DEBATING CULTURAL HYBRIDITY

Multi-Cultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism

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ESSENTIALISING ESSENTIALISM, ESSENTIALISING SILENCE: AMBIVALENCE AND MULTIPLICITY IN THE CONSTRUCTIONS OF RACISM AND ETHNICITY

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FEAR OF ESSENTIALISM

Essentialism, it seems, has become the bogey word of the human sciences, an accusation generating a virtual ‘paranoia’ (Fuss 1990: 1). Against essentialism, social constructionists stress the contingent, fractured, ambivalent and reflexive nature of culture and identity as these are played out in the context of power and domination.

In the study of racism and ethnicity, the founding assumption of anti-essentialism has been the fluidity, hybridity and openness of national culture and diasporic collective identities. Yet the scholarly fear of essentialism has also inspired a growing interest in the sites of essentialism — in the question of who essentialises whom, when and for what purposes.

Such constructionist questions highlight the paradoxical fact that, as Fuss puts it, ‘there is no essence to essentialism’ (1990: xii). Equally significant is a growing sense that constructionism has gone too far — in denying the ontological grounds of experience as a source of cultural meaning, and particularly so with regard to the ‘phenomenology of embodiment’ (Shilling 1993: 86), here considered as it relates to the experience of racial violence and suffering and the collective identities this experience generates.

Although the rise of organised racial violence in Europe during the 1990s has been a much-publicised social fact (see Bjorgo and Witte 1993; Witte 1994; Bjorgo 1995), there has been a tendency to gloss over the increase in racial violence in Britain itself, most scholars preferring,
instead, to focus their deconstructive gaze on the stereotypes and textual narratives of racialising discourses. Nevertheless, the figures add up to a depressing record: in Britain in 1992-93, for example, there were 8,000 officially recorded incidents of racial violence, a figure which disguises the extent of the violence, thought to have been a multiple of this number (Runnymede Bulletin, September 1993). In September 1993, a candidate from the British National Party, the neo-Nazi fascist party, was for the first time elected as a municipal councillor in a London borough (he later lost his seat). An anti-racist demonstration against the BNP, which demanded the banning of explicitly racist political parties, ended in violence with a large number of policemen and demonstrators injured. Since 1992 the number of recorded incidents has risen; there has been an increase in vigilante activism of ethnic minority youth, minor ‘race’ riots in Bradford and Brixton, and further evidence of unwarranted police violence against members of minority groups.

Such processes of escalating racial and xenophobic violence in Britain appear to generate contradictory social trajectories. On the one hand, the pathways of mediated alliances and crosscutting ties between the majority and ethnic minority groups, which might counter the growing cycle of violence, become increasingly fragile. In Gregory Bateson’s terms, we may say that violence generates counter-violence in a schismogenetic process of communal polarisation (on schismogenesis, see Bateson 1958 [1936]: 175-97). On the other hand, opposing this trend, anti-racist movements mobilise an increasingly broader and more committed spectrum of ethnic groups for joint action against this escalating violence (see Miles 1994a).

In this chapter I analyse the experiential consequences of ethnic violence as a social force which absolutises ethnic identities. My argument starts from the premiss that violence is performative and exemplary: an extreme act of symbolic communication which generates a transformation in human relationships. The moral philosopher Emmanuel Levinas contrasts violence with altruism, which he defines as the human recognition of personal responsibility to an other in his or her difference. Unlike altruism, violence, he argues, denies otherness its legitimate right to exist and to be different. For Levinas, ‘face’, the acceptance of human alterity, contrasts with the ‘silence’ of violence, which is the turning away of face, a silence which is the denial of otherness (Levinas 1987).

In the following analysis, I build on Levinas’s contrast to argue for a critical difference between processes of objectification and reification: between ‘ethnicity’ as a shifting, hybridised politics of identity or collective self-representation, and ‘racism’ or xenophobia – ethnic absolutism – as a progressively essentialising politics of violation and absolute negation
of alterity. My argument responds in part also to a contemporary debate in Britain about anti-racism and multicultural identities. It is a debate which has highlighted some of the intractable dilemmas inherent in the multicultural privileging of singular, discrete and exclusive ethnic or racial identities in the public sphere.

At issue are problems of both representation and self-representation. The distinction is critical, for it raises questions about the moral and political right to represent a cultural other. Increasingly, the tendency has been to label all collective representations – whether of ethnic and religious groups, or classes and nations – as misplaced essentialisms (so that as anthropologists we can no longer study a ‘society’, a ‘community’, a ‘culture’ or a ‘people’). Yet this indiscriminate accusation of essentialism, applied uncritically to all objectifications of collective agents, has tended, I shall argue here, to obscure processes of collective representation and self-representation which are not essentialist. To appreciate this further, I turn first to a consideration of the meaning of essentialism.

To essentialise is to impute a fundamental, basic, absolutely necessary constitutive quality to a person, social category, ethnic group, religious community, or nation. It is to posit falsely a timeless continuity, a discreteness or boundedness in space, and an organic unity. It is to imply an internal sameness and external difference or otherness.

The charge of essentialism attaches to any form of analysis which may be said to obscure the relational aspects of group culture or identity, and to valorise instead the subject in itself, as autonomous and separate, as if such a subject could be demarcated out of context, unrelated to an external other or discursive purpose (see Rorty 1992). The charge of essentialism is also levelled at structuralist analyses that highlight the internal coherence of symbolic patterns or social systems, and at phenomenological ones that stress the emotional power of distinctive cultures to define experience: the social force of taken-for-granted sentimental cultural attachments.

As a political performance, essentialising is defined as a form of displacement, ‘which serves to disguise and distort the real thing’, in Edward Said’s terms (Said 1985: 22), to obliterate people, he says, as ‘human beings’ (ibid.: 27). Representation as distortion is seen here as a mode of silencing and suppressing the voices of oppressed subgroups. In this respect essentialism is a performative act, a mode of action.

Attempts to avoid essentialising the social collectivities we study lead, however, to a series of conundrums. If to name is to re-present, to imply a continuity and discreteness in time and place, then it follows that all collective namings or labellings are essentialist, and that all discursive
constructions of social collectivities – whether of community, class, nation, race or gender – are essentialising. If Western Orientalism constructed a false non-Western Other, the Saidian critique of Orientalism runs the danger of constructing false counter-Occidentalisms of the West (Clifford 1988: 259, 262 passim; Carrier 1995: 1–3 passim). Since any objectification of a group or collectivity necessarily implies a continued unity in time and space, and a measure of integration, it would seem to follow that all forms of objectification essentialise.

In seeking a way out of this apparent aporia, Dominguez suggests that ethnographic writing should focus not on groups but on the process of objectification itself: the way collectivities describe, redescribe and argue over who they are (Dominguez 1989: 38; see also Yuval-Davis and Baumann in Chapters 11 and 12 above). Her work, like that of other feminists and post-colonial critics, reiterates that who has the right to objectify is itself a political question, because objectification implies ‘a semiotic appropriation of self by the other’ (ibid.: 166) and, by implication, a silencing of the other.

The issue is not, we need to remember, merely discursive, a linguistic paradox disclosing the limits of language. Policy decisions, state fund allocations, racial murders, ethnic cleansing, anti-racist struggles, nationalist conflicts or revivals, even genocide, follow on essentialist constructions of unitary, organic cultural collectivities.

The very heterogeneity of that list points, however, to the tangled issues I want to address here: citizenship rights and multiculturalist agendas are as much dependent on collective objectifications as are racist murders or ethnic cleansing. It is therefore critical to establish clearly the difference between modes of objectification and modes of reification. I want to suggest that reification is representation which distorts and silences, and hence is essentialist in the pernicious sense implied by this term. In this chapter I explore the difference between such reifications and normal ethnicity – a mode of objectification that, unlike xenophobia, ethnicism or racism, is, I suggest, a rightful performance or representation of multiple, valorised and aestheticised identifications.

That the problem of collective objectification is political, and not merely theoretical, is underlined by the energy devoted by ethnic activists and academics in Britain to arguing about the moral appropriateness of group labels. Such labels seem to capture the essence of a group, and this has lead to fierce debates about what ethnic minorities should call themselves, and be called. Label after label is rejected. First, the label of ‘migrant’ was rejected, then of ‘immigrant’, then of ‘black’, then of ‘Asian’ (see also Modood and Bonnett, Chapters 9 and 10 above).
The argument about ethnic naming highlights the fact that it is not only Western representations of the Other which essentialise. In their performative rhetoric the people we study essentialise their imagined communities in order to mobilise for action. Within the spaces of civil society, the politics of ethnicity in Britain are not so much imposed as grounded in essentialist self-imaginings of community. Hence, ethnic leaders essentialise communal identities in their competition for state grants and formal leadership positions. But – equally importantly – such leaders narrate and argue over these identities in the social spaces which they themselves have created, far from the public eye. Hence much of the imagining that goes towards mobilising ethnic or religious communities in Britain occurs in invisible public arenas, before purely ethnic audiences (on the significance of such popular cultural public arenas in India and more generally, see Freitag 1989).

In other words, self-essentialising is a rhetorical performance in which an imagined community is invoked. In this regard, the politics of ethnicity are a positive politics: they serve to construct moral and aesthetic communities imaginatively. These moral and aesthetic communities are not fixed: they overlap and vary in scale. They emerge situationally, in opposition to other moral and aesthetic communities. Seen over time, this multiplicity of contingent, shifting and emergent collective identities enact a composite, unreflective, ‘natural’ and changing hybridity. The politics of race, extreme nationalism or xenophobia, by contrast, are a violent politics. The communities essentialised by the perpetrators of violent acts of aggression are not imagined situationally but defined as fixed, immoral and dangerous. In being demonised, they are reified.

Violence is an act which demands retribution. It creates, as Kapferer argues, its own ‘meaning’ and ‘order’, in which ethnic identities ‘flash off’ each other (Kapferer, forthcoming). It is performative, a ‘display’ of self-sufficient autonomy and rejection of otherness which becomes in time routine practice, grounded in common-sense social constructions. Through this process, the signifying practices of racial violence come to be constitutive of self and identity – as happens, for example, among white working-class adolescents (see Hewitt 1986; Rattansi 1995). Unless it is checked, violence generates an escalating cycle of fear and counter-violations, leading to an unbreachable moral chasm. To achieve this end, xenophobic actors ‘theatricalise’ and ‘ritualise’ violence, in order to destroy the natural syncretisms, hybridities and multiple affiliations of everyday life and ‘magnify’ cultural differences (Tambiah 1986: 117).
It was such a cycle which led to the racialisation of British Muslims in the course of the Rushdie affair. The emotionally charged development of the *Satanic Verses* affair can thus serve to illuminate the schismogenetic nature of essentialism as a social process grounded in violence.

**AGONISTIC MORAL PANICS: THE SATANIC VERSES**

*The Satanic Verses* was a politically polemical novel inserted into an already charged political field. The field was marked by a cycle of agonistic moral panics, which generated a chain of essentialisms and counter-essentialisms.

Moral panics demonise tangible surface targets through a process of 'displacement' (see S. Cohen 1972: 9). In a moral panic, underlying social contradictions converge on apparently concrete causes. As moral panics overlap, as the 'demons proliferate', the sense of threat reaches a point of crisis in which ordinary people begin to fear 'the breakdown of social life itself, the coming of chaos, the onset of anarchy' (Hall *et al.* 1978: 322–3) – in short, apocalypse, which only an 'exceptional' response can forestall.

The historical roots of the Rushdie affair in Britain can be traced to British and American imperialism in Iran, an intervention which violated Iranian national integrity. Supported by the West, the Shah of Iran's modernisation drive attacked not only political freedoms but Islam as the national religion, evoking instead a pre-Islamic Persian history, dating back 2,500 years to Cyrus the Great (see Lewis 1975).

The Shah's deliberate attack on Islam generated the first moral panic, led by the Islamic clergy, which ultimately sparked the Iranian revolution. The Iranian revolution led to the second moral panic, this time in the West, which was fuelled by a fear of a violent, fanatical 'Islamic fundamentalism'. Rushdie, and secular Muslim intellectuals like him, shared that fear, as other Islamic countries like Pakistan began, following the Iranian revolution, to abolish hard-won civil liberties, and especially the rights of women (see Mumtaz and Shaheed 1987).

Both moral panics generated essentialist definitions of opponents. Iranians, in their fear, demonised the Shah and essentialised America as 'The Great Satan'. The West, and urbanised liberal Muslims in Islamic countries, demonised the Ayatollah Khomeini and essentialised the Muslim hordes. *The Satanic Verses* can be seen as a cultural response to this real sense of fear experienced by a Muslim cosmopolitan elite.

The publication of the novel sparked a new moral panic. Muslims globally perceived it as a public symbolic violation, a Western and Zionist
conspiracy to defame and mock Islam and its sacred symbols. In Britain the moral panic was a tangible symptom of the contradictions Pakistani immigrants were experiencing between their aspirations as economic migrants and the cultural alienation which permanent settlement implied (see P. Werbner 1996a). The fact that the book seemed to mock and deride Islamic culture and values made it a symbol of racism, of the humiliation Pakistanis experience daily as black victims of racial abuse and discrimination.

Hence a novel which might at another time have passed unnoticed came to be displaced as the devilish locus of a moral panic. The author was literally demonised in the Islamic press and cinema, his slanted eyes and long ears lending themselves to the creative imagination of Muslim cartoonists. A literature defending Muslim interpretations of the book emerged (see, for example, Ahsan and Kidwai 1991). A deep sense of hurt pride and offence generated a campaign against the author, even before the Ayatollah’s fatwa.

The violent response of Muslims to the author and the book triggered a British and Western counter-moral-panic. This last in the cycle of agonistic moral panics displaced and essentialised local British Muslims as folk devils. It papered over the contradiction in Britain between the ‘nation’, invoked as an expression of a shared, unified and homogeneous culture and history, and the multicultural, multi-racial nature of contemporary British society. British Muslims came to epitomise the danger to the nation as a moral community, to freedom of expression, to physical safety, to universal cultural communication between all citizens. ‘Islamophobia’ – the fear of Muslims – became a direct expression of this moral panic.

Muslim and English moderates attempted to dissipate the panic by refocusing attention on the blasphemy law and its bias in favour of Christianity. Indeed, the whole debate has consisted of such refocusings, each side foregrounding and essentialising different dimensions of the cycle of agonistic panics and counter-panics (on this process in scientific discourse more generally, see Strathern 1991).

As the affair continued, it became clear that Muslim religious feelings were not protected under the British blasphemy law. British Muslims discovered that their religion could be violated and mocked without the law affording them any protection. In response, in a schismogenetic process of polarisation, they essentialised English society as hostile and unfeeling. At the same time, they reconstituted themselves as a community of suffering.
RACISM AND AMBIVALENCE

A digression is in order here: my claim that racism reifies and absolutises cultural difference is challenged by a contemporary stress on the inherently ambivalent nature of relations between racist and racialised, coloniser and colonised, in which ‘fear and desire double for one another and play across the structures of otherness’ (Hall 1992: 256). In the postmodern world, Rattansi argues, ‘racist identities are decentred, fragmented by contradictory discourses and the pull of other identities ... [they are] not necessarily consistent in their operation across different contexts and sites’ (Rattansi 1995: 70). For the racist, ‘the racist object is not only disgusting and hateful, but powerful, fascinating, erotic and possessing qualities admired by racist subjects’ (ibid.: 74). This seems to accord with Fanon’s claim that the ambivalence of racist (or colonial) ‘desire’ is mirrored by the racialised subject’s dream of dispossessing and replacing his oppressor: ‘there is no native who does not dream at least once a day of setting himself up in the settler’s place’ (Fanon 1967: 30). Hence the colonial situation is characterised by a continual fluctuation between attraction and repulsion (Young 1995: 61).

Reflecting on such ambivalent desires, it might seem that racist subjectivities are fractable, situational and partial, not unlike any other collective identities. There are, in other words, ‘no watertight definitions to be had of ethnicity, racism and the myriad terms in between.... Indeed, all these terms are permanently in-between, caught in the impossibility of fixity and essentialism’ (Rattansi 1995: 53). The dangers of such a thesis are obvious: in conflating the multiplicities and hybridities of everyday ethnicity with the ambivalences of racism or ethnicism, ethnic sentiments are, in effect, criminalised, while racist motivations are, by the same token, exonerated. All is ambivalence.

At first glance, Hall’s or Rattansi’s views merely echo the stress on ambivalence in the encounter between racist and racialised in the work of Homi Bhabha. Like Bhabha, Rattansi’s psychoanalytic focus on sexuality importantly recognises the emotional roots of identity. Yet he fails, like Bhabha, to appreciate the critical difference between racism and everyday ethnicity – that is, between reification and objectification. There are important parallels between my critique of his approach here and the criticisms levelled by some post-colonial writers at Bhabha’s reading of Fanon.

According to JanMohamed (1985), Bhabha fails to recognise that Fanon viewed the colonial conflict as an irreducible Manichaean struggle. Indeed, reading The Wretched of the Earth one cannot escape the progression Fanon traces from the moment of colonial repression and mutual
envy and/or desire to the polarised liberatory violence of the nationalist movement (the point stressed by Parry 1987) pitched against the utter brutality of colonial counter-violence (Fanon 1967).

For Gates, reviewing this argument, it simply reflects the porousness of Fanon's work which makes it amenable to multiple, positioned, critical readings (Gates 1991: 458). From my perspective, what Fanon importantly recognised is that all relations between racists and victims, colonisers and colonised, are imbricated in violence. This is ultimately what differentiates racism, ethnicism or xenophobia from banal, everyday ethnicity, however competitive, interested and ethnocentric identity politics may be. In a racist relationship desire and attraction are schismogenetically transformed into an impulse to violate, to rape and to molest. The key is to be found in the process itself, which is enunciatory, performative and dynamic, not static and logocentric.

The interpretative differences between Fanon-gazers are thus also differences in the interpretation of racism itself; a question of what happens when words become acts. My proposal is that violent acts erase the ambivalences of racism to reveal a 'Manichean world' (Fanon 1967: 31). In this sense the 'third space' of pre-revolutionary, blurred and compromised identities which Fanon describes – a site where racist and racialised mirror and are drawn towards each other, inversely and perversely – is from the start a space of distorted specularities: a pathological space.

One should be careful not to conflate spatial metaphors of heterotopia, cultural ambivalence, multiplicity or hybridity which may denote quite different relations.5 In Bhabha's own work, an optimistic evocation of an 'intervening space' in which a 'new transnational and translational sense of the hybridity of imagined communities' will replace the polarising violence associated with ideas of a 'pure, "ethnically cleansed" national identity' (1994: 5) is ambiguously located vis-à-vis his analysis of the 'splitting' of the colonial space of consciousness in a 'Manichean delirium': a paranoid fantasy of boundless possession (ibid.: 43–5) in which the ambivalent figure of the deracinated évolué, doubly, neurically, as I read it, different according to Fanon, occupies a liminal space betwixt-and-between colonised and coloniser.

In my reading of Bhabha, the post-colonial space of the migrant he evokes is marked ambiguously both by pathological ambivalence and violence and by multiplicity: of split subjects and identities which deny the possibility of 'claiming an [authentic and whole] origin for the self', since the diasporic sense of self is necessarily disrupted by a consciousness of difference (1994: 47): one is continually positioned in space between a range of contradictory places that coexist' (ibid.). The mistake Bhabha makes is to conflate the third space of multicultural multiplicity with the
Fanonian, pre-revolutionary, perverted and fear-driven space of colonial specularties (ibid.: 50–51). This conflation obscures the specificity of the redemptive project undertaken by Third World and Black writers: to write the counter-narratives of the margins, not merely in order to unsettle ‘any simplistic polarities and binarisms’ (ibid.: 53) – the task of remaking the nation in its complex cultural and ideological heterogeneity – but, above all, in order to expose the violence and suffering generated by the encounter. This is Paul Gilroy’s central point (1993): that black aesthetics and polemics were produced by the engagement with the darker, destructive side of modernity. Unlike Gilroy, however, both Bhabha and Rattansi fail in the final analysis to distinguish clearly between the interruptive juxtapositions which objectify hybridised ethnic and cultural differences and the violating ambivalences of racism.

THE EMERGENCE OF A COMMUNITY OF SUFFERING

By contrast to everyday ethnicity, ethnicist or racial violations create communities of suffering. Counterposed against the self-declared ethnic ‘purity’ of the racists, a community of suffering is often a hybrid assortment of Others. The ‘Muslims’ racialised in the aftermath of the Iranian revolution or of the Rushdie affair, form a composite unity of nationalities and ethnicities. To understand how such a community of suffering emerges, we need to consider the ontological structure of racism as violence, and to examine the specificities of its violations. By doing so, we can begin to disclose how these generate the creative cultural narratives of communities of suffering.

Violence and violation are, of course, pervasive in Britain, as they are in other industrialised societies. Every year there are thousands of cases of domestic violence, violent robbery and homicide. Racism, xenophobia or extreme nationalism differ, however, from these other acts of violence in being directed against individuals by virtue of their (ethnically, biologically or culturally marked) group memberships. The violence is directed symbolically against the whole group by violating individual members of it. From this perspective, ethnic violence (‘ethnicism’) – even between groups putatively of the same ‘race’, as in Sri Lanka, Bosnia or Zimbabwe – is a form of racism, since what is critical is the way in which groups are essentialised violently in order to subordinate or exclude them permanently. It makes little difference, in this respect, whether such groups are marked out by colour, language, religion, territory, or claimed common origin.
Racial or xenophobic attacks are meant to be exemplary. The message of the attackers is clear: these immigrants, black people, Muslims, don’t belong here. They must go or be eliminated. In this sense violence is a ‘theatrical’ locutionary act, an act of public communication. Hence, although racial violence seems to be haphazard and uncontrolled, in reality it is systematic.

As in tribal feuds, continuing violence comes in time to be perceived as an essential feature of intergroup relations. Where aggression goes unpunished, it comes to be legitimised ideologically.

In order to highlight the systematic nature of racial, xenophobic or quasi-nationalist violations, I turn now to a consideration of the dimensions of personhood and sociality that racism as violation invariably targets. Against the trend, I am arguing for the need to go beyond the recognition that there are many historically contingent racist discourses (P. Cohen 1988), and to seek the ontological structure of racism in the violations which repeat themselves across these and make the experience of racism ontologically comparable in the perception of its victims. My focus is particularly on the materiality of racism, its embodiment, which is revealed graphically in the objects that racism targets:

1. the human body (through torture, death, rape, physical mutilation, slavery);
2. individual and group property (through dispossession of land, personal property, corporate possessions, national estates);
3. sacred communal symbols (through physical destruction or desecration of places of worship, of religious and cultural icons, of aesthetic works, or by suppressing language);
4. group political autonomy (by jailing, exiling or executing leaders and dismantling regimes, and by attacks on vulnerable members of the group, such as women and children).

Effectively, then, ethnic violence targets the body, the body politic, the material bases of physical and sociopolitical reproduction, and the emblematic representations of subjectivity, personhood and society.

Everyday, banal racism, the kind most often encountered in Western democracies, replicates this series in parallel acts of sometimes invisible aggression:

1a. against the person or subject (through verbal insults and abuse, and deliberate social exclusion);
2a. against equal opportunities and citizenship rights (in housing, employment, education, etc.);
3a. against sanctified cultural icons (via slurs and attacks on a group’s culture by the media, or public political demands that the group assimilate or ‘integrate’);
4a. through a silencing of group voices in the public sphere; this was a pertinent feature, of course, of the Rushdie affair.

As a quotidian enactment, racists try to force the redefinition of social situations as confrontations between culturally or biologically marked collective actors. This contrasts with the normal political process of collective boundary construction which is fundamentally recursive and situational, reliant on the sited play of different subjective identities. Racism is thus a vortex which swallows up all other identities. In so doing it violates ‘normal’ expectations of sociality by generalising all situations that include cultural Others as Manichaean.

Because racism and xenophobia are ontologically structured in violent polarising acts, this makes the experience of racism ontologically comparable in the perception of victims across cultural communities and beyond the historical specificities of particular racisms. The early politics of the British Black anti-racist movement exemplify this hybrid transcendence of migrant identities. As Sivanandan recalls:

We learnt ... to weave from the differing but common traditions of our anti-colonial struggle a common struggle against racism. We related to both the struggle back home and the struggle now, the struggle of Gandhi and Nehru, of Nkrumah and Nyerere ... a beautiful massive texture. (Sivanandan 1990: 66)
The vital sedimented memory of common suffering and resistance is the shared ‘text’ for future cultural creativity. Involved here is far more than a mere ‘invention of tradition’; at stake is the imaginative rewriting of the experience of those who ‘suffered the sentence of history – subjugation, domination, diaspora, displacement’ (Bhabha 1994: 172), a memorialising of ‘a solidarity founded in victimisation and suffering’ (ibid.: 191). In sum, the moral fable of collective suffering is an allegory that can travel, as exemplified by Black slaves’ aesthetic reworking of the myth of Exodus (Gilroy 1993: 207–8).

Racism, xenophobia or quasi-nationalism are the very opposite of altruism and moral proximity, as Bauman has argued (Bauman 1989; 1992: 47–53). It is the inversion of the moral community (and hence of ethnicity); a denial of ‘face’ in Levinas’s terms (Bauman 1992); an act of violent ‘silencing’ in Foucauldian terms. The ‘silences’ arising from violent group subordination need thus to be distinguished from the ‘silences’ of quotidian ethnicity: a recursive and reiterative process through which multiple identities are selectively highlighted – now figure, now ‘silent’ ground. To pursue this statement further, I turn now to an analysis of the ‘silences’ of ethnicity.

**MORAL COMMUNITIES**

Like communities of suffering, moral communities disguise their composite multiplicity under a semblance of unity. Indeed, the challenge for the moral community is to transcend its internal cultural, political and gendered differences. Hence, although British Pakistanis are most known for their violent public protests in the aftermath of the publication of *The Satanic Verses*, in reality their main work of community formation has been hidden, virtually invisible, and has taken place in the spaces they have created for themselves. It is in these public arenas that Pakistanis mobilise to celebrate or fund-raise, and in which – to echo Clifford Geertz – they tell themselves stories about themselves.

The fundamental notion of public service for Pakistanis is *khidmat*, service rendered selflessly with no expectation of return. *Khidmat* is a form of unilateral giving, a sacrificial offering in the sight of God, an expression of public responsibility. The limits of the moral community are the limits of such unilateral giving or, alternatively, of sharing. *Khidmat* is thus an embodied, metonymic act of *identification* which expresses personal commitment stemming from a shared identity. During the 1990s, for example, Pakistanis, along with other British Muslims and concerned citizens, were engaged in a major philanthropic fund-raising drive throughout Britain to raise medical aid and food for the Muslims
in Bosnia. The drive included voluntary functions, concerts and political meetings, as well as the organisation of convoys of food, clothing and medicine across Europe to Bosnia.

Much of this fund-raising is highly politicised and competitive, yet even at its most agonistic, philanthropic giving of this type constitutes a symbolic statement about the recognised limits of trust. The category encompassing donors and recipients is, from this perspective, imagined as a moral community. Through his/her donations, an individual expresses membership in a circle composed of mutually trusting others.

But most importantly for the argument put forth here, rather than khidlat signifying identification with a single, essentialised community, giving enables subjects to reach out to a variety of overlapping and progressively widening imagined moral communities - from a circle of known intimates to the whole ethnic or religious community, including many unknown persons, and finally, to a scattered diaspora or the national homeland (see P. Werbner 1990). Hence the other is transmuted, through giving, into an extension of the self.

Unilateral giving grounds hybrid identities in dialogical relations, by connecting the self to significant others. In claiming public recognition, moral communities assert a beneficent equality rather than superior moral worth, positioning themselves within a system of named moral communities. Giving (like racial violence) is performative - a symbolic, indeed theatrical, gesture. But unlike violence, it is a gesture of reaching out, of responsibility and identification, signalling moral commitment or 'proximity' in the sense suggested by Levinas. Identities, in other words, are lived not only discursively, but through gestures of identification or rejection.

Anthropologists in recent years have increasingly recognised the dialogic nature of community. A moral community is not a unity. It is full of conflict, of internal debate about right and wrong (on this feature of Muslim society, see, for example, Fischer and Abedi 1990; Bowen 1989; P. Werbner 1996b, 1996c; and more generally on internal moral arguments of identity, Paine 1989; Dominguez 1989; R. Werbner 1991). Such debates imply fierce competition for leadership. They also involve competition for the right to name: Who are we? What do we stand for? What are we to be called? Are we Muslims? Democrats? Pakistanis? Socialists? Blacks? Asians? The power to name, to inscribe, to describe, to essentialise, implies a power to invoke a world of moral relationships, a power underlined in the myth of Genesis. Naming constitutes a forceful act of leadership in its own right.

Solidarities are not givens but achievements, usually ephemeral. Yet they are imaginatively critical moments: anti-essentialist arguments attacking
the false construction of ‘culture’, or ‘community’, fail to recognise the
importance for participants in moral debates of an imaginative belief in
the reality of such achieved solidarities (see Friedman 1992; Friedman
and Baumann, Chapters 5 and 12 above). Strategic essentialising has to
be grasped as a reality beyond a constructivist historiography of subaltern
consciousness (Spivak 1987: 205): in fact, the subaltern does speak, even
if her or his voice does not always reach ‘us’ – does not necessarily
seek to reach us. The performance of identity outside and beyond the
official public sphere, in alternative public spaces (Gilroy 1993: 200),
precedes and anticipates any public action in the larger national arena.

In Britain, diasporic public arenas are spaces in which local-level
community leaders engage in moral arguments and dialogues among
themselves, in front of local audiences. In such meetings, leaders promote
not only ‘ethnic’ but a variety of civic values – democratic, nationalist,
religious. Their speeches stress that people are locked in moral interde-
pendency; that – as one local-level Pakistani leader put it – ‘A person
cannot exist outside the community, as a wave cannot exist outside the
ocean.’ The rhetoric of such organic leaders evokes vivid images and
tropes, appealing (in the case of Pakistani settlers) to Punjabi and Islamic
cultural idioms and moral ideas in order to score points and move their
audiences. In their performative rhetoric local leaders evoke not only
moral communities but aesthetic communities as well.

THE AESTHETIC COMMUNITY

If the moral community is constituted through acts of giving, the aesthetic
community is defined by cultural knowledge, passion and creativity. This
is particularly important in the case of South Asians in Britain, for whom
language and popular culture cut across different South Asian national
and religious affiliations to create a broader, hybridised unity (on this,
see Hutnyk and Baumann, Chapters 7 and 12 above). Aesthetic com-
mities have their cultural experts: their orators, poets, priests, musicians,
saints and intellectuals. Their members share common idioms of humour,
love, tragedy, popular culture, festivals, cricket and myths of the past: of
national or religious exemplary heroes, of great battles and victories, of
oppression and freedom. They share aesthetic ideas of spatial separations
between the profane and the sacred, sensuality and spirituality, ‘fun’ and
sobriety. To perpetuate and reproduce these, Asians, Pakistanis and Mus-
lims in Britain incorporate themselves in a myriad of associations: literary
societies, religious organisations, orders and sects, sports clubs, women’s
cultural associations, and so forth.

In their artistic celebrations and rituals Pakistanis perform implicit
acts of identification with several different aesthetic communities. As immigrants they evoke nostalgically their Pakistan homeland and the villages of the Punjab, Sind, or the Frontier: they cite the poetry of their national poet, Muhammad Iqbal, which is read with heroic images of national pride, eagles, and metaphors of a Muslim nation. The moral lessons they draw are Islamic but also Western-democratic. The aesthetic community is intertwined with the moral community: ideas about purity and pollution, good and evil, sin and redemption, articulate the two. In their symbolic performances of religion, diasporic Muslims and Pakistanis fuse their complex identities as Punjabs, Pakistanis, socialists, democrats, British citizens, Asians, and Muslims. This fusion of discrete identities appeals to the deepest sensibilities of their audiences, to their nostalgia for another place and time. At the same time they evoke nostalgically their homeland and the villages of the Punjab, Sind, or the Frontier: they cite the poetry of their national poet, Muhammad Iqbal, which is read with heroic images of national pride, eagles, and metaphors of a Muslim nation. The moral lessons they draw are Islamic but also Western-democratic. The aesthetic community is intertwined with the moral community: ideas about purity and pollution, good and evil, sin and redemption, articulate the two. In their symbolic performances of religion, diasporic Muslims and Pakistanis fuse their complex identities as Punjabs, Pakistanis, socialists, democrats, British citizens, Asians, and Muslims. This fusion of discrete identities appeals to the deepest sensibilities of their audiences, to their nostalgia for another place and time. 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respond flexibly to competing ethnic demands for public resources and positive action. This ambiguity allows for contextual redefinitions rather than fixed reifications. The moral economy of state allocations on a tight budget is thus quite rational: it attempts to allow for the special needs of ethnic minorities while selecting the largest possible constituency, defined (variably) by race, language, religion, national origin or neighbourhood, capable of managing the allocation amicably, without too much internal conflict. The welfare state thus constantly attempts to match scarce resources with claimed and perceived needs and collective group 'labels'. As a result, public fictions of communal unity vary situationally, and are constantly evolving through negotiation and dialogue between administrators and ethnic representatives (see P. Webner 1991a). This familiar feature of ethnic politics differs radically from the essentialising processes of public reification which mark fixed cultural exclusions and subordination, often violently enacted.

The morally paramount division generated by the violations of racism might be expected to encompass and subsume all other cultural and religious divisions in a single community of suffering. Yet in contemporary Britain, the seeking of common aesthetic and moral narratives by the victims of racism has turned out to be highly problematic. Whereas racists essentialise and reify their victims differentially, these victims of racism struggle to find a shared, unitary identity they can all agree upon.

**ESSENTIALISING SILENCE**

Anti-racist discourses do not simply mirror differentialist racist discourses, each racism with its 'own' anti-racism. Because racial violence is an embodied, material attack suffered across racialised groups, it creates the potential ground for a mobilisation of broad, inter-ethnic alliances. Such alliances include also members of the majority group who are concerned with the broader defence of the nation-state's civic culture or citizenship identity (see also Rex 1992: 54).

Given their common experiences of racism and the shared sentiments these generate, anti-racists as a community of suffering can, potentially, evolve their own counter-discourses and self-identifications in the political arena. By doing so, they can transcend their particular ethnicities, class origin or gendered identities to forge new moral and aesthetic communities imaginatively.

But, paradoxically, racism, whether random or perpetrated by the state and police, violates selectively: Bangladeshis in London suffer more street violence, blacks are subjected to more police harassment, immigration
controls affect Asians more; black women are doubly marginalised; the cultural icons of particular groups are desecrated differentially. This differentialism drives a wedge between ethnic groups. It was highlighted by the Rushdie affair, which separated Muslims as a community of suffering from the secular ‘black’ community.

The paradox that racism not only unites victims but also divides them culturally has been highlighted by a political and academic debate between anti-racists regarding the validity of their shared identification as ‘black’, Black being originally used as the banner of a social movement of doubly oppressed workers within the broader socialist radical camp (on this debate, see Sivanandan 1990; 77–123; Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992: 7, 132–56; Braith 1992).

In its heyday, as we have seen, the black solidarity movement denied the significance of ethnic cultures, focusing singularly on the colonial and class struggle. Along with this focus came a sustained critique of anthropological studies of ethnicity, which were attacked for being divisive, apolitical and essentialising. Ethnicity, it was argued, colluded with the capitalist and bourgeois domination of a divided black working class. ‘Culture’ in this neo-Marxist critique was not ethnic but working-class and popular (see Hebdige 1979). Anthropology, in stressing the uniqueness of ethnic cultures, failed to recognise the class and racial dimensions of immigrant existence in Britain (CCCS 1982).

The Manichaean world imagined by the movement essentialised all whites as racists. At the same time the subtle racism of differentialist discourses projected a distorted ethnicism. Instead of demonising Britain’s ethnic minorities as non-human, the New Right stressed the virtues of English national cultural solidarity and the dangers inherent in multiculturalism. Rather than blatant colour racism, members of this new social movement stereotyped the cultures of Britain’s various ethnic minorities as inferior or primitive. They appealed to the virtues of Englishness and the moral superiority of English culture, with its tried and tested democratic, liberal and enlightened values. They attacked the obdurate unwillingness of immigrants to assimilate and embrace this culture wholly (for a discussion, see Miles 1989; see also Gilroy 1990 for a neo-Marxist response).

In the light of these developments, anti-racism as a mode of correcting false fictions of otherness was increasingly acknowledged as a devastating failure, not only by conservative critics but by radical activists themselves (see, for example, P. Cohen 1988; Gilroy 1987; Murphy 1987; Modood 1988). One challenge to the radical position took the form of a rejection by Asian intellectuals of a unitary ‘black’ label.

In a series of articles culminating in his contribution to this volume
nevertheless violent, reified of cleavage basic Here the groupings by, 4sian ness, and anrl lineuistic cuirurally divisive The ('black') than they tion to creativily bean history, more positive, comntttuities groLgp between 'coercivelv' imposerl on 244 (Chapter above), Tariq Modood argued that a 'black' identity is being 'coercively' imposed on Asians against their will; as such it disempowers — and, indeed, harms — them. There is a difference, Modood argues, between a 'mode of oppression' — a negation — and a 'mode of being' — a positive, empowering cultural and psychological force which enables a group to 'resist its oppression'. Indeed, he claims, not all racist violations are the same. The most virulent white English hostility is reserved for communities which reproduce their cultural distinctiveness. The manufacture of a black identity out of black American, African and Afro-Caribbean history, Modood continues, serves to marginalise 'Asians' in relation to Afro-Caribbeans not only culturally, but economically and politically.

In the face of such arguments, and the evident vitality of Asian cultural creativity in Britain, Stuart Hall, in similar vein, revises an earlier position which attacked 'ethnicity studies' (CCCS 1982). He reflects that 'we always reconstructed' the 'great collectivities' of class, race and nation: 'more essentially, more homogeneously, more unified, less contradictorily than they ever were, once you actually got to know anything about them' (1991: 46). Asian people, he continues, when they came using their own resources of resistance, when they wanted to write out their own experience and reflect their own position, when they wanted to create, they naturally created within the histories of the[ir] language, the[ir] cultural tradition ... (ibid.: 56)

The problem with this debate is that it appears to replace one reification ('black') by another ('Asian'). The latter, in turn, disguises morally and culturally divisive oppositions among Asians between religious, nationalist and linguistic groups: Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs, Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, Punjabis, Gujeratis and Sindhis. Asianness, like blackness, is locked in a misplaced concreteness. It is not, after all, primarily Asian collective sacred icons and cultures which are violently targeted by racists in Britain, but the discrete national and religious icons of sub-groupings within the broader South Asian collectivity. As we have seen, the most violent racism at present is directed against British Muslims. When, however, the primary battle is for state allocations or posts, the basic relationship which is publicly represented is not racial, but ethnic. Here the dynamics of fission and fusion rather than of a single dominant cleavage are the main operator, the 'voices' and 'silences' the product of relationally objectified ethnic segmentary oppositions rather than of violent, reified suppressions.

Stuart Hall's discussion of the ambivalences of the politics of representation fails to distinguish between these two silences. His discussion is nevertheless insightful because it discloses, perhaps unintentionally, the on-
tolological and phenomenological dimensions of the segmentary principle of fission and fusion (that is, of situational objectifications). Opposites, Hall argues, not only repel, but are also attracted to one another; they bear the trace of their resemblance, articulated in an encompassing term of identification which, in turn, ‘silences’ those differences. The relationship between communal representations or identities, seen thus, he continues, is inherently dynamic and ‘positional’. Its further complexity lies in the way multiphrenic, overlapping identities are managed in practice, or singular identities highlighted in political contestations.

But such ‘silences’, the silences of ethnicity, are – and this is a key point in the present argument – quite different from the violently produced silences of racism. Ethnicity does not deny proximity and alterity; it merely highlights difference. Ethnicity is an argument with other opinions – a dialogical heteroglossia in Bakhtinian terms. The violent silences of suppressed voices denied a political presence in the public sphere are generated by a denial of otherness – a denial of ‘face’ and ‘opinion’ in Levinas’s terms. The two silences – of ethnicity and racism/ethnicism – are thus quite different; indeed, opposed. There is no ‘becoming’ in the silence of racism, because no proximity or commonality is acknowledged. Such a silence is the silence of tyranny, of absolute ‘I-ness or ipseity (see Levinas 1987: 18–23; 47–53). Thus Hall is right to argue for the need to ‘decouple’ ethnicity from racism in the analysis of ‘Englishness’ (1992: 257), but he is wrong to equate the ambivalences of ethnicity with those of racism.

There is also a third, related, class of silences, which I shall call ‘methodological silences’. These silences are discussed by Strathern (1991) in her application of chaos theory and fractal graphics to problems of social scale. Methodological silences are constituted by the gaps created by our scientific discourses, the ‘remainder’ these discourses generate. As Strathern points out, no representation, however complex and apparently exhaustive, is ever complete; there are always, in principle, further gaps to be filled, described or explained. In this sense all knowledge is partial, and replete with silences. As we produce knowledge, ‘we become aware of creating more and more gaps’ (Strathern 1991: 119). Discussing black people, we become aware of ignoring Asians; discussing Asians, we ignore Muslims; and so forth, right down to the individual, the self, and the divided self.

There are, then, at least three types of ‘silence’, which differ, in principle, from each other, and parallel different forms of essentialism. The voices of ethnic and subethnic groups, like the voices of individual subjects, are not necessarily silenced by violent suppression; they are given expression at different scales of action, in particular contexts, in front of different
audiences. By contrast, minorities which are oppressed, marginalised and 'silenced' seek to make their voices heard from the widest public platforms: the national media, a canonical national high culture, and economic and political debating forums. It is in these contexts that national images and public agendas are formulated which affect the destiny of these groups.

Feminists have been key advocates against the rising tide of multiculturalism represented by Modood and others (e.g. Ballard 1992). As Yuval-Davis reiterates in Chapter 11 of this volume, feminists evoke the voices of ethnic minority women in Britain, silenced by the valorisation of essentialised definitions of cultural communities. They argue that to recognise the separate rights of such communities is to promote patriarchal values which deny Muslim or black women the equality and 'voice' due to them as British citizens (see the contributions to Sahgal and Yuval-Davis 1992; Murphy 1987; Yuval-Davis 1993; Ali 1992; also Goering 1993). Fixed public communal labels necessarily ignore the internal differentiations within cultural communities, the multicultural and hybrid identities of its members. To empower specific named collectivities legally or financially at the expense of others is to privilege a particular, situationally defined and objectified collectivity as an essentialised, reified, discrete continuity.

In arguing against such 'organic' political evocations of community – that is, community as an essentialised Gemeinschaft – Anthias and Yuval-Davis go even further: they deny the very utility of the term itself (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992: ch. 6, especially 163; Yuval-Davis 1993: 3; see also Eade 1991). This rejection must also be seen in the light of the hitherto almost fixed association 'community' has acquired in the sociological imagination with Tonnies' ideal typification as a traditional, face-to-face collectivity of consociates, bound in amity (see Hetherington 1993). The liberating impact of Benedict Anderson's notion of 'imagining' has been to release this restricted notion of 'community' from the prisonhouse of sociological language. Anderson traces the transformation of 'community' as a sociospatial collectivity of contemporaries (not consociates) who perceive themselves as sharing similar, synchronised everyday lives. The release of the term from its common-sense sociological straitjacket reveals its refractive and situational features. Like deieng (meaning 'home') among the Nuer, 'community' evokes sited meanings and values contextually.

A recognition of the sited nature of 'community' serves only, however, to underline the fundamental aporias of the politics of representation: a public identity has ontological connotations – it is constitutive of self and subjectivity through its ethical and aesthetic evocations. It
is empowered, empowering and passionately defended. Multiculturalism empowers morally and aesthetically imagined communities, not oppressed class fractions.

Yet the immediate thrust of multiculturalism is towards a fragmentation of solidarities, so that the politics of representation become the politics of proportional representation, percentage politics. The clash of interests between disadvantaged groups exposes the moral hollowness of ethnic claims (Werbner and Anwar 1991; Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992).

Such cultural fragmentation is impotent to contend with powerful organised racist violence. Effective anti-racist struggles depend on the evolution of common, unitary narratives and the suppression of cultural differences between victims of racism. The search thus continues for a powerful hybridising, essentialising allegory which can mobilise a wide constituency of anti-racists positively, as label after label, narrative after narrative, is rejected.

CONCLUSION

My aim in this chapter has been to recover the performative and processual dimensions of racism and ethnicity; to move away from a logocentric emphasis on racism as discourse to an understanding of the embodied materiality of racism (or ethnicism) as experience, and its polarising force. Just like racism, ethnicity, too, is materially embodied and grounded in sentiment. But whereas racism negates and violates (however ambivalently), ethnic identities are performed through gestures of identification, of reaching out. These two modes of relatedness marking alterity need thus to be theorised in terms of the systematically contrasting ways in which they deploy essentialist and non-essentialist representations and self-representations in the public domain. Even when racism highlights its ambivalences by masquerading as ethnicity (as do ‘New Right’ differentialist discourses), its intentions remain self-evidently aggressive, transgressive and absolutist: racism draws a line; it essentialises alterity.

By contrast to racial politics, the politics of ethnicity depend on scale and situation. The highlighting of a particular ethnic, as against racial, collective identity in the public domain generates a field of relevant oppositional identities at a particular social scale. This is because collective identities are defined within moral and semantic social worlds of oppositions and resemblances. There is no collective identity in and for itself, as a positivity without an implied negation. Bureaucratic fictions of unity essentialise, but they do so by objectifying communities situationally and pragmatically, in relation to notions of redistributive justice. This objectification is quite different from the violent essentialising of
racism, or the mobilising, strategic essentialising of self-representation. Self-essentialising as a mode of reflexive imagining is constitutive of self and subjectivity. It is culturally empowering. But it is not, unlike racist reifications, fixed and immutable.

We are confronted with a duality: while ethnic identities are always positioned, and situationally grounded, racialised identities are fixed by a single dominant opposition, highlighted and elaborated above all others in response to physical and moral violations (see, for example, R. Werbner 1991; Kapferer 1988). This is because the politics of representation or identity are most critically divisive and overarching when they recall past violations and evolve into a politics of moral accountability. In such a politics, history is invoked as a charter of injustice still awaiting restitution (on such a politics, see R. Werbner 1995). For Muslims in Britain, the Rushdie affair is experienced as a festering open wound, an unpaid debt that demands redress and moves them to claim a separate anti-racist identity in the public sphere. But where racism is recognised as violating a whole spectrum of minority groups, the shared embodied materiality of their suffering creates potential ground for common oppositional fables and a genuine cultural fusion in broader alliances, as they come to realise the reality of a major radical, unbridgeable moral breach. By contrast, ethnic competition generates fission and fusion, and situational oppositions.

My argument, I believe, goes beyond the recognition of ‘unity in diversity’ or even of a ‘universal diversity’ – the assumption that political struggle does not have to be uniform or united, but must recognise continued differences of interest and positioning: ‘otherwise any notion of solidarity would be inherently racist, sexist and classist’ (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992: 197; see also Yuval-Davis, Chapter 11 above). In asking what impels people towards solidarity against the disruptive power of difference, I suggest that it is because racism and xenophobia are (at least for some, if not all, members of racialised minorities) materially embodied, and experienced as personal or collective violation – and hence suffering – that persons quite differently positioned are able to interpret and fabulate this experience ideologically, aesthetically and morally as essentially unitary, across gender, class and ethnic differences; to create, in other words, a ‘new’ identity.

The result is that in modern, ethnically diverse nation-states there are continuous centrifugal and centripetal pressures: on the one hand, to assert and elaborate particular identities; on the other, to create broader, more universalistic alliances.

Hence, not all collective cultural representations and self-representations in the public sphere are essentialising in the same way. To lump all forms of objectification together as essentialist is, from this perspective,
to essentialise essentialism. It is to conflate two opposed relational fields of objectification and reification.

This is precisely, however, what many discussions of racism and ethnicity in Britain tend to do. This tendency is exacerbated by the sometimes exclusive focus on the ideological dimensions of ethnicity and racism. Yet contrary to the view of some scholars, otherness or alterity exists within a complex field of relations. There is no fixed divide between self and other. Instead, alterities form a continuous series on a rising scale: from the divided or fragmented self to major collective cleavages between ethnic groups or nations.

Against the ideological and logocentric stress in scholarly discussions of racism, I have argued here that collective constructions of racism and ethnicity are forms of polarising or recursive symbolic action, part of a host of other acts, played out in public arenas, all of which aim to effect change, transform, attack, or elicit support. The verbal rhetoric of racism or ethnicity is performative and strategic rather than descriptive and representational, a political weapon in a public struggle for state resources, citizenship rights or a universal morality.

NOTES

This chapter draws on work in progress and earlier work by the author listed below, and is part of a forthcoming book provisionally entitled Diaspora and Millennium: Islam, Identity and the Aesthetics of the Religious Imagination. An earlier version was presented as a Keynote Address to the Swiss Ethnological and Sociological Associations’ joint Annual Conference on ‘The Other in Society: Migration and Ethnicity’, at Berne University in October 1993, and has been published in the proceedings of that conference (Wicker et al. 1996). It was also presented to Keele University’s Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, and at an ICCCR seminar at Manchester University. I would like to thank the participants in the seminar for their helpful and incisive comments. Special thanks are due to Bobby Sayyid and Nick Lee for their insightful suggestions in revising this draft.

1. Gregory Bateson has argued that there are two forms of schismogenesis, based on complementary and symmetrical oppositions, both of which lead through a dynamic process of mutual opposition towards greater differentiation of value and a progressive exaggeration of difference and antagonism, unless they are checked by counter-tendencies. See Nuckolls (1995) for an interesting recent discussion of Bateson’s work.

2. Bauman (1992) attributes the notion of an aesthetic community to Kant, citing Lyotard (1988). The notion of an aesthetic community is more distinctively grounded, however, in postmodernist theory than in a Kantian universalist aesthetics (see Geertz 1993: ch. 5, for a superb account of what makes for an aesthetic community).
3. Kevin Hetherington has developed the Foucauldian notion of ‘heterotopia’ (Hetherington 1996).

4. Hence Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1992: 12) argue perceptively that racism is a discourse and practice of inferiorising ethnic groups. Ethnocentrism occurs when one’s own culture is taken for granted as natural, and is characteristic of all ethnicities to a greater or lesser extent. Xenophobia, or the dislike of the stranger or outsider, on the other hand, becomes racism when there are power relations involved.

5. Stuart Hall has stressed the historical specificities of racism. No doubt, he says,

there are general features of racism. But even more significant are the way in which these general features are modified and transformed by the historical specificities of the contexts and environments in which they become active. (Hall 1986: 23)

He goes on to deny the misleading view that because racism is everywhere a deeply anti-human and anti-social practice, that therefore it is the same – either in its forms, its relations to other structures or processes, or its effects. (ibid.)

The view presented here is that while this is undoubtedly the case, the ontological features of racism as violence need to be analysed in their generality, across these differences.

6. Racist ideologies, myths and fantasies focus on this same substantive structural constellation which constitutes the violence in the first place, as Philip Cohen (1988) shows.

7. The breach is the outcome of the ‘success’ or profitability of violence for its perpetrators, which marks the start of a fundamentally different relationship between two groups. It also creates an impetus to rationalise and justify the new relationship from the perspective of the oppressor. From the point of view of its victims, the historical act of violence becomes the basis, as mentioned, for a politics of moral accountability (see R. Werbner 1995). For the violators, politics are henceforth determined by a structure of fear.

8. The focus on discourse is very general, and in the post-colonial critical literature follows Said’s use of Foucault. Robert Miles, from a more orthodox Marxist perspective, also privileges discourse in his definition of racism (Miles 1989, 1994b). I would agree with Anthias and Yuval-Davis’s critique of this limitation (1992: 11).

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