displays the cacophony of a marketplace.

Traversing Interior Boundaries: Fronts and Backs

As customers enter and navigate the interior of the stores they experience the space in a processional manner. Erving Goffman’s theatrical metaphor of space helps explain such an experience. Goffman (1959) distinguishes between fronts and
backs. Fronts are formal spaces where diverse individuals and groups interact while back refers to a domain of an in-group where formal manners are replaced with informal in-group interactions and behavior. Fronts and backs are reproduced by setting up physical boundary features like doors, curtains, and walls that may allow or hinder access into certain parts of the building. One may also encounter symbolic boundaries such as careful placement of images, subtle signs, changes in lighting intensity, sounds, and smells that suggest more subtle forms of spatial distinctions. The latter may be obvious and visible to members of the in-group while totally invisible to others who cannot read the esoteric and culturally determined cues. For instance, in the stores discussed above, the darker, interior spaces, accessible at the end of a procession, are always reserved for prayer, private events, and families. Both symbolic and physical boundaries are employed in order to cross over from one socio-spatial domain and dwell in another.

The entrance sequence begins a haptic processional experience. The double entry doors of Tahoora and Ghareeb Nawaz are typical of Chicago. These doors keep the cold away and help with heating during the bitter winters. But despite this architectural similarity the experiences of the double door entry sequence in the two restaurants are different. Tahoora’s entrance is spotlessly clean. There are no advertisements and posters on the entrance door and store windows. The sales counter, visible from the entrance, is set way back at the interior of the store (Figure 2.2). Since customers waiting to buy or order food crowd around the sales counter in the deep interior, the front zone of the store remains relatively less crowded.

The elongated front zone between the sales counter and the entrance, 20’ long, serves yet another function that is not immediately obvious to the occasional customer. The front zone, occupying two structural bays, serves as a space for entry and transition for activities in the basement (Figure 2.3). The stairway has a chain
Figure 2.3  Tahoora—
left: street level interior layout; right: basement level interior layout. Drawings by Sohail Khurram.
with a sign indicating that the lower level is private and out of bounds. In the basement of Tahoora is a “community hall” that is used as a basement mosque (Masjid-e-Tahoora) during prayer hours. A separate room serves women worshippers and community and educational activities. Yet shoppers who know about the basement mosque “find their way to the lower level when the congregation meets” (Anonymous customer, interview, February 5, 2011).

The doorway, entrance transitional zone, and withdrawn sales counter set up an important choreography of “crossing and dwelling.” A brightly lit transition, signs, and a staircase separate the experience of being in the marketplace or in the prayer space inside Tahoora. This space between the entrance and the prayer room and between the entrance and the marketplace is a boundary between two domains rendered as a “thick edge” that “emerge[s] as not a plane but a zone, not physical but socio-spatial, not a division of things but a negotiation of flows” (Borden, 2000). Consider how the embodied act of entering into Tahoora is mediated by this thick edge. Customers entering the store see the sales counter and the food display. The long path between the entry and the destination food counters produces habitual and culturally choreographed responses from these users. They make a beeline for the sales counter. Moving straight towards the counter is not a discretely considered act—that is exactly how one behaves in a food deli. However, for the members of the mosque congregation, the very act of veering off midway, towards the basement mosque, is a break from the latter trajectory. It is an act of religiosity, an intention to pray, and a reiteration of one’s religious identity, and a path taken by only those who are actively seeking to get to the basement spaces. The seemingly innocuous act of walking across an entrance zone and deciding to turn towards the stairs in Tahoora is an embodied act reiterating one’s identity and allegiances. As one walks down the staircase, acts of ritual cleaning and taking off of shoes precede entry into the prayer room. These sequential experiences enacted over a period of time reiterate a feeling of sacredness and enhance a perceptual distance from the marketplace above, preparing the devout for prayers. It also reproduces a sense of congregational and community identity.

Ghareeb Nawaz is located in an old corner building that is not as deep as the lot line. At the back of the store is a parking lot. The entrance to Ghareeb Nawaz is cluttered with signs, newspapers, advertisements, and brochures. One enters into the front room, brightly lit by fluorescent lights. The front room seems open and empty during lax hours, but during busy hours, the room fills up with people ordering and picking up food. A large portal leads customers into the back zone, also known as the “family room” (Figure 2.4). According to the owner, the room is so called to cater to parties with women and children. However, I have never observed strict gender divisions being observed in this tiny restaurant. Instead the primary difference between the front and back is haptic. The brightly lit front room is characterized by fast-paced activities and constantly moving customers. The tempo in the less bright back room is slow-paced as people take their food and settle down at the tables/booths. A prayer nook is located at the far end of the family room next to the toilets. One has to enter, cross the front room, and then cross over to the side room in order to reach the prayer room. The back zone is visually inaccessible, so that a praying individual remains unseen from the front pick-up area.
In December 2010, after this chapter was written, Mohammad Bozai, the American-born son of the owner, helped redesign the interiors. According to his father, the new and updated interiors have “modernized” the old place. This “modernization” project included a new coat of paint, a new flat screen TV, and new counters. But the two most important changes include relocation of the counter and partial removal of the party wall between the two rooms. The new position of the counter gives the person at the counter visual surveillance over the entire store. The wall between the two rooms is now a half wall. The new interior creates a sense of separation while allowing clear lines of sight from the counter. Although the new changes make the interior seem more open and lighted, the back room remains visually separated and the half wall retains the experiential boundary between front and back.

If Tahoora’s sequential arrangement induces a slow unfolding and transformation from the marketplace to the prayer space, Ghareeb Nawaz’s spatial transformation resembles the quick efficiency of a drive-in or takeout. Cab drivers rush in during prayer hours for salah or namaz (prayers), entering the backspace from the front room along a narrow passage. After prayers, some eat food but others rush out. Unlike Tahoora where the prayer space is delineated and separated from the commons by a barred stairway, Ghareeb Nawaz’s prayer space is integrated within the store interior and its sequentially processional layout. The room, approximately 9’ × 9’, is enough to hold three praying individuals. A rug, floor patterns, and framed images of the kaaba distinguish this room from the other spaces (Figure 2.5). The processional order of the store interiors and the back location of the prayer room seclude it from the hubbub in the front.

The interior spatial characteristics reflect its non-congregational and temporary use (unlike Tahoora’s congregational gathering space). Ghareeb Nawaz’s interior prayer spaces belong to a quotidian landscape of “lived religion” that is distinctly different from sanctioned places of worship such as the local Jama Masjid located...
on 6340 N. Campbell Avenue, three blocks west of Western Avenue, or the less formalized but nevertheless formal congregational space in Tahoora Masjid. In their research on New York cab drivers who are Muslims, Courtney Bender and Elta Smith (2004) found a network of “free-standing prayer spaces” located across different locations in New York City. In Bender and Smith’s study we find that practicing Muslim cab drivers in New York City cannot drive to a mosque to conduct their daily prayers while driving passengers around. They have to find alternative spaces to perform their rituals and prayers. As a result, prayer spaces have appeared across the secular domain allowing Muslim immigrants to integrate their religious and spiritual needs within the public and semi-public regions of urban life and to carry out their religious practices even while participating in the mainstream public realm. Bender and Smith argue that these spaces represent “an organizational innovation within the existing field of American mosques and complicate the analysis of immigrant religious life that focuses solely on congregational participation” (p. 76). Calling them spaces of everyday “lived religion,” Bender and Smith show the creative role that “immigrants’ activities play in reconstructing the boundaries of public and private, ethnic and religious identities” while using such spaces (p. 77). Such an interweaving of spatial domains becomes necessary for Muslims since the public realm in the United States is not set up to support the daily religious and spiritual needs of practicing members of this community.

Whether in Tahoora or in Ghareeb Nawaz, the experience of traversing elongated processional spaces in order to access the prayer space engages the entire body of the user. Getting to back spaces is an intentional and embodied act since it not only leads to spaces for necessary bodily cleansing rituals associated with Islamic prayers but also involves walking across and beyond the restaurant space. The linoleum pattern, framed pictures, and lighting add to the changed ambience of the prayer zones, subconsciously conditioning the user into this temporarily private and sanctified space.
According to members of the Tahoora congregation, those people at the sales counter during daily prayer hours are marked either as non-practicing, or as people who are not members of their particular congregation. In both places, in order to effortlessly cross into the back zone one needs to know the exact location of this space and have a good knowledge of the layout of the restaurant interiors. In both places, the act of crossing over into the prayer zone is an intentional reiteration of religious practice and an embodied act of belonging in an ethno-religious community.

A salient feature of the prayer spaces in the restaurants described above is its relative illegibility to those who are not practicing members of the congregation (in case of Tahoora) or practicing Muslims (Ghareeb Nawaz). To an outsider or a tourist, conversant with the exoticized hypervisible ethnic spaces and ethnic enclaves in North America (Chinatown, Little Italy, and even Little India along Devon), the interweaving of domains (marketplace and prayer space in this case) is ideologically incomprehensible. The ontological invisibility of these intertwined spaces is important in the case of Muslims whose legibility and legitimacy in the American public realm has been under increased scrutiny, surveillance, and misrepresentation since September 11, 2001. During my interviews with the storeowners there was a clear hesitation on the part of the employees to give me their names and identifying details. Their reticence emerges from the negative media images, fear of intrusive government intelligence bodies, and a general feeling of vulnerability that recent violent events in Chicago have exacerbated among the local Muslim community. Thus the spatial illegibility provides an opportunity for the immigrants to carve out a safe zone for their community within the larger public realm.

Intertwined Spaces and Relational Visibility: Reading Ethnicity in the Built Environment

Reading authorship of the built environment in transcultural public spaces requires us to go beyond an understanding of origins, styles, and technologies of building and include a discussion of affects and performances of placemaking. Most South Asian storeowners along Devon Avenue occupy buildings that were built in the past by German and Jewish immigrants. Their buildings are neither exceptional nor exotic. Yet these new immigrants use these spaces in deeply embodied and culturally inflected ways, thereby recreating a new world in an old setting. They mark their stores and communicate with their customers via signs, banners, pamphlets, and posters (Sen, 2012). They transform the interiors, sometimes momentarily, through visual markings, transient behavior, protean performances, and momentary activities. As in linguistic code-switching, by merely changing the signage or altering behavior one transforms the nature and character of these spaces.

Boundaries, both physical and symbolic, allow individuals to circumscribe a safe in-group area. Boundaries allow users to cross over and experiment with multiple senses of belonging and allow immigrants to manipulate conditions of liminality to their own advantage. Thick edges maintain the sanctity of the interweaving domains while at the same time they provide flexible conditions where boundaries can be transgressed when necessary. Multiple domains within transcultural spaces need not be bounded, policed, and controlled. They need not be physically separated and zoned. Rather their visual and spatial co-presence within a larger public location
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provides opportunities for exchange and negotiations. Because these spaces are not sequestered behind the walls of residences or specially designed private institutional building types (e.g., mosques), restaurants such as Ghareeb Nawaz and Tahoora are places where the choice of being Muslim in America can be practiced beyond the absolute, private domain.

Four major points that have implications for future studies of urban transcultural public spaces emerged from this study. First, transcultural public spaces are ephemeral, protean, and transient sites where placemaking is more a momentary performance than a planned strategy. That means that a researcher has to go beyond the traditional analysis of building type and form that is common in material culture and architecture scholarship. Instead we will need to look at the built site as a complex theater stage where meaning and use of space depends on the event, activities, and actors.

Second, different people use and interpret transcultural places differently over time. Different users share the same space in different ways, make different territorial claims over time, and engage each other using varying proxemics standards. Complex overlapping and transmuting domains of insides and outsiders, fronts and backs, in-group and out-group spaces, and cores and peripheries, maintained by real, imaginary, or experiential boundaries, sustain these public spaces. These multivalent experiences and interpretations of such places are phenomenological and spatial orders reproduce sensory cues that allow individuals from different backgrounds to recognize and interpret this material world in inflected ways. A variety of responses may be generated by interior layouts (plan), façades decorations, architectural style, the processional and sequential experience of the interiors, and volumetric qualities of space. Uncovering the experiential order of transcultural space is the first step towards understanding place and placemaking in such locations.

Third, it becomes necessary to uncover the temporal rhythms and overlapping domains that bring life to transcultural spaces. One way of deciphering the multiple rhythms of transcultural spaces is to explore how spatial boundaries are viscerally experienced in these stores. Many of the boundaries that sustain multiple spatial domains inside these stores are time-based, protean, and experiential. They exist temporarily and then very quickly disappear. In the preceding discussion we saw how in a matter of minutes, store interiors turn into daily prayer spots and basements convert into congregational worship spaces and religious schools.

Finally, transcultural spaces are characterized by a relational visibility that sustains a very different kind of public space than the erstwhile agora and plaza. Here, on the one hand, these spaces sustain multiple publics—various subgroups within the Muslim immigrant community, non-Muslims, South Asians, non-South Asians, etc.—to participate with and see each other. On the other hand, it allows each individual to interpret and recreate these spaces in different (personalized) ways. The configurations of these spaces promote moving in, across, and out of them in multiple ways. These movements and experiences reproduce a variety of embodied forms of being American, Muslim, consumer, and ethnic. The civic, cultural, secular, and sacred domains are performatively bridged and crossed.

Intertwined transcultural spaces change the way we describe ethnic space in the United States. No longer is an ethnic space a site of difference. Instead it is a choreographed experience of difference and boundary crossing. Consequently, this research
project hopes to inform material culture studies of the built environment in two ways. By making experience the center of our inquiry we deconstruct the built object and study parts of buildings. That means we write, compare, and catalog the production of sequential experiences of moving between exterior and interior spaces rather than only comparing the cultural production of building types. It means that we consider a notion of authorship that is not merely about craftsmanship or patronage. Microhistories of individual users inhabiting, using, and producing experiential meanings explain everyday placemaking. Granted, our idea needs methodological fine-tuning, yet, as this chapter argues, reading embodied experiences of placemaking may help us decipher the many invisible worlds that lie behind the brick and mortar of our buildings.

Notes
1 The area of this study is very diverse. According to the 2000 census, this area has 49.7 percent white residents, 6.78 percent black, 15.5 percent Hispanic, 22.3 percent Asians, and 5.65 percent counted as others.
2 In 1965, the passage of a new Immigration Act made it possible for highly skilled South Asians to enter the United States. Although the 1965 law lifted all geographical and racial quotas and let in only skilled immigrants it was only in the 1980s that the family reunification clauses brought in less-skilled South Asian immigrants families to join their more educated and skilled compatriots (Minocha, 1987).
3 Many new and growing South Asian Muslim residents of this area work in low-paid and unstable jobs. But not all are unskilled; for instance, I interviewed skilled plumbers who due to their low English language skills and/or unstable immigration status cannot find regular and well-paid jobs. Because the US census does not collect information on religious groups the exact numbers of Muslim immigrants are not documented (except in the membership rolls of local cultural and religious bodies that in the recent political climate are difficult to obtain). Interview with GB/5/09; AZ/2/09, MH/2/09.
4 In the past, theories of assimilation assumed that immigrants enter ethnic ghettos on arrival, but lose their old habits and customs then move into suburbs as they are absorbed into American mainstream culture. Later, alternate theories of hybridity and diffusion emerged to explain that old and new customs mixed in order to produce new creolized forms.
5 Since 1991 parts of Devon Avenue have been symbolically renamed “Gandhi Marg,” “Muhammad Ali Jinnah Way,” and “Sheikh Mujib Road” to represent the Indian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi communities respectively. These honorary street names, common practice in Chicago, pay homage to the founding fathers of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh respectively and acknowledge the large Pakistani and Bangladeshi population living and doing business on this street.

References


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