Becoming the Other in One’s Own Homeland?
The Processes of Self-construction among Japanese Muslim Women

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This paper examines the ways in which Japanese women married to Pakistani migrants construct their identity as “converted Muslims.” In doing so, it aims to show how the restructuring process of the world economy and the resulting movement of people across national borders affect the experiences and self-perceptions of the women in a local context. After describing the socio-economic contexts of the women and their married life, this paper will focus on their gatherings via which a new notion of the self emerges. It will then examine the ongoing process of redefining the self in a wider social context and the manner in which gender intersects with other differences such as religion and nationality in determining the trajectories of self-construction. The paper concludes that the process of “becoming Muslim” is not a result of the women passively assimilating themselves into “Pakistani culture,” but rather the result of them actively negotiating their place within the often contradictory circumstances in which they find themselves.

Key words: migration, international marriage, Islam, Muslim, conversion, gender, Japan, Pakistan

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The socio-economic position of Muslim women is an increasingly controversial topic in today's world. Under the shadow of "Islamophobia," which began growing on a global scale after 9/11, concern over the "oppression of Muslim women," as seen in media coverage, has had a profound effect of alienating Muslims and establishing a border between "Us" and "Others."

However, the complex social reality in which Muslim women live rejects the simplistic idea that any one homogeneous and static category of "Muslim women" ever existed and requires a close examination of current socio-economic contexts. Such an examination echoes the recent endeavors of feminist anthropologists who not only have tried to show the diversity of ways in which gender and sexuality are framed in different societies, but also to gain insights into how gender categories intersect with other forms of difference such as ethnicity and class, and into how women themselves respond to complex and changing situations (MOORE 1988; NAKATANI 2003; UDAGAWA 2003).

The lives of second-generation Muslim women, whose parents migrated to Europe through pre-colonial ties, have already been explored, and the existing literature has presented a complex picture in which these women negotiate their religious selves. In comparison to a relatively well-developed body of literature on Muslim migrants, the experiences of women who convert to Islam through marriage to male migrants from Muslim countries have been largely ignored. Additionally, in recently emerging studies on intermarriage, there is a paucity of research into the lives of women married to migrants. Instead, the focus has been on international marriages in which women migrate to marry men in developed countries.

In the following, I shall explore experiences of Japanese women who have converted to Islam through international marriages to Pakistani migrants, and examine the trajectory that the women follow in search of a new religious identity within their new social context. By focusing on the lives of local women married to migrants, I wish to contribute to the existing literature in two ways. First, I aim to show that the contemporary transnational movement of people brings about changes not only in the lives of the migrants and those in the sending society, but also in the lives of those in the receiving society. Moreover, in focusing upon women in the receiving society, I demonstrate that members of the receiving society have not

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1 Tahir ABBAS (2005) offers a detailed analysis of how 9/11 and subsequent incidents have affected the lives of Muslims in Britain.
2 Among other major roles that women play in ethnic and national processes, they can be signifiers of ethnic/national differences. Importantly, women also actively participate in the process of reproducing and modifying their roles (YUVAL-DAVIS and ANTHIAS 1989:7-11). Work by Claire DWYER (1999) and others which deals with a new generation of Muslim migrant women within Western societies demonstrates not only how veiled Muslim women are seen as markers of differences between Muslims and non-Muslim mainstream society, but also the ways in which the border between the two is often blurred, contested, and negotiated by migrant women themselves.
3 For recent works on cross-cultural or transnational marriages, see Rosemary BREGER and Rosanna HILL (1998), Nicole CONSTABLE (2005a), and Katherine CHARSLEY and Alison SHAW (2006).
4 Also, there is a paucity of literature that examines the experiences of men who migrate to marry women in developed countries. Katharine CHARSLEY (2005) examines the lives of male Pakistanis who migrate to Britain in order to marry British-born Pakistani women and illuminates the way in which their masculinity is being negotiated through such a pattern of transnational border crossing.
experienced the influx of migrants in the same way and illustrate ways in which differences such as gender, religion and nationality intersect in the experiences of local women, as well as how their lives and perspectives are transformed as a result.

With the above in mind, I first describe the socio-economic characteristics of Pakistani labor migration to Japan since the 1980s and the resulting increase in the number of international marriages between Pakistani men and Japanese women. I then draw attention to the women’s perceptions of marriage, which have largely been ignored in the discussions of this emerging pattern of international marriage. Following this discussion is an exploration of three major changes often observed in the early stages of their marriages that include: (1) The relationships formed between the newly married couple and the husband’s kin in Pakistan which develop through specific patterns of transnational border crossing; (2) the husband’s occupational shift to self-employment and its socio-cultural implications for the lives of his Japanese spouse; and (3) the process in which the Pakistani notion of ‘izzat (honor) is constructed in a migratory context with a focus on the symbolic role played by Japanese women married to Pakistanis.

Having discussed the socio-economic environment in which Japanese spouses find themselves after marriage, I then address the key question of this paper which is how the women come to perceive themselves as Muslims. The main focus here is on the emergent tendency to redefine themselves as “converted Muslims.” To illustrate this point, I first show that such a change in self-perception is closely related to women’s networks formed through attending religious gatherings. I then draw attention to joint efforts made by attendees to work out what “real Islam” is by distinguishing it from “Pakistani custom.” Finally, I turn to their experiences in Japanese mainstream society with a focus on the mediating roles they play in order to raise their children as Muslims in a largely non-Muslim society. I argue that such roles lead the women to reinterpret what it means for them to be Muslim. In conclusion, I summarize the discussion and point out the implications that it has for understanding the complexities of the lives of women who marry migrants and the subsequent courses they take to reposition themselves in their own society.

The following discussion draws on data collected during fieldwork conducted between 1998 and 2006 in the Greater Tokyo area and in Pakistan. During that time, I interviewed 40 women, 22 of them more than twice. The interviews ranged in length from one and a half hours to three hours. Of my interviewees, the majority were married during the 1990s. At the early stage of my research, most of them were in their twenties and thirties and their children’s ages varied between infants and the lower grades of primary school. As I discuss later in more detail, the majority of their husbands were in the business of exporting used cars.

I also attended women’s gatherings at mosques and other places where many of my key

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5 The bulk of the data was collected between 1998 and 2001. My research during 1998 and 1999 was made possible by a Sasakawa Scientific Research Grant from the Japan Science Society and by a research grant from the Institute for the Culture of Travel.
informants were present. This participant observation was most intensive during 1998 and 2000. The religious gatherings I attended were mainly those organized by an Islamic organization established by Pakistani Sunni Muslim migrants in the 1990s and were attended mostly by Japanese women married to Pakistanis. The approximate number of attendees was between ten and twenty, although it varied depending on the type of meeting. I met 29 of the 40 informants through these mosque gatherings. Thus, I do not claim that the following analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of the experiences and perceptions of all Japanese women married to Pakistani migrants. However, it does bring forth some important socio-economic characteristics shaping the lives of Japanese women married to Pakistani migrants during the 1980s and 1990s. Moreover, through closely examining a limited number of cases, I hope to contribute to a better understanding of how multiple differences, including religion, gender, and nationality, may intersect in and shape the lives of women who came to be involved in the transnational movement through marrying Muslim migrants. My aim here is to show how, despite a number of constraints and power relationships in which they find themselves, the women seek to actively define or redefine their position in a contemporary migratory context. In the process, I demonstrate that the ways in which identities are reworked in the contexts of migration and international marriage cannot be understood within the simplistic frameworks of a) assimilation, or b) conflict between two cultures that are often assumed to be static and monolithic. Rather I show that despite the constraints and contradictions the women encounter, the changes they undergo from which a new self emerges involve far more complex processes.

Emerging Patterns of International Marriage in Japan

Unlike Western European countries, whose postwar economic recovery depended heavily on labor migration from their former colonies, it was only in the 1980s that Japan experienced a relatively large influx of labor migrants from abroad. Following female migration from such countries as the Philippines and Thailand, there was an inflow of male migrants who filled the then booming Japanese economy's need for labor. Among other Asian countries, the number of entries to Japan from Pakistan marked a rapid increase in the late 1980s and peaked in 1988 with 20,034.

The arrivals from Pakistan, like those from other Muslim countries including Bangladesh and Iran, were predominantly men in their twenties and early thirties who obtained short-term visas upon arrival due to the visa exemption agreement that then existed between Pakistan and Japan. While they were from various parts of Pakistan, a considerable

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6 The postwar economic development of Japan was enhanced by a surplus of labor from rural areas within the country. It should be mentioned, however, that before and during World War II, there were considerable numbers of labor migrants from Japanese-colonized Korea and Taiwan, many of who remained after the war.

7 My survey, carried out in Saitama Prefecture at an 'id (Islamic festival) gathering after the end of Ramadan in January 1999, shows that among the 95 Pakistani men who answered the questionnaire, 40 were from Punjab.
number were from urban areas such as Karachi and Lahore. My interview data shows that out of the 40 cases, 28 husbands were from these two cities, and that they were relatively well educated. Upon arrival in Japan, most of them worked illegally for small-sized enterprises mainly in the Kanto (Greater Tokyo) area. They were mostly engaged in manual labor which was in great demand in the Japanese domestic labor market at that time. After a peak period in 1988, the number of incoming Pakistani nationals sharply dropped reflecting significant changes in the immigration procedures of the host country, as well as its declining economic climate. The changes made in immigration control also had an effect of further marginalizing Pakistanis in Japan as “Asian illegal workers” who were more “visible” as compared with other foreigners from Eastern Asian countries.

The estimated number of Pakistanis overstaying their visas decreased from 8,056 in 1992 to 3,414 in 2000. On the other hand, the number of Pakistani nationals registered in Japan gradually but steadily increased from 4,124 in 1992 to 7,498 in 2000. More striking is the fact that the number of those who were registered under the visa category of “Spouse or Child of Japanese National” increased from 112 in 1984 to 1,630 in 2000. Although a sex-specific ratio and the age groups of the residents classified under this category are not provided in the statistics, it is assumed that they consist predominantly of men who married with Japanese women. During the 1990s, the number of Pakistani men who acquired a visa status of

(24 from Lahore), 28 from the North-West Frontier, 7 from Sind Province (6 from Karachi). The remaining seven arrived in Japan after migrating to such countries as Saudi Arabia and South Korea. (The rest of the answers were invalid.) According to the Pakistani person who distributed the questionnaires for me (both in English and Urdu), the participants numbered about 150 people (all male) among whom approximately 90 percent were Pakistanis. The rest were presumably Indian or Bangladeshi.

8 However, as Alison SHAW points out (2000: 19-20), one cannot easily assume a clear dichotomy between the “urban” and the “rural.” Pakistani society has been undergoing a dynamic process of urbanization which has led to an increasing degree of communication between urban and rural areas, as well as a growing diversity within urban populations.

9 In 1988, the total number of Pakistani nationals apprehended for “illegal employment” was 2,497, which constituted 17.4 percent of the total number of those apprehended for “illegal employment.” (Calculated from a table presented in MORITA and IYOTANI [1994: 194].)

10 The number of arrivals from Pakistan in 1989 was 7,060 (down 65 percent from the previous year) and in the following year dropped further to 5,544.

11 First, the visa exemption agreement between Japan and Pakistan was suspended in January 1989. This was followed by the amendment of the Immigration Law in the same year, which, among other changes, imposed a penalty on employers of illegal migrants. Importantly, the amendment also included a provision providing the legal right of residence and work for descendants of Japanese migrants overseas (Nikkei) (SELLEK 1997; DOUGLASS and ROBERTS 2003: 7-8). As a result of this amendment, foreign labor within Japan was polarized with Nikkei legal workers on the top and the rest, including Pakistanis, on the bottom (KAMITA 1994).

12 “Asian illegal worker” is a term which has come to be commonly used in Japan since the 1980s to denote those who came to Japan from other Asian regions to work as manual laborers without a legal visa. The term is often used in a derogatory way and represents one of the major stereotypes for non-Western foreigners residing in Japan.

13 Note that “the number of those who remain without a legal visa (Fuso-zanyuusho-ru)” provided by the Ministry of Justice is the approximate number, based on entry and departure figures (MOJ 2000).

14 The total number of foreign nationals registered in Japan in 2000 was 1,686,444 (JIA 2001).

15 The main bases of this assumption are: First, the total number of Pakistanis registered has been constituted predominantly of males. Second, the number of Pakistanis registered under the category of “Spouse or Child of Japanese National” does not include children born to Japanese women married to Pakistani nationals since they are given Japanese nationality by the amendment to the Nationality Law of 1984. Third, during my participant observation at social and religious gatherings, I saw very few Pakistani women who were married.
“Permanent Resident” was also on the increase. Apparently, many of them acquired that status after staying in Japan with a spousal visa. Consequently, a considerable percentage of Pakistani male migrants in Japan are assumed to be married to Japanese.16

This type of marriage is part of an increasingly frequent phenomenon of international marriages involving Japanese nationals that occurred during the 1980s and 1990s. The percentage of marriages in Japan in which either of the couple is of foreign nationality has increased from 0.9 percent in 1980 to 4.5 percent in 2000 (MOHLW 2002).17

Not only has the number of international marriages risen dramatically during these two decades, the data shows a specific “marriage-scape” (CONSTABLE 2005b). During the 1980s and 1990s, Japanese males marrying internationally tended to marry within a narrow range of nationalities such as Chinese and Filipino, while the nationalities of the spouse of Japanese females appear to have varied more significantly.18 This new pattern of international marriage in Japan likely reflects the increase of foreign male workers who came to seek economic opportunities under the tight control of Japanese immigration policy since the 1980s.

Researchers as well as the wider society have thus far tended to explain such marriages in terms of the men’s strategy to obtain legal visa status. Although such a strategy may be an underlying reason for this type of marriage and more importantly constitutes an important reality in the lives of the women married to migrants, I argue that women’s perceptions and experiences must be taken into account because the marriages reflect the transformation of Japanese society in terms of women’s growing interests in the outside world (YAMANAKA 2006: 4), as well as their desires and imaginings concerning gender relationships and family (KUDO 2005: 74-92).

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16 The Pakistani nationals who are registered under the category of “Permanent Resident” increased from 51 in 1988 to 546 in 2000. The figure further rose to 2,120 in 2006. The number registered under the above-mentioned two categories of “Spouse or Child of Japanese National” and “Permanent Resident” accounts for 36.8 percent of the total number of Pakistanis registered in 2006 (JIA 1989, 1990, 2007).

17 Of the total of 4.5 percent, the percentage of marriages in which the wife is of foreign nationality was 3.5 percent while that in which the husband is of foreign nationality was 1.0 percent. The percentage of international marriages in Tokyo is even higher and in 2004 as much as one in ten marriages was between Japanese and foreign nationals (NIHONGO KYOIKU SHIMBUN 2006).

18 This contrasts with the 1960s during which over 90 percent of international marriages involving Japanese females were to Americans, South and North Koreans, and Chinese (MOHLW 2002).
Marrying Pakistani Labor Migrants: Women’s Perspectives

In order to explore how the women themselves see their marriages with Pakistani migrants, I shall first examine how they meet their future husbands. According to the interview results, the circumstances in which they met their husbands can be categorized roughly into the following four patterns. First, in 13 out of a total of 40 cases, they met their husbands at their work place. In some cases, they were colleagues and in other cases, the women were working for an airline company or an international telecommunications company which their husbands used as customers. Second, in 14 cases, they met their husbands during their leisure time in such venues as sport clubs, or they were introduced to their husbands by mutual friends. Third, in seven cases, the women met their husbands in their neighboring areas or in a commuting train. Fourth, two women met their husbands while they were involved in volunteer activities helping foreigners, such as teaching Japanese in a local community hall.

The above data shows that although young Pakistani male migrants tended to experience downward social mobility from middle class status in their home country to “manual laborer” in Japan, they did, to a certain degree, share common urban space and interests with local young women. In addition, the cases of the women involved in activities helping foreigners reveals that the “internationalization” promoted by Japanese government and local self-governing bodies during the 1980s and 1990s led the women to meet their prospective husbands. Moreover, prior to meeting their husbands, a considerable number of women already had a keen interest in other cultures and studied or frequently traveled abroad, including to other Asian countries.

This interest of Japanese young women in the outside world cannot be understood merely in terms of individual interests, for it is closely interrelated with socio-economic factors such as the marginal position Japanese women occupy in the mainstream labor market. For example, one of my interviewees was working in a company as clerical staff, or OL (office lady), whose duties revolved around assisting male colleagues. She found her work monotonous and felt increasingly marginal at work as younger females joined the company. It was at that time that she was asked to help at a business run by a Pakistani migrant who was an acquaintance of a friend married to a Pakistani. She enjoyed working at her new place of employment and later met her husband there.

Why and how did they feel attracted to their future husbands? The key to such a question may be found in their narratives which recollect the process by which they decided to marry. On one hand, many women admitted that in the initial stage, they had a prejudice against

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19 Regarding the educational backgrounds of the women I interviewed, apart from one who finished her education after secondary school at the age of 15, 10 were high school educated, 11 continued their studies at vocational college, 4 at Junior college, 9 at university, and 1 completed a postgraduate degree. This data was not obtained in the remaining four cases. Of those whose answers were obtained, 25 percent entered four-year universities. This percentage is similar to the official figure reflecting that, in 1995, 22.9 percent of females entered four-year universities in Japan (MOECSSST 2006).

20 This data was not obtained in the remaining four cases.
“Asian foreign workers,” whose low status is contrasted with the higher status enjoyed by Westerners within the hierarchically structured image of the “Other” in Japan. On the other hand, several women remarked that, “in comparison with Japanese men” their husbands were “kind,” “sincere” and moreover, “took care of and showed concern for the family.” What impressed these women was not only the “warm family relationships” which often appeared in their narratives when they talked about their experiences in Pakistan in the early stage of their marriages, but also that their future husbands presented a new figure as a husband and father who not only supports his family economically, but also feels morally responsible and emotionally involved in family affairs. This was novel to some of the women in the sense that they did not find it in the existing image of Japanese males that reflected men who worked long hours and left most family matters to their wives. Meeting Pakistani migrants, therefore, presented an alternative ideal for partnership to some of the women.

**Becoming a Wife of a Pakistani Migrant: Socio-economic Changes**

In order for the husbands to obtain a spousal visa in Japan, the couples must complete marital procedures in accordance with the laws of both countries concerned. This includes a religious marriage contract (*nikah nama*), required by Pakistan, prior to which the bride must convert to Islam. The majority of the women remarked that at the time of conversion, they considered it merely a “formality” and did not reflect much upon it. Yet, they entered a process that began to form their self perceptions as Muslims. Before discussing this process, I will briefly describe three major socio-economic changes which took place in the early stage of their marriages, as they seem to be closely interwoven with the women’s subsequent processes of redefining themselves.

**Journeys to Pakistan**

The husbands who overstayed their visas were now able to resume face-to-face relationships with their close kin at home. For many of the women, this made trips to Pakistan the first significant event of their married life. In 28 cases out of 40, the husband had overstayed his visa at the time of marriage. Of those 28 cases, 16 husbands returned to Pakistan and stayed longer than a year before they obtained a spousal visa for Japan. In 12 of

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21 Male Muslims are religiously permitted to marry the people of the Book, meaning Christians and Jews. My interviewees included two Christians, both of whom converted to Islam upon marriage, although there may be some cases in which women who were Christians prior to meeting their prospective husbands did not convert to Islam upon marriage.

22 In many cases, the immigration procedures for the husband to acquire a visa took several months or longer, depending on the individual case. In 40 cases, only 6 husbands had a legal visa at the time of marriage. Such couples were mostly married before 1989 when the visa exemption agreement between Japan and Pakistan was suspended. (This data was not gained for the remaining six husbands).

23 This was due to a legal sanction imposed by Japanese immigration law that prohibited those who overstayed their visa from entering Japan within a year. Out of the 40 cases, 7 husbands did not return to Pakistan, but applied in Japan for “special permission for residence” until the spouse visa was finally issued (These details
these cases, the brides accompanied their husbands and stayed in the husband's natal household for a length of time ranging from one month to longer than one year. The couples also visited the husband's joint family in Pakistan for social occasions such as *shadi* (marriage ceremonies) of the husbands' siblings and other kin, as well as 'id (religious celebrations). When children are pre-school age, the wives tend to stay in Pakistan with their children often for a prolonged period of several weeks to a few months. On such occasions, animal sacrifices for the birth of a child (*aqiqah*) and a boy's circumcision may also be performed.

The experiences of the Japanese women in Pakistan were shaped by the local norms and practices relating to family and gender. First, they stayed in their husbands' household (*ghar*) which ideally consists of the husband's parents, married brothers, their wives and children, and unmarried siblings. In practice, though, its form may be affected not only by the life cycle of the family, but also by other dynamic factors such as urbanization and labor migration (DUBE 1997: 25; DONNAN 1997). In the husband's natal household, Japanese women find themselves in a web of relationships as *bahu* (son's wife), and *bhabi* (brother's wife) and are expected to act accordingly in relation to the other members of the household.

Another important element which affects the experiences of Japanese women in Pakistan is *parda*, a form of sexual segregation widely observed in South Asia whose practice may vary according to class, region, ethnicity, and other factors within Pakistan. Although its practice and ideals have been undergoing a dynamic transformation within Pakistan, for many of the women I interviewed, the norm of *parda* is still a reality which constrains their spatial mobility in comparison with their life in Japan. While they were in Pakistan, the Japanese women mostly wore *shalwar-qamiz* (tunic and loose trousers) and *dupatta* (oblong scarf) to conceal their body and were, in many cases, expected to be accompanied by their male kin when they went outside. Importantly, the practice of *parda* is considered crucial in maintaining the *izzat* (honor) of the family which largely depends on the conduct of the women of the house.

When talking about their experiences in Pakistan, some women contrasted their position in Pakistan with those of "(female foreign) tourists" who do not have to observe the norm of sexual segregation since they do not belong to any family in Pakistan, and hence have no obligation to protect the honor of the house. Their position in the husband's natal household is, however, more complex than it may at first seem. In the joint household, some Japanese spouses feel that they are less vulnerable than the wives of their brothers-in-law and attribute this difference to the economic contribution which they have made to the household by being Japanese. On the other hand, their being both an outsider to the family and a for-

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24 Behind the form of the joint household is an ideal that brothers should remain together (LYON and FISCHER 1997: 174). This ideal also underlies the Punjabi notion of the wider extended kinship or "*biradar*," a term derived from the Persian word "*biradari*" meaning "brother."

25 Among Muslims in South Asia, however, *parda* tends to be legitimized in terms of Islam. Also note the different emphasis placed in the notion and practice of *parda* between Muslims and Hindus (MANDELBAUM 1988: 76-97; DUBE 1997: 67).

26 Ideally speaking, marriage is arranged between the families within the same *biradar*, the extended kin
eigner, including the fact that they were brought up in a "corrupt" non-Islamic environment, can culturally marginalize them in Pakistan at least at the early stage of their marriage, making their position within the kin group quite ambivalent. Although in only 1 case out of 40 did the husband's family overtly oppose the marriage because the woman had not been Muslim, many women said that they did feel prejudice directed toward them by the husband's family and relatives when they first visited Pakistan.\(^{27}\) One woman, for example, said that although she was warmly welcomed, she felt she was being carefully watched by the husband's father; she speculated that he had a negative image of foreign women. Some Japanese women also said that in Pakistan they felt the existence of a stereotypical image of women brought up in a non-Islamic environment; that is, they were sexually and morally loose.\(^{28}\)

The Husbands' Occupational Change: From 'Foreign Worker' to Entrepreneur

The 1990s saw a significant shift among Pakistani migrants toward self-employment. Although they may acquire legal visa status by marrying Japanese nationals, they still find themselves socially and economically marginalized as foreign workers. This prompts many of them to start a business of their own which, in many cases, is a business exporting used cars.\(^{29}\)

Such an occupational shift seems particularly noticeable among those who are married to Japanese nationals. My interview data reveals that most of the husbands started their businesses after marriage.\(^{30}\) While it should be emphasized that marrying a Japanese woman and acquiring a stable visa status do not directly lead to starting a business, practical help that the Japanese spouse can provide is undoubtedly an important resource for building an enterprise.\(^{31}\)

\(^{27}\) There were also 2 cases out of 40 in which the husbands' immediate family openly opposed marriage to someone outside the kin group. Further, in seven other cases, the husband's relatives, not his immediate family, strongly opposed marriage to someone outside the kin group or to a candidate not arranged by the family; some of these cases were even brought to court.

\(^{28}\) While the sending of migrants from Pakistan to developed countries is thought to be a key for the economic survival of the family concerned, those who reside in a non-Islamic environment tend to be perceived as leading immoral lives. In particular, there exists a strong stereotyping of and prejudice toward women in non-Islamic societies as sexually loose and freely interacting with non kinsmen. See Shaw (2000: 38) for a discussion on how this stereotype was applied to English women by relatives in Pakistan of men who came to England in the 1960s.

\(^{29}\) Among 40 interviewees, the husbands of 28 ran their own business, of which as many as 24 were involved in the used car business. Other much less frequent choices were hala\(l\) (religiously permitted or lawful) food and restaurant businesses.

\(^{30}\) Among these 28 cases only 4 started their business before marrying while as many as 15 became self-employed within three years after marriage.

\(^{31}\) In many cases, the Japanese wives mobilize resources such as their Japanese language skills and the help of their close kin. For example, their parents can act as legal guarantors for the business, permitting their husbands to participate in car auctions.

As Eleonore Kopman et al. (2000: 41) point out, ethnic minority businesses involve complex articulations between class, gender, racism and citizenship status. In cases of Japanese wives married to Pakistani migrants, Fukuda Tomoko (2004: 174) suggests that the Japanese wives' involvement in their Pakistani
Once the husband acquires a legal visa and the couple starts their life together in Japan, it becomes possible for the husband to bring his family from Pakistan. Although the female members of an extended household may travel to Japan, more commonly, male members do so in order to work and supplement remittances that, in many cases, the husband himself continues after marriage. It is often the task of the Japanese wives to complete the necessary immigration documents, written in Japanese, in order to apply for visas.

Indeed, bringing the husband's male kin to Japan and starting a business are closely related because the husbands tend to see their kin as their most trusted business partners. By remitting money to his extended family in Pakistan and improving their economic status as well as providing other male members of the family with opportunities to work in Japan, a man, in turn, establishes his status within the household as a trusted son and brother, and thereby strengthens existing gender and age hierarchies within his natal household.

How do the Japanese wives, then, perceive their roles in such a process? One woman's remark is quite revealing in this respect. She said: "We (referring to Japanese women married to Pakistanis) are an essential part of our husbands' project to earn Japanese currency and remit it home." This suggests that some of the women feel their resources as Japanese nationals are being used in order for their husband's extended family to maintain economic survival in Pakistan.

As discussed earlier, the strong responsibility that Pakistani men feel for taking care of their families was a trait that initially attracted some Japanese women to marriage. During the process of family formation, however, the women came to realize that the husbands' notion of "family" was quite different from their own. This point is well reflected in what one woman resignedly said: "My husband cannot be a daikoku-bashira (literally meaning the central pillar of the house, which refers symbolically to the breadwinner of the family) because he has many other members of the family to support: his wife and children are only of secondary importance."

The Construction of Parda in a Migratory Context

The occupational shift from wage-employment to self-employment described above is likely to bring about the transformation of not only the economic activities of the migrants, but also

husbands' businesses are, among other gender factors, also related to women's marginality in the mainstream Japanese labor market.

32 For example, female members of the household might visit Japan at the birth of a child in order to help the couple with the necessary domestic work for a short period of time.

33 Although the husbands of my informants speak fluent Japanese, their ability to read and write the language is mostly limited, and this - aside from any racism they are likely to encounter - severely hinders their opportunity to gain job promotions or to find better jobs.

34 However, some of the women are themselves actively involved in their husbands' businesses and find such work fulfilling (TAKESHITA 2004: 170, 173).

35 Referring to the sending of money to Pakistan, one woman who was due to give birth to her first child said that the couple had been sending money to Pakistan, but felt that they were no longer able to do so once they have a child. She added that they were thinking of bringing the husband's younger brother to Japan so that he could work and send money to the family in Pakistan. She and her husband were hoping that the brother would be able to send a monthly sum of around 20 to 30 thousand (Japanese) yen.
the wider context of their lives. Namely, self-employed migrants tend to form and maintain stronger networks with other Pakistanis who are in the same business due to the need to exchange business information and a similar use of leisure time.

These stronger networks built by self-employed Pakistanis appear to have further implications for the lives of their Japanese wives because as closer ties are formed among self-employed Pakistanis, the above-mentioned notions of ‘izzat (honor) and parda (sexual segregation) begin to be constructed in a migratory context. This conclusion is drawn from the results of my interviews and participant observation which revealed that many Japanese women start to wear šalwar-qamiz and dupatta when they attend social or religious gatherings where other Pakistani men are present.

Some women say that “my husband asks me to wear šalwar-qamiz and to cover my head with a dupatta when we meet other Pakistani couples, because in so doing, I look modest in the eyes of other Pakistanis.” Such remarks suggest that šalwar-qamiz and dupatta symbolize sexual modesty and religiosity of the wearer in the eyes of Pakistani male migrants. What is more important is that the Japanese wife’s attire or conduct is perceived to affect the honor of her husband.

The above findings indicate that at least in the initial stage of marriage, a wife’s wearing of particular attire is contextual and aims to maintain or increase the honor of the husband among his Pakistani male associates. Moreover, it may be possible to argue further that such expectations may increase as the husband starts a business of his own and becomes more closely involved in personal networks with other Pakistani men in Japan; this is a phenomenon that is less observable among women whose husbands are employed by Japanese companies because they tend to be less concerned with the honor of their husbands. This may be due to a tendency for these husbands to be less involved in male networks of Pakistanis in Japan than those who have started their own businesses.

Forging a Religious Identity as a “Converted Muslim”

Thus far, I have discussed three major changes Japanese women who marry Pakistani migrants tend to experience in the early stage of their married lives and the practical and symbolic roles they play in regards to their husbands’ position in their networks. Now, I shall turn to religious gatherings of women where the attendees share their daily experiences and examine how those gatherings give meaning to the reality of their marriage and help them to negotiate their newly acquired identity as Muslims.

Women’s Gatherings

Some of the women I interviewed developed a strong sense of being Muslim and started covering their heads not only in the presence of other Pakistanis who share the norm of parda (sexual segregation), but also whenever they left their houses. Of the 40 women I inter-
viewed, 18 covered their heads outside the home at the time of the initial interviews, although the pattern of such practices changed over time. This contrasts with the early stages of their marriages, when they had little interest in Islam and wore *shalwar-qamiz* and covered their heads with a *dupatta* only in the presence of other Pakistanis.

How then did such a drastic change come about? My interview data and participant observation at women’s gatherings at mosques strongly suggest that many of these women become religious as a result of joining women’s gatherings at mosques and being influenced by other attendees, most of whom also converted upon marrying Pakistanis. In the early 1990s, Japanese women married to Pakistanis started to form a network of Muslim women through attending Islamic classes. These classes were provided by Islamic institutions in the central part of Tokyo that existed prior to the influx of Muslim labor migrants. The number of mosques steadily increased throughout the 1990s in suburban areas such as Saitama and Chiba. Many of these mosques did not have space exclusively reserved for women and were therefore largely perceived as being male spaces. For this reason, women married to Pakistanis began to organize women’s classes in their homes in the early 1990s. Later, the basis of women’s networks was strengthened by the construction of women’s sections in mosques built in the late 1990s.

What were the main motives for the women to organize and participate in religious gatherings? According to the interview results, the most pervasive was related to raising their children as Muslims. To educate their children as Muslims, they felt it necessary for themselves to learn about Islam. Another main reason for Japanese wives of Pakistani migrants to participate in religious and other social gathering was the desire to meet with those who shared the same concerns and problems that they had encountered through their marriages, particularly after giving birth to a child. As I discuss later in more detail, attending these religious meetings meant not only acquiring new knowledge about Islam, but also meeting those they saw as being “in the same circumstances” and sharing the experience of marginalization in both Japanese and Pakistani societies.

**Being Reborn as Muslim: Narratives of “the Second Conversion”**

As I pointed out earlier, a considerable number of women among my interviewees started covering their heads with a *hijab* after they started to attend religious gatherings. In the narratives of the women who developed a religiously oriented life, the changes were often described as a departure from their former lives where they were Muslim “in name only.” Let me quote one woman recalling how she started wearing a *hijab* in everyday life.

> I pronounced the “*shahada*,” the testimony of faith, without faith in Islam thinking that it is merely a part of the marriage procedure, not really knowing what it meant. Nor

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30 The term *hijab* can be used as a general term for the veil, or a wide variety of Islamic dress worn by Muslim women. When my informants use this term, and accordingly throughout this article, it specifically refers to a form of headscarf that is used to tightly wrap the head and neck.
was I conscious of Islam when I stayed in Pakistan right after my marriage (until the husband acquired a visa for Japan). After we came back to Japan, I helped the business that my husband started. After a while, I stopped working, feeling really tired. When I regained my health and started to feel I should go out with my child more often, I happened to know a Qur'an class from a newspaper for (Japanese) Muslims which a friend of my husband's brought to us. However, I was not sure if I should go to such a (religious) place without having any clear image of Islam. I thought I should probably wait until I studied the basics by myself . . . But, when I rang the organizer to inquire about the class, I was touched by the way she talked to me.

I met other “Muslimas” there (many of whose husbands were Pakistanis) and was attracted to their “Islamic way of life,” by which I mean the lifestyle which adopts the teaching of Islam into daily practices concerning food and children’s education.

As I came to know more Muslims there and made friends with them, I started to wear a hijab sometimes, when I went out. In the streets, I was exposed to discrimination, being suspected to be a member of Aum (short for Aum Shinri Kyo, a cult which committed a large-scale terrorist act in Tokyo subway in 1995). But on the other hand, I came to feel serene when I wore a hijab. In the beginning, I used to feel unease about the public gaze, but now I feel unease if I do not cover myself with a hijab. I feel that wearing a hijab has been a second shahada (conversion) for me.

As illustrated in this woman’s narrative, attending the women’s religious meetings has, in many cases, brought about a change in their self-perceptions from “paper Muslim,” by which the women refer to the former self who converted to Islam upon marriage, but knew little about the religion, to “practicing Muslim.” Importantly, the religious transformation involves a process through which the attendees reinterpret the meanings of their experiences and the problems that “ordinary Japanese do not understand” with other women “in the same circumstance,” by which they mostly mean being married to Pakistani migrants.

Not only do they confer on the marginalities they experience within Japan, they also discuss their experiences at their husbands’ natal households in Pakistan. At one meeting, a woman turned to me and said, “Here, I can learn about Pakistan from sources other than

37 “Muslim” is the female form of the word “Muslim.” When Japanese converted Muslim women use this word, it often connotes a strong sense of solidarity and intimacy shared by those who share the faith in a non-Islamic environment.

38 My informants tended to use Arabic words when they mentioned Islamic terms such as Shahada, which is pronounced Shahadat in Urdu. For this reason, throughout this article I use Arabic words for Islamic terms instead of Urdu.

Shahada means accepting Islam by confessing “there is no true god except Allah, and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.” Most of the Japanese women I met used this word almost exclusively to mean the initiation ceremony prior to their marriage (nikah). It is, however, recited not only at the time of conversion, but also on various other occasions including daily prayer. I would like to thank Otsubo Reiko for pointing out this to me.

39 Apart from problems they encounter in raising children as Muslims in a non-Muslim country, another difficulty they encounter in Japan is racial discrimination against their husbands in daily aspects of life, such as finding work or housing.
my husband.” She also said that before she met other Japanese women married to Pakistanis, her husband’s family was everything she knew about Pakistan. This remark may be related to the women’s often limited mobility within Pakistan due to the norm of parda (sexual segregation).

While most of them find the practice of parda in Pakistan very difficult to cope with, mosque gatherings in Japan which segregate male and female participants make it possible for them to share their experiences both in Japan and Pakistan. A strong sense of “Us” and feelings of intimacy are created by sharing their experiences of marginality both within their home country and in Pakistan. The subsequent process of trying to construct the self into one consistent with Muslim practice involved the exchange of information concerning where and how to obtain particular items of clothing or food regarded as halal (religiously permitted or lawful). It also included exchanging such items as gifts.

Such activities, as well as the women’s meetings at the mosques, are illustrative of a self-construction process which can be better understood through Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann’s (1966: 144) concept of alternations. Berger and Luckmann called alternation the process in which the individual “switches worlds” and argued that such a radical transformation can be made possible only through undergoing a process of re-socialization. Furthermore, they pointed out that “significant others” acting as guides into the new realities were necessary for re-socialization to be successful (Berger and Luckmann 1966: 144-8).

In the cases of Japanese women married to Pakistani migrants who joined women’s gatherings, other participants such as the “Senpai Muslim” or “senior Muslim” played the role of the “significant other.” The utility of this “significant other” is well described by one woman who participated in my case study when she said, “Before, I only knew Japanese wives (of Pakistanis) who hardly knew anything about the Qur’an not to mention shalwar-qamiz. I started to feel like learning about Islam only after I met other married women at this Qur’an class.”

Constructing the Dichotomy between “Real Islam” and “Pakistani Culture”

Having pointed out the tendency among the attendees to start religiously oriented life through forging personal ties with other women that they met at women’s gatherings, I must add that there are individual differences in the ways the women perceive their newly acquired religious identity. While some develop a strong sense of being Muslim, others are reluctant to accept the faith wholeheartedly and define themselves as “bad Muslims” or “drop-outs.”

Despite the diversity in attitudes and patterns of religious practices, there was a strong tendency among the attendees in general to try to distinguish what is “real Islam,” by which

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40 However, the women are acutely aware of the necessity to keep family matters private and within the family so that the family honor is duly protected.

41 I am indebted to Kasuga Kisuyo’s work (1989) for drawing my attention to Berger and Luckmann’s notion of alternation to better understand the social contexts in which Japanese women create a new world of Islamic faith.
they normally referred to the teachings of the Qur'an or the hadith,\(^\text{42}\) from “Pakistani customs” as such. During both interviews at home and participant observations at gatherings, the women often raised questions as to whether what they were told to do by the members of the husbands’ families had any concrete basis in the teaching of “real Islam.”

In order to illustrate this tendency, I quote from a question and answer session held after one of the meetings.

**Participant 1:** I have a feeling that I see Islam through the eyes of my Pakistani husband. For example, when we took our newborn baby to Pakistan, the husband’s family put on the child a *ta’viz* (an amulet) and a fake mole on the face in order to ward off an evil eye. Do such practices have a real effect from an Islamic point of view? Or is it just what we call “custom”?

**Lecturer:**\(^\text{43}\) Evil eye can happen. (...) But, unless the Qur’an actually states that one has to wear a *ta’viz* or cites a *du’ā* (supplication) to avoid such things, it has no effect. (...) 

**Participant 2:** (in the natal house of the husband in Pakistan) I am often told to cover my head when the *adhan* (calling of prayer from the mosque) starts. (...) Is this one of the religious duties instituted by God?

**Lecturer:** No, it is not. However, she will be given the reward if a woman covers her head with feelings of respect to the *adhan* when it starts, since it is one of the acts of worship.

What one woman said during an interview also echoes this tendency among the women to try to distinguish “custom” from “real Islam”:

Sometimes, I feel lost, not knowing what is the right thing to do (as a Muslim) in everyday life, including some very minute things. If I ask Pakistanis around me, what they normally say is “you must do it because it is a (religious) duty.” I am not sure as to whether what they tell me to do is just their custom or in accordance with the teachings of Islam. Mr. A (a Japanese male convert who teaches Qur’an classes) is very helpful in this respect. He tells us whether it is the (Islamically) right thing to do by referring to specific parts of the Qur’an or the hadith.\(^\text{44}\)

Through the discourse on “real Islam,” the women come to identify themselves as “converted Muslims” which they differentiate from “born Muslims,” by which they mean not only

\(^{42}\) The hadith is the authoritative record of the Prophet Muhammad’s exemplary speech and actions.

\(^{43}\) By the lecturer, I mean the Muslims who were invited to give religious speeches at the women’s gatherings I attended. The lecturer whom I cited above was a Pakistani male *hafiz* meaning someone who knows the Qur’an by heart.

\(^{44}\) When discussing “real Islam,” some women referred to Islamic practices of Middle Eastern countries rather than those of Pakistan as a model. They also tended to value reciting the Qur’an in “proper” Arabic pronunciation.
those born as Muslim but also those who follow the customs without fundamentally questioning what Islam really is.

Such self-definition as a "converted Muslim" is best seen in the form of their head-covering. Many of the Japanese women at religious gatherings covered their heads more tightly with an opaque scarf, which they called hijab. This contrasts with the head-covering of Pakistani women as well as Japanese newcomers to the gatherings who tended to cover their heads more loosely with a dupatta over their shalwar-qamiz. Interestingly, while many Pakistani husbands asked their wives to wear shalwar-qamiz and dupatta in front of other Pakistanis because they felt such attire expressed women's piety as well as ideal forms of femininity, the reasons the 6 women out of my 40 interviewees who normally wore shalwar-qamiz in their everyday lives gave were not religious.\(^4^5\) Indeed, they had more practical reasons for doing so such as it being more "easy to move" or "economical." Furthermore, one woman argued that "Muslim women need to cover their heads with a hijab, but, it is not always necessary to wear shalwar-qamiz if they cover their bodies properly."

Creating a New Space as "Converted Muslim"

The tendency to reflect upon Islam and articulate it has also been reported from within the Muslim world as well as by second-generation Muslim migrants in Europe (Eickelman and Piscatori 1996; Dwyer 1999; Ohtsuka 2000). Eickelman and Piscatori (1996: 39-44) argue that behind such a phenomenon, which they call the "objectification of Islam," are elements distinctive to the modern era, including mass higher education and communications that make it possible for an ever increasing number of ordinary Muslims to access religious texts and doctrinal concepts.

The strong interest seen among my interviewees to question what "real Islam" is reflects this, especially in the wide range of information that is available to learn about Islam and the opportunity to see it in the light of other religious traditions. In particular, a wave of migration to Japan not only from Pakistan but also other Islamic countries, and an increase in the number of Japanese people working and studying in Islamic countries who often bring home new values, gave my informants the ability to scrutinize their religious practices from perspectives different than their own personal experiences.\(^4^6\)

I should, however, like to emphasize that there is another important element in the Japanese women's quest to discover the "real" meaning of Islam. This is the structural position they find themselves in as wives and daughters-in-law. Such an argument, as illustrated, is based on my observation that women often discussed "real Islam" in terms of what they were "made to do" by other members of their husbands' families in Pakistan. I would argue that their quest to discover "real Islam" can therefore be interpreted as an effort to create an

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\(^4^5\) At the time of my first interviews, 28 women out of a total of 40 informants said they covered their arms and legs, but not necessarily in shalwar-qamiz.

\(^4^6\) There are also cases of Japanese single women who converted to Islam while they were abroad. Although the number is still quite small compared with those who are converted through intermarriage, they also join in religious meetings in Japan and their influence in constructing "real Islam" can be quite considerable.
autonomous space as a “converted Muslim”: a space which allows them to act independently within the given power structure of the joint household in Pakistan and in the society of Pakistani self-employed men in Japan that has constructed the notion of parda (sexual segregation) in a migratory context.

What then does this “real Islam” mean for everyday husband and wife relationships? I would argue that the situation involves many different factors, including possible change of the religious attitudes of the husbands. While the notion of parda has been constructed as a tight network of self-employed Pakistani men developed in the migratory context in Japan, my interviews with some of the Pakistani men and their Japanese spouses revealed cases in which the husbands’ religious identity has changed over time. For example, one husband told me that he was born Muslim, but he became a “real Muslim” in Japan after experiencing hardship that led him to reflect upon his religion. In such circumstances, it is possible that the couple may come to jointly seek the “real” Islamic way of life, which is not synonymous with the “Pakistani culture” in which the husband was brought up.

What happens if the husband retains a way of life which the wife views as “Pakistani custom” or if the husband “forgets about Islam” in Japan? In such cases, conflicts may arise between Japanese wives and their Pakistani husbands when the former try to act in accordance with “real Islam.” For example, one woman said to me, “Yesterday, I argued with my husband. He wanted me to wear shalwar-qamiz before we went to see a Muslim couple. I refused his request, protesting that, according to the Qur’an, it is sufficient if I wear modest western clothing which covers my arms and legs. My husband was not happy, but could say no more.” She negotiated her attire through the discourse of “real Islam,” which in this specific case won over her husband’s perceptions of women’s religious modesty epitomized in shalwar-qamiz.

Negotiation of one’s position within the power structure, by defining oneself as a “converted Muslim” can be paradoxical in that by stressing “real Islam,” the authority of the husband over the wife can be legitimized. For example, at one meeting a participant asked the following question: “I am told to keep my hair long. Is this a religious duty?” The male lecturer responded: “If it is your husband who says so, you must obey him, but if it is not, ask him to quote the part of the Qur’an that states the rule; anyway, you should not argue with him.”

As shown in this example, the discourse of “real Islam” can be somewhat contradictory. I should, however, point out that the discourse concerning the power balance between the husband and wife is never static even in the narratives of Islamic leaders. At one of the meetings, a male lecturer stated that although the husband is normally the one who religiously guides the wife, he may forget real Islamic values in a largely non-Muslim environment. The leader went on to say that under such circumstances, the wives are the ones who should remind their husbands of Islamic values.

Further, the women do not always defer to Islam when it comes to the everyday negotiation of power at home. When talking about the relationships they have with their husbands, the
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women often defined themselves as "Japanese" who have their own voice, contrasting themselves with Pakistani women whom they saw as submissive and obedient to their husbands.

Perhaps more importantly, it seems that while the women's objection to the power imbalance within the household is a factor in the emergence of their identity as "converted Muslims," the process of identity change is very much independent of their husbands. This is based on my observation that, as long as the women agree with their husbands upon basic religious issues such as the kind of food they should avoid and as long as they agree to compromise on what to wear in the presence of other Pakistani men, the husbands tend not to interfere with the wives' everyday religious practice. I would further argue that the reason for the women to seek their own ways of being "converted Muslims," independent of their husbands, is closely related to their unique position as Japanese Muslims. As I demonstrate in the next section, while their husbands' religious difference tends to be accepted in mainstream Japanese society to a certain degree because they are foreigners, the women have to carefully negotiate their identity as Japanese Muslims in their natal society where the ideology of "cultural homogeneity" prevails.

Reinterpretation of Islam in a Wider Social Context

Thus far, I have argued that a new religious self as a "converted Muslim" is being created among Japanese women married to Pakistanis through attending religious gatherings and forging ties with other women "in the same circumstances." The process in which the women try to construct their religious identity is, however, by no means completed at some particular point, but is ongoing. I shall illustrate this point by discussing the women's roles in bringing up their children in a wider social context.

As their children grow up, the women become increasingly involved within the local community with neighbors, their children's schools' staff, and the mothers of their children's classmates, who are predominantly non-Muslims. Under these circumstances, the roles they play in forming their children's self-perception as Muslims come to the fore. While details of such efforts vary among Muslim families, they include observing religious rules concerning food by making a hatal (religiously permitted or lawful) lunch for their children. In most cases, they take pains to make it look similar to the meals provided for other pupils in the school or nursery and often find it difficult in terms of cost and effort.

The women are also expected to mediate between different values and norms. The husbands of the women I interviewed tend to start observing religious regulations on food more strictly as the life cycle progresses, especially when they become fathers. It is usually the mother's role to negotiate with the staff of their children's nursery or school to meet the father's expectations. Thus, they must bridge the daily practices of their children's school with such things as the special arrangement of food, as well as matters such as fasting during Ramadan and appropriate clothing for female children in sport classes. The results of my
interviews suggest that the women encounter various levels of difficulty in trying to fulfill this role in everyday life. Among these difficulties is the constant pressure to provide sufficient explanation to their children, their husbands, and non-Muslim Japanese, including their children's school staff, about "differences" relating to food and other aspects of life.

In fulfilling this role, they often experience prejudice from or conflicts with mainstream society that tends to see Japanese as homogeneous. That is to say, their being Muslim contradicts a given "Japanese-ness" that was, ironically, reinforced in the 1980s and 1990s when the number of foreigners increased rapidly and discourses on the "internationalization" of Japan were widespread. As YOSHINO Kosaku (1997) argued, internationalization paradoxically maintained as well as strengthened the border between "Japanese" and "Others" and, as a result, the homogeneous image of "Japanese" was reproduced. Under such social circumstances, Japanese women who practice Islam in everyday life blur the clearly dichotomized border between "Us" and "Them." As a result, they often encounter suspicion or rejection from mainstream society. For example, when I was walking with a Japanese woman married to a Pakistani in the streets of central Tokyo, we met an Egyptian woman we knew. She covered herself with a long coat and a hijab. After we greeted each other and walked passed, the Japanese woman said to me with resignation, "It is OK (accepted) for a foreigner to wear such an (Islamic) outfit in public, but not us, Japanese Muslims."

What is noteworthy is that many of the women who start practicing Islamic ways of life, such as wearing a hijab, undergo a process of further reinterpreting Islam as they come to have more daily contact with mainstream society through child-bearing. Let me cite one example of a woman who wore a hijab when I first interviewed her. When I met her for an interview five years later, she was not wearing a hijab and explained the reason to me as follows:

In Islam, moderation is important. It's hard to know how I am supposed to interpret this, but I think maybe I should be moderate not only in the way I look, but also in the way I think about things. If someone argues that women should wear a hijab in order to avoid the gaze of unrelated males, I would say that it is rather men's problem and not women's. I mean that men should stop judging women by the way they look. It is important to be conscious of God from the bottom of your heart. The most important thing of all is to feel the existence of God in your heart wherever you are, and not just by wearing a hijab or praying at certain times of the day. If we're always aware of His being, we can do anything, as long as it's not forbidden by the religion.

This woman's remark illustrates the way in which an identity as a "converted Muslim" is being constantly negotiated. That is not to say that the women altogether abandon Islamic

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47 Although other complex reasons may be involved, the difficulties of raising children as Muslim in Japan may lead these couples to educate their children in Pakistan or a third country such as New Zealand or the U.A.E. where the husband has a business base. In most cases, the Japanese mothers also migrate with their children and the Pakistani fathers continue to work in Japan while traveling between the two countries.
ways of life that they once acquired, but rather that they carefully negotiate and modify their practices in accordance with the new realities they face in everyday life, all the while continuing their quest to seek the "real" meaning of Islam.

Conclusion

What I have discussed is the trajectories followed by a limited number of Japanese women who attended religious gatherings at a relatively early stage of their married lives. In no way does this discussion present the whole picture of those who married Pakistani migrants in Japan during the 1980s and 1990s. However, it does describe some of the desires and realities that are experienced by local Japanese women who married Muslim migrants, and how they responded to the contradictory situation. In conclusion, I would like to make three points.

First, like women from developing countries who migrate to marry men in developed countries (Freeman 2005), Japanese women married to Pakistani migrants are likely to encounter various contradictions between the desires and fantasies they had at the time of their marriage and the reality that they later faced. One woman sums this up by reflecting, "I wanted to reach out for something new through this marriage, but it turned out that what was waiting for me was a very small world." Such a statement implies that the Japanese women did not necessarily view marrying an "Asian illegal worker" as "marrying down," but rather as a way to bring new possibilities into their lives. However, within the reality of their marriage, they came to see differences between their husbands' notion of "family" and their own. During the process of family formation, some women increasingly developed the feeling of being used.

Second, I argue that these women's experiences cannot be viewed simply as the result of a man from a developing country making the best of an international marriage with a woman of a developed country. "A very small world" may refer not only to the women's subordinate position under the domestic power structure based on gender and seniority that they experienced in Pakistan, but also to the multiple marginalities they experience in their own society. In other words, their overall experience may derive from the interplay of multiple power relationships such as the existing gender inequalities within Japan, the Japanese notion of the "Other" where "Asians" are placed on a lower stratum and, by extension, the widening economic gap between nations on a global scale.

Last, these women, however, cannot be seen as merely marginalized. The emergence of a new religious identity as a "converted Muslim" is not the result of passive assimilation into their husband's religion. Rather, it is a process of actively cultivating a new self-image, albeit from a very limited space, both within the power structure of the joint household in Pakistan and their own society, even though that space must be carefully constructed in the prevailing view of "cultural homogeneity" found in Japanese society.
For the women I interviewed who married Muslim migrants in their own homeland, that individually constructed space results in and encompasses many possibilities and predicaments. On one hand, a rich and intimate space of the “converted Muslim” opened up, through which a new notion of self was cultivated in joint efforts. On the other hand, this new world proved inseparable from multiple socio-economic marginalities and a resulting sense of vulnerability and uncertainty in and outside Japanese society. Thus, their positioning in society is unstable, ambivalent, and subject to constant negotiation. Ultimately, this negotiation is a result of their ongoing struggle to redefine themselves and their self-image as Muslim in their own homeland and the complex interplay of differences and power relations brought about through intermarriage within a migratory context. I would speculate that the process of self-construction for these Japanese women and their religious practices will continue to be intertwined with various socio-economic factors including the nature of the discourse of “cultural homogeneity” in Japanese society, the socio-economic marginalities that their husbands experience and how they view themselves as Muslims, and in what ways the entire Muslim community in Japan changes over time.

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