Fun Spaces
On Identity and Social Empowerment among British Pakistanis

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The state of effervescence in which the assembled worshippers find themselves must be translated outwardly by exuberant movements... religion would not be itself if it did not give some place to the free combinations of thought and activity, to play, to art, to all that recreates the spirit.... (Durkheim, 1915: 381–2)

Effervescence, Aesthetics and Morality

IN THE CORROBORREE, Durkheim tells us, an emotional aesthetics of play and sensuality, of song, music, movement and merry-making, goes beyond mere play, to release and revitalize the moral forces of society stripped of any quotidian ‘fatigue’. The pulsating oscillation between the ‘slavishness of daily work’ and the exuberance of religious effervescence marks the continuous renewal of society as a moral reality beyond the individual.

Durkheim’s insights provided, of course, the ground for Turner’s analysis of liminality as communitas (Turner, 1974) and for Douglas’s interpretation of humour as anti-rite (Douglas, 1968). Both recognize the emotional camaraderie and fellow-feeling released by humour and licensed behaviour, and the levelling of difference, structure and hierarchy these imply. Similar themes seem also to echo through Bakhtin’s analysis of the medieval carnival. He too identifies the pulsating rhythm of a ‘two world condition’ in which the carnival spirit of fun, laughter and bodily sensuality surfaces periodically in relation to the natural cosmic cycle (Bakhtin, 1968: 6, 9). During carnival, hierarchy is suspended along with all privileges, norms and prohibitions, as people are ‘reborn for new, purely human relations’ (Bakhtin, 1968: 10).

Yet the Bakhtinian affirmation of grotesque realism disguises also a darker allegory – of repression, of the ‘prohibition of laughter’ (Pomorska, 1984: ix) even if the laughter of carnival is ‘indestructible’ (Pomorska, 1984: 33). Durkheimian morality is here transmuted into a semiotic struggle over the definition of morality, waged between an elitist, official, unchanging aesthetic and the unofficial parodic freedom of folk culture. The shift is to a focus on a politicized aesthetic, empowering different class segments. The present paper discloses the way in which such a morally grounded, semiotic struggle has developed among diasporic Pakistanis in Britain.

Pakistani postcolonial identities are forged by the intersection of three transnational lived-in cultural ‘worlds’: the world of a pan-South Asian aesthetic, encompassing music, dance, poetry and humour grounded in shared social and physical experiences; an anglicized postcolonial Western ‘Commonwealth’ culture; and an Islamic reformist culture which denies the legitimacy of the other worlds and strives to recreate a pristine purity. Reform Islam in South Asia, rather than being dominant, however, is constantly vying for hegemony against the pervasive impact of mass South Asian popular culture.\(^1\) In this sense the familiar Bakhtinian semiotic of popular or folk versus elite cultures needs to be reconceptualized: untenable is a simplistic Marxist view which posits a direct correspondence between cultures of resistance and subordinate status.

The worlds impinging on Pakistani society, both at home and in the diaspora, are more than the ideological ‘présences’ (‘existences’?) which Hall sees impinging on Caribbean identities: présence Africain, présence Européenne and présence Americaine (Hall, 1990: 230). Hall focuses on the way these cultural influences create a hybridized Afro-Caribbean subject dialogically (Hall, 1990: 230–5). The aim of the present paper is, by contrast, to show how lived-in ‘worlds’ become the grounds for real struggle in internal Muslim and Pakistani symbolic battles, fought over the definition of moral value and the practices embodying it.

It is significant for the argument put here that the majority of diasporic Pakistanis in Britain embrace both the world of Islamic asceticism and sobriety and the world of South Asian (‘Indian’) popular culture with its laughter and sensual gaiety. Many also partially embrace the world of Western secularism and play. Yet while the vast majority – men and women, young and old – participate as spectators in these worlds, their participation as creative and inventive actors varies: Pakistani women, who are the creative celebrants of pre-wedding rituals, and young Pakistani men who actively participate in sport, dominate the unofficial worlds of sensuality and play. Older Pakistani men, by contrast, are actors on the stage of local-level ethnic and religious politics where they display their oratorical skills in passionate power struggles. At stake in these struggles is the control of public arenas, such as the Central Mosque, as well as the privilege of hosting British and Pakistani politicians and dignitaries (Werbner, 1990a, 1991).

In the present article a semiotic of contested moralities and aesthetic modes of celebration is examined as it illuminates the development of a
diasporic Pakistani communal public sphere. The struggles documented here occurred in Manchester, a city with a relatively affluent Pakistani population of about 20,000, set within a wider conurbation settled by some 100,000 Pakistani immigrants and their descendants, virtually all Punjabi and Urdu speakers. The vast majority of Pakistanis both in the city and the wider conurbation are pious Muslims, and many are extremely religious.

My focus is on the emergence of a diasporic public sphere, defined, following Habermas (1962/1989), as a place where private citizens come together to debate issues of public or national significance. Although highly restricted in scope and almost invisible to non-Pakistanis, the British Pakistani diasporic public sphere is nevertheless a space for debate and voluntary action in response to national and global issues (see Werbner, 1990b, 1994; for similarities in South Asia see Freitag, 1989a, 1989b). It is in such ethnic public arenas, moreover, that communal narratives are first fabulated, formulated and reformulated in front of a local ethnic audience. Ethnic empowerment is therefore as much about the creation and reproduction of autonomous ethnic spaces as it is about the penetration into the wider public sphere controlled by the state or media. The implications of this stress on ethnic autonomy will be developed below.

The diasporic Pakistani public sphere is, at present, voluntary and personal. As such, it bears historical resemblance to the nascent European public sphere analysed by Habermas (1962/1989), before it came to be dominated by the culture industry. For Habermas, like others of the Frankfurt School, the expansion of the culture industry spelled a fragmentation of authority and of rational discourse in the public sphere, since mass culture, they felt, constituted desire in inauthentic and contrived terms, and exploited the hedonistic instincts of the masses. Against this critique, however, I highlight the relation between Pakistani grassroots popular culture/political activism and the South Asian culture industry. Ideologically, ‘Bollywood’ (Bombay’s answer to Hollywood) and the South Asian music industry, while manufacturing an endless supply of flamboyant kitsch, nevertheless tap indigenous North Indian and Pakistani roots of humour, sensuality and satire which serve, I propose, to empower marginally positioned Pakistani social categories, such as women or youth.

This highlights a critical dimension of the present discussion. At stake in the evolution of the public sphere is the question of ownership: who owns the public sphere? Who controls the discourses allowed to be made ‘public’? Who dictates what is ‘official’, that is, legitimate as representative of the group or its ‘culture’, or ‘unofficial’, illegitimate and hence denied public voice? Control of the public sphere as a contested arena is constitutive of authority, just as authority constitutes the public sphere.

The question of ownership is particularly germane to discussions of contemporary Muslim societies where Islamic radicals vie with feminists and conservative modernists for control over public spaces. In Manchester, the Pakistani ethnic public sphere, as a contested arena, went through a radical transformation in the 1990s during which the authority of Pakistani
male elders and their monopoly of communal public space were contested. The challenge came from Pakistani women, on the one hand, and young Pakistani men, on the other, two groups currently carving a space for themselves in the public sphere.

Very roughly, three historical phases mark this transformation. The first phase, between about 1950 and the mid-1980s, was a period of communal reconstruction and consolidation dominated by first-generation immigrant Pakistani men. It was followed by a brief period, from the mid-1980s onwards, which was one of intense political contestation between male elders, women and youth. This was also a time of male protest against The Satanic Verses. Since then there has been a partial capitulation of exclusive control by men, and with it the emergence of a gendered and familial Pakistani space of voluntary action which is also a space of ‘fun’, that is, marked by gaiety, humour, music and dance.

Space, Voice and Identity

Why have the spaces and ‘voices’ of Pakistani fun, whether in Pakistan or in Britain, been so difficult to suppress by Muslim reformists? To begin to answer this question it is useful to consider the notion of ‘space’ deployed here. The anthropological gaze, in interrogating the link between ‘space’, ‘voice’ and ‘identity’, has tended to stress the fact that ‘place’ as a source of identity, whether region, locale or national/transnational territory, is culturally constructed (see Appadurai, 1988; Ferguson and Gupta, 1992). Reversing the directionality of this equation, the present argument regards space as a metaphor for voice and identity. Like the French usage of ‘espace’, space here refers to an opening which enables a privileged mode of knowledge, cultural practice or discourse, and which is semiotically marked and framed as distinct both by the actors who ‘own’ the space and by others excluded from it (see especially Bourdieu, 1985). In this sense space is representational. Importantly, however, for the argument presented below is the further fact that representational spaces must be produced both materially and symbolically (in being ‘represented’); they thus require investment, public mobilization and co-ordinated action (see Lefebvre, 1974/1991: 33). In other words, social space, both as a metaphor for empowered identity (or ‘voice’) and as a public site of performance cannot be detached from collective mobilization, agency, social practice or audience.

If space and identity interact, then clearly the spread of world religions, colonialism and empire, migration and displacement, nationalism and pan-nationalism, have generated a world of individuals bearing multiple, contradictory, multiphrenic identities. British Pakistanis are, simultaneously, Muslims, South Asians, mostly Punjabis, more or less Westernized. They manage these identities by creating different symbolic domains of activity and keeping these domains separate. In particular, the purely sacred, formal and serious activities of ‘high’ Islam and the profane, a syncretic, hybrid amalgam of Islamic and Asian/Western cultural and
symbolic practices, are compartmentalized, or, to use Clifford Geertz’s apt term, kept in ‘disjunction’ (1968: 17–18, 105–7).

Moments of effervescence are performative moments: they occur periodically as ‘highs’ which punctuate daily life. Each Pakistani lived-in world (Muslim, South Asian, Western) potentially has such moments of public renewal and revitalization. Yet each celebrates discrete and even contradictory and competing moralities. Both in Pakistan and in Britain, Pakistanis avoid conflict (and continue to have ‘fun’) by ‘framing’ these spaces (see Bateson, 1973: 150–67), setting them apart and celebrating them situationally. The framing separates the profane from the sacred, the pure from the impure: music, dance, humour and sensuality are distanced from the religious activities focused upon the mosque or the sobriety of Pakistani national commemorations. The ideological challenge posed to this pragmatic modus vivendi has come, however, from a more strident Islamic meta-message which claims for the sacred and for the guardians of the sacred (pious Pakistani male elders) a total monopoly over public space, to the absolute denial of the legitimacy of all other forms of Pakistani public celebration.

**Contested Spaces**

In the face of attacks by Muslim puritanical (‘fundamentalist’) movements, the space of fun has come to be, for Pakistanis, a highly contested space. The mosque and official Islamic events are framed consensually by strict taboos and exclusions. More controversially, however, outside the mosque a sensual Punjabi aesthetics of music, dance and verbal licence has been defined by the Muslim reformist groups as un-Islamic and sinful, and particularly so with regard to the conduct of women, their sexuality and their right to be visible in public. This is often stressed in relation to veiling (see Mumtaz and Shaheed, 1987; esp. 29–31, 77–98; Kandiyoti, 1991; Najmabadi, 1991: 65–8); what is less often theorized in the increasingly vast literature on Islamic revival is the equally doctrinaire redefinition of instrumental music, dance and masquerade (and hence also of ritual celebrations, Hindi films and musical concerts) as sinful. Islamic reform aims to restrict bodily expressions of emotion and desire. This is often constructed in oppositional terms, vis-a-vis the Hindu majority in India. Hence Barbara Metcalf reports that the 19th-century Deobandi reformists in India ‘objected to customs such as sama’ (musical sessions to induce ecstasy) . . . and elaborate weddings and funerals on the basis of their similarity to Hindu festivals’ (Metcalf, 1982: 153). A reformist tract, *Heavenly Ornaments*, became a standard gift for Muslim brides in India. The very same book, in its English translation, is now required reading for British Pakistani women who are members of Tablighi Jama’at, one of the most influential Islamic reform movements in the West (Metcalf, 1990: 5). In the late 20th century it is not, of course, only Hindus who are targeted but, by analogy, the permissive West. Hence Chapter 6 of the book depicts the sinful pleasures associated with customary celebrations:
Everyone knows what sin and evil the dancing of harlots [professional singers and dancers in India who were regarded as prostitutes] entails. All the men look at unrelated women. That is adultery of the eyes. They hear the sound of women singing and talking. That is adultery of the ears. They talk with these women. That is adultery of the tongue. . . . If dancing is this evil, just think how sinful the people must be who arrange for dances. . . . Moreover, the musicians play various instruments . . . that too is sin. Hazrat Apostle of God . . . declared: ‘My Provider ordered me to destroy these instruments’. (Metcalf, 1990: 95)

Women, the guardians of (allegedly Hinduized) ‘sinful custom’ (as against purified Islamic law) are particularly prone to sin:

Now, as for the dancing arranged for the women [in exclusive female celebrations], you should consider it equally illegitimate, whether there are drums and other instruments or not. Books forbid the performance of monkeys – isn’t it much worse to have people dance? Moreover, the men of the house sometimes catch a glimpse of the dancing, with all the evils described above as a result. Sometimes the [women] dancers sing, and their voices reach the men outside. The men who hear women sing are committing a sin, as are the women responsible for the singing. (Metcalf, 1990: 95)

Masquerade too is prohibited:

Some women put a man’s hat on the head of the dancer. It is sin for a woman to look or act like a man. . . . In short, all the dancing and music that goes on today is a sin. (Metcalf, 1990: 95)

Along with singing, dancing and masquerade, ostentatious dress and jewellery are sinful (‘the noble hadis forbids jingling jewelry, because Satan is present in every sound’, Metcalf, 1990: 109).

Just as the English Puritans attacked the permissive excesses of Elizabethan England, so too ‘fun’ in the form of music, dance and customary celebration has been delegitimized and marginalized by Muslim reform movements. Their scripturalist zeal is not limited to South Asia. Patrick Gafni describes how in Upper Egypt, a student musical comedy performance was interrupted:

[B]earded militants entered forcibly and took over the stage, expelling the actors. They declared that the production was not in keeping with Islam and they demanded that it be cancelled completely. In its place, they announced that they would conduct an Islam programme. (Gafni, 1994: 100)

In similar vein the Islamists prevented the establishment of a cafe on campus because it would encourage ‘idleness and mixing of the sexes’ (Gafni, 1994: 103). In revolutionary Iran, too, the sinfulness of dancing, music and especially the cinemas were, Beeman tells us, ‘singled out for harsh attacks from the mosque and religious schools’, and were defined as instruments of Satan, the great tempter (1983: 196, 210).
If to have fun is to sin, then being sinful is fun. But this implies a cultural ‘gap’: an absence of a public domain of legitimate popular culture bridging the austere religiosity of the mosque and official occasions, and the transgressive breaking of taboos common in the intimacy of domestic wedding rituals; no official popular cultural space for entertainment, fun and laughter which could be said to be at once Pakistani and yet acceptable from an Islamic religious point of view. In Manchester, Muslim religiosity is not only austere but also contentious and politicized. The city’s Central Mosque has been since the 1980s the focus of religious sectarian conflicts and struggles for power and dominance which often involve public arguments and fights, sometimes quite violent (see Werbner, 1991). Until quite recently, there were no ‘legitimate’ cultural modes of celebration in the city which were Islamic and yet not mosque-based or religiously focused; no official cultural spaces Pakistani parents in Britain shared with their children and which constituted a publicly sanctioned substitute for Western popular culture.

Islam, Nationalism and Popular Culture

To consider further the implications of this polarized opposition between sinful fun and moral sobriety, the need is to examine the relationship between Pakistani nationalism and the other two sources of identification: South Asian popular culture and Islam. Historically, Pakistan as a modern nation-state was created by a separatist Muslim national movement in British India. Despite the conjuncture of Islam and nationalism which fuelled the Pakistani movement, there has been a growing tendency for Pakistani immigrants in Britain to suppress their ‘Pakistani’ identity in the wider, national public sphere; instead, Pakistani ethnic leaders and elders evoke a singular identity, that of being ‘Muslims’. Increasingly, they have distanced themselves from the broader ‘Asian’ identification, and they also reject an activist ‘black’ self-representation, espoused by some anti-racist left-wing groups. On most occasions they insist on being labelled ‘British Muslims’, the only exception to this being when they bid against other ethnic groups for municipal funding or local representative positions.

Yet this marking of a singular, *Islamic*, identity disguises, in reality, a continuing valorization of different dimensions of a complex cluster of personal identities. Perhaps because Islam is perceived as ‘high culture’, it is, for diasporic Pakistanis, a primary source of public identity, to be defended at all costs. Nevertheless being a Muslim continues to be for the vast majority integrally grounded both in Pakistani nationalist sentiment and in an apparently insuppressible Punjabi popular cultural tradition, rooted even more broadly in a pan-South Asian aesthetics.

Quite unlike Islamic reformist ‘high’ culture, however, this South Asian popular culture is ‘fun’: it celebrates the body and bodily expressiveness or sensuality through sport, music, dance and laughter. If Islamic morality is rule-bound and cerebral, stressing self-control and enclosure, South Asian popular culture is transgressive, openly alluding to uncontrollable feelings,
sex and other bodily functions. It glorifies physical strength, beauty and prowess. It mobilizes satire, parody, masquerade or pastiche to comment on current affairs, to lampoon the powerful and venerable, to incorporate the foreign and the Other beyond the boundaries.²

The celebration of South Asian popular culture as ‘fun’ is not merely a pastime or a moment of license, peripheral to an understanding of British Pakistani society’s ‘culture’. If this was the case it would be difficult to explain why excessive shows of force by Pakistani elders, guardians of a ‘pure Islam’, are necessary to suppress such celebrations of fun. Nor is popular culture, whether in the form of cricket, music or drama, reducible to singular identities – nationalist, ethnic or religious, to be entirely ‘captured’ and manipulated by political leaders (on the resistance to such manipulation among Afro-Caribbeans in Britain see Cohen, 1991, 1992).

Part of the reason for this insuppressible, irreducible quality of fun lies in its symbolic elaboration of emotion and passion, and its ‘democratic’ accessibility to all social strata. Fun creates powerful counter-discourses and it is these which cannot be rooted out. Where one cultural identity (‘Muslim’) encloses the group in a purified fortress of difference and Otherness, other Pakistani identities played out through fun constantly breach the barricades, appealing to groups beyond the boundary and to human sentiments which incorporate this Otherness in parodic self-mockery or humanitarian love and caring.

Popular culture is not merely celebrated by socially marginalized groups such as women. As Bourdieu (1984) has insightfully recognized, popular culture empowers both subordinate classes and superordinate groups, often those concerned with the innovative production of high culture, or elites wishing to set themselves apart from the conservative middle stratas. In the present paper I try to locate the social contexts in which specific modes of popular culture valorize different class fractions and social categories.

Both identity and status are necessarily expressed symbolically in interactive contexts. Hence, if fun is the special prerogative of subordinate and elite groups, these groups – as social agents – must create the spaces or social contexts in which fun is culturally produced. It is in this sense that ‘space’ must be tangibly objectified. Distinctively, immigrants from Pakistan to Britain have had to create not only fun spaces but the sacralized spaces of high Islamic and nationalist culture as well. A focus on these immigrants as social agents creating their own spaces for cultural and political expression thus entails a shift in theoretical perspective, from an analysis of ‘culture’ or ‘religion’ as essentialized, disembodied systems of meanings and prescribed practices to a focus on cultural performance as indexical and historically constituted through practical knowledge and purposeful action.³ Collective identities, in being continuously negotiated and objectified publicly by social actors in relation to their imagined audiences, are never permanently fixed.

What produces and sustains the social spaces in which particular Pakistani symbolic discourses and practices are created, negotiated and
elaborated? Remarkable in the case of Pakistani settlement in Britain have been the resources of time, wealth, effort and symbolic imagination Pakistanis have been willing to invest in their alternative diasporic public sphere and its various arenas. Equally marked has been the extent to which they are willing to mobilize to defend and protect these domains of public performance when and if they are threatened ‘externally’. Investment is an act of creation; defence is an act of preserving that which has been created.

Migration thus entails more than cultural transplantation. It entails acts of cultural and material creativity. Social spaces and symbolic discourses, as well and their material and organizational embodiments, all need to be created from scratch. These creations may meet resistance from the receiving society since migrants are not creating their social spaces entirely in a void. Yet not all new ethnic and religious creations meet such resistance or are perceived to threaten existing social arrangements. Within the general conditions of postmodernity the potential exists for an almost infinite creation of new social spaces, given appropriate investment and the existence of receptive audiences made up of cultural or religious consumers. Hence, as long as Pakistani social spaces have not threatened to displace or encroach upon the symbolic spaces of others, they have remained – at least in Britain – almost invisible, and certainly tolerated. Civil society is by its very nature pluralistic and continuously inventive. The ‘war of positions’ I thus describe is an ‘internal’ one, within the diasporic community itself.

**South Asian Popular Culture**

To further appreciate the struggle for the definition and control of a collective ‘voice’ in the public sphere, the need is to consider more general transformations arising out of the commodification of South Asian culture. Popular culture in South Asia has its traditional spaces sited in two major domains: a feminized youthful domain I shall call wedding popular culture, and a youthful male domain of sport. The first domain, that of wedding popular culture, draws its symbolic inspiration from female pre-wedding ritual celebrations, and especially the *mehendi* rite (see Werbner, 1990a), a ritual initiation of the bride and groom which licenses fun, music, dancing and transvestite masquerade. *Mhendis* are traditionally held in purdah, behind the ‘veil’, in the secret enclosure of the women’s quarters, by an intimate circle of kinswomen and friends of the bride and/or groom.

While the customary pre-wedding practices of Muslim South Asian men are also marked by licensed behaviour, lewd joking and transvestite dancing, these are less elaborate, arguably because the tension between what is illegitimate and permissible is not so great. Reform Islam expects young women to hide their sensuality and exhibit extreme modesty and bodily control. Music and dance, as we have seen, are usually prohibited, and the only permissible expression of sexuality is in marriage. Men, especially young men, are by contrast allowed to be more ‘natural’ and wild since they must engage with the outside world of danger and honour. Men and
women are segregated in public, and women must cover their bodies and heads in front of male elders and strangers.

From this space of absolute segregation and female enclosure, wedding popular culture has been projected in contemporary South Asia on to the widest space of mass media, commercialized popular culture – films, television, live entertainment, music, dance, singing – in which love, sensuality, comedy, parody, romance and passion are literalized and objectified in commodified aesthetic forms for the widest possible consumer market. What was feminized, restricted, hidden and marginal has become inclusive and dominant. What was sexually segregated is now publicly mixed. What was unofficially licensed as satire in hidden female celebrations is now licensed in public. Popular cultural stars – male and female – are adored and hero-worshipped. Women stars appear in public as sensual beings who sing, dance and openly fall in love. In *Postmodernism and Islam*, Akbar Ahmed describes this radical change:

A singer or film star was once sneered at in high society as someone of lowly origin, little better than a prostitute. It is one reason why, a generation ago, some of the great Muslim stars in India . . . took Hindu names. [By contrast] Huge sums of money are now paid in Muslim countries to entertainers . . . These vast sums . . . mean a change of attitude to ‘canned’ entertainment and live entertainers . . . the dawning of the age of the media in Muslim society. Muslims need to face up to the fact there is no escape now, no retreat, no hiding place, from the demon. (Ahmed, 1992: 259–60)

While wedding popular culture is the space of romantic love, sport, and especially cricket, is an expression of controlled masculine aggression and competitiveness. The intense enthusiasm for cricket as spectacle in South Asia amounts to a cult glorifying the human body, not as a denied vessel to be transcended by ascetic practices, but as an active, valorized vehicle to be nurtured and cultivated in order to enhance human physical capacity in the world. Hence sport is the masculinized domain of popular culture. Cricket, the game of the ‘Other’, the former imperial oppressor, which has become a national and international sport, has become also a popular cultural expression of modern Pakistani nationalism and of friendly competition in the international arena. It is the sport of the Commonwealth, a medium of communication, along with the English language, between prior colonies. It is a subculture with its own values of *noblesse oblige*, fair play, upright conduct, sportsmanship, correct public behaviour, team spirit and so forth. The national cricket team is an emblem of the modern nation-state, Pakistan, as a ‘Western’ invention. Since cricket has become a part of professionalized mass media entertainment, its stars have become national heroes. The huge financial stakes involved in the international game make it more exciting, competitive and contentious than its imperial predecessor, subject today to highly controversial public disputes, screened live on satellite television, between national teams, or between team captains and umpires, and to allegations of corruption and bribery, involving hundreds of thousands of
pounds. All this adds to the masculine glamour and politicization of the game.

Here, then, are two popular cultural domains which Pakistanis both at home and abroad all share and which are not specifically Islamic, although they mesh with Islamic traditions as domestic manifestations – a feminized domain of ‘marriage’ popular culture and a masculinized domain of male ‘honour’, power and aggression. Both are transgressive of Reform Islamic precepts which stress purity, bodily containment, spirituality and intellect. Both also transcend and hence transgress (from the Islamist viewpoint) the boundaries of the Muslim community or umma. Wedding popular culture encompasses a pan-Asian Urdu- and Hindi-speaking population, including Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs, who share common aesthetic traditions, similar wedding songs and dances, musical instrumental genres, as well as comic and satirical tropes which cut across religious and even regional linguistic boundaries. Cricket, too, transgresses the boundaries of the umma, creating links between nations having different religious persuasions, while at the same time it poses an alternative to the religious community in its glorification of the modern nation-state, a Western invention which promotes a very different definition of order, law and morality than does Islam. Pakistani identities thus draw on three intersecting transnational cultural spaces, none of which coincide with the nation-state.

**Performative Space and Identity**

As performative spaces, each cultural domain also represents a source of personal gendered and generational identity empowerment, and dramatizes a powerful aesthetic tradition through voluntary activities enacted by opposed social categories: Islam – by male elders; wedding popular culture – by women and youth; and cricket – by men, especially young men. The divisions can be summed up as in Table 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Domain</th>
<th>Gender/Age</th>
<th>Aesthetic/Morality</th>
<th>Boundaries</th>
<th>Empowerment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>Male/ (female) elders</td>
<td>Purity, spirituality, self-denial solemnity</td>
<td>Religious community, umma</td>
<td>Dominant male elders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wedding Culture</td>
<td>Young women (women)</td>
<td>Sensuality, love, comedy, satire, sexual expressiveness</td>
<td>Pan-Asian</td>
<td>Women and non-orthodox elite families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cricket</td>
<td>Young men (men)</td>
<td>Physical power/ aggression, individual responsibility, team spirit</td>
<td>Commonwealth nation-state</td>
<td>Young men and non-observant elite men*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* As Imran Khan has established his Islamic credentials, he has also become the darling of the religious establishment.
A paradoxical situation has thus emerged in which South Asian wedding popular culture is both the highest and the lowest, the most exclusive, restricted and segregated, and the most inclusive, universal and tolerant, having the broadest appeal in terms of generation, gender and religious persuasion. While Reform Islam is inclusive in its transcendence of linguistic and hence regional, national and ethnic boundaries, and tolerant in its transcendence of class and race, it remains intolerant in its rejection of alternative aesthetic and ethical expressions (see Metcalf, 1982, 1987). Muslim religiosity attacks virtually all forms of popular culture and hence the relationship between these cultural domains is one of powerful contestation. The status of the ‘owners’ of the religious domain – clerics, saints and male elder community leaders or spokesmen – has been rendered ambiguous by the mass commercialization of both South Asian popular culture and of cricket in India and Pakistan. As on the subcontinent, so too among diasporic Pakistanis in Britain film and cricket stars compete for popular supremacy with saints, ulama (legal experts) and politicians. Although Muslim religious and political leaders utilize the press and media to gain publicity, they can rarely compete against the sheer seductiveness and glamour of Indian and Pakistani film or TV stars and cricket heroes.

In Britain, Pakistani immigrants have had to create the domain of official Islamic national high culture and its spaces have, until recently, been entirely controlled by male elders. It was this reconstruction and control which marked the first phase of migration. During this phase, domestic wedding mhendi rituals, held by women in the confines of their homes, were early on revitalized by immigrants as young girls and boys reached marriageable age (see Werbner, 1990a). Sports and mass South Asian ‘canned’ popular culture were enjoyed during this period by diasporic Pakistanis as ‘imported’ commodities, packaged in South Asia, in a context in which, in Gillespie’s words, Hindi popular music and films ‘achieved a remarkable cultural hegemony . . . throughout the Indian diaspora’ (Gillespie, 1995: 78–9). Yet home consumption of canned culture left a diasporic public sphere in which men, whatever their political and religious persuasion, predominated. The contours of the space of official high culture and politics they created was sober, earnest and intellectual, while being also, as mentioned, a domain of political argumentation and poetic rhetorical creativity, a testing ground of individual leadership qualities in an endless game of factional power alignments.

Implied here was a certain communal closure. Despite the fact that the Pakistani religious-cum-political domain had come to be increasingly fractured and factionalized since the mid-1970s, it nevertheless remained socially encapsulated, with religiosity, wealth, elderhood and leadership conjoined. Non-observant Pakistanis remained marginal in the community.

Sporadic attempts by women to form their own organizations had all failed. Young Pakistani men’s organizations were conspicuous by their absence. The empowerment of these two subordinate groups – Pakistani women and young men – relates to the maturation of second-generation
immigrants and the cultural dilemmas generated for their parents by permanent settlement. Dispersed urban living and the need to provide alternative forms of entertainment for youth and children, to compete with the magnetic attractions of Western popular culture, have underlined a growing Pakistani parental predicament: how to preserve and reproduce community not merely as a domain of religious observance but as a site of fun, leisure and celebration into which young Pakistani men and women can be socialized? It is worth pointing out here that the large Asian youth ‘raves’ which surfaced in Britain in the late 1980s (and which were forbidden pleasures for most young Pakistanis) served only to exacerbate Pakistani parental dilemmas.

This growing need for a public space of legitimate ‘fun’ has entailed the movement of a locally constructed ‘wedding’ popular culture from the interiority of the domestic into the diasporic public sphere. The transformation has been associated with an assumption by women and music and sports fans of voluntary leadership roles, threatening the hegemony of male elders in the local Pakistani diasporic public sphere and its constitutive arenas.

What is this public sphere? The problem is one of theorizing the nexus between popular and political cultures, between mass media images and simulations and local-level voluntary communal public culture as praxis. It is through voluntary action that public ethnic spaces are created and it is within these public spaces that ethnic ideologies are negotiated by local-level leaders and activists in front of a local audience. The public culture produced through cultural praxis is, by its very nature, pluralistic since it evokes a variety of aesthetic, moral or religious sentiments in order to mobilize audiences or congregations for a range of communal ends, whether for the solidaristic celebration of religious and national festivals or for philanthropic and charitable causes.

Pakistani public arenas of communal voluntary action can be located at a particular point in a hierarchy of progressively inclusive social spaces, from restricted inter-domestic spaces of celebration (weddings, funerals) which mobilize friendship and extended family networks, to mass culture directed at mass audiences. At each scale of social inclusiveness different cultural narratives are negotiated. The most inclusive – that of mass culture – reaches into the other cultural spaces and is thus all-pervasive. It also travels across national boundaries and ethnic or religious communities, and enhances both the awareness of alternative cultural forms and the direct access of individuals to these alternative forms of cultural expression.

I have argued elsewhere that the domestic mhendi ritual has an incorporative capacity to comment and absorb alterity and to image alternative realities, such as the pervasive sexual promiscuity of British society. This capacity stems from its liminal deployment of parody, pastiche, and satire (Werbner, 1990a: Ch. 9). The same is true on a vastly greater scale of South Asian mass popular culture more generally, which borrows themes and consumer goods selectively from Western popular genres without losing its
distinctive South Asian flavour. This incorporative capacity is enhanced by the shared stress in Western and South Asian – and indeed, Islamic – popular cultures on bodily expressiveness and enjoyment. Reflecting this incorporative capacity of popular culture, new Pakistani professional pop groups are beginning to emerge in Britain which celebrate hybridity through an amalgam of South Asian, Western and black hip hop genres. These groups often satirize familial themes such as arranged marriages and attack racism, while glorifying Asian and Muslim masculinities.4

Since South Asian mass culture is openly for sale, its reach is fundamentally indiscriminate, especially in its packaged forms as TV programmes, films and audio-video cassettes, books, newspapers and periodicals. It thus attacks the dominance of Muslim discourses in the public sphere. In seeking mass consumer markets, the South Asian culture industry not only celebrates collective values but revises, channels and reshapes these values.

At the other end of the scale, Pakistani domestic and inter-domestic celebrations objectify the specific culturally shared images and symbols negotiated in intimate familial circles. Such intimacies extend to a ramifying social network of families and friends who congregate during festivals and especially at rites des passage (wedding receptions routinely host over 500 guests). Communal voluntary public culture lies at the point of greatest ambiguity between the utterly private and exclusive and the fully public and inclusive. This is why diasporic ethnic and religious subjectivities are formed, celebrated and transgressed within this sphere.

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, a series of public celebrations held in Manchester by Pakistanis transgressed in one way or another currently accepted Muslim ethno-religious ideologies. On the one hand were very large eid celebrations held in restaurants which openly transgressed the Islamic moral prohibition on drinking alcohol and on public displays of female sensuality in dance and song. These celebrations were held by a local Westernised elite which drew on Western or South Asian forms of entertainment to infringe Islamic ritual prohibitions, without challenging either Western or South Asian hegemonic values. As morally transgressive, these events were marginalized by being defined as deviant by the majority of Pakistanis. They thus constructed a Pakistani diasporic ethnicity which was unofficial and delegitimized, a space of ‘sinful fun’; set apart was a class fraction (Westernized elite and wealthy Pakistanis/Asians) whose members had shed one facet (Islam) of a multifaceted ethnicity, while continuing to celebrate their national and regional cultural attachments. This fraction, being wealthy and politically powerful, could not be ignored or entirely marginalized. Yet these elite Pakistanis remained peripheral to the central arena of diasporic politics since they were perceived to promote an ideological capitulation to Western dominance. Moral transgression was thus primarily a means of defining an exclusive, elitist social status in a social context in which the Pakistani ethnic majority in the city remained deeply religious. The transgression created a conjuncture between normatively separate cultures (Western and South Asian) which empowered a fraction of an already
powerful group – wealthy, high caste men and their families – without fully challenging structures of dominance within the local Pakistani community.

That such celebrations should move into a semi-public arena points, nevertheless, to the fact that this Westernized Pakistani elite is now making a hidden political bid for communal dominance against the more religiously conservative elite fractions. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, however, the appeal of Westernized genres of cultural transgression has been limited to a small minority, and the Westernized Pakistanis who promote these celebrations are unable to mobilize broad constituencies. Their empowerment is one of wealth and of connections to the wider society. Few of the organizers even pretend at present to assume ethnic leadership roles. Hence, this form of cultural transgression may be said to be syncretic without being innovative.

By contrast to the merely culturally transgressive – drinking in public or the public celebration of bodily enjoyment – new public celebrations in the city served to empower previously subordinate, culturally constituted social categories, and to locate them more clearly in the legitimate communal arena. Women and youth have begun to claim their rightful place within this arena. Their transgression has been more radical since it has challenged established hierarchies by harnessing the sentimental power of South Asian popular culture – sports and entertainment – for the self-empowerment of groups previously denied access to the public arena altogether. Exploiting the openness of civil society in Britain, these groups have been able to challenge the monolithic representation of a bounded community which male Pakistani ethnic leaders had hitherto fostered. For the men, the majority first-generation immigrants from Pakistan or India, it is only within such a bounded community that they can achieve high status and make leadership a meaningful value, given the subordinate position of Pakistanis as an ethnic minority in Britain, and hence also their own peripheral status within this broader arena.

Thus both women and young men have been discouraged by male political activists from holding independent prestige events in the communal public arena. Pakistani women have in the 1990s founded a number of active philanthropic organizations concerned with fund-raising for welfare causes and the rights of women and children. Women have moved aggressively into public voluntary fund-raising. In their appeal for contributions to build a children’s hospital in Pakistan, for donations for Pakistani dowries and for aid for Bosnian refugees, the women staged cultural performances which fused Islamic themes and ethical concerns with dance and music as a means of fund-raising. Among the more spectacular public events recently staged by a consortium of Pakistani women’s organizations in Manchester was a ‘women in black’ march through the city streets to protest against the continuing violence in Kashmir and Bosnia. Participating in the march was a British Member of Parliament, Gerald Kaufman, and it was hosted by the Lord Mayor of Manchester.

Al Masoom (‘For the Innocent’), the women’s organization spearheading this move into the public domain, has been subjected to a campaign of
harassment and physical threats, to allegations of corruption and mishandling of public money, all in a clear effort to prevent the women from assuming a legitimate leadership role in the community. The solidarity of local Pakistani women in the face of this sustained attack has been quite remarkable, with many of them ignoring their husbands’ criticisms in their determination to join and participate in the organization’s activities.

Young men’s empowerment as an autonomous social category focused initially on cricket. Playing cricket, as against entertaining cricket stars, is regarded as a legitimate activity, and the control of male elders in this domain is minimal. But when young men organized a public benefit dinner for the captain of the Pakistani cricket team, Imran Khan, the event was sabotaged by unidentified elders and later dubbed by the Pakistani male establishment a ‘failure’. Before the event, which mobilized almost 1000 primarily young Pakistani male textile workers and market traders, serious attempts were made to prevent its staging. The event itself was disrupted by an offensive attack on Imram Khan. The benefit dinner, which raised £5000, was clearly regarded as a threat to elder male domination. Unlike women, however, young Pakistani men can be gradually incorporated into elders’ associations as they mature. The line between ‘youth’ and ‘elderhood’ is highly ambiguous and depends on the achievement of further status attributes (wealth, professional or political standing, etc.). Young men are often recruited to meetings requiring factional shows of physical strength or voting power (Werbner, 1991). Their exclusion from leadership in the prestige public domain is thus temporary, yet it remains particularly significant in the British context. For it is in the field of sport that young British Pakistanis express their love of both cricket and the home country, along with their sense of alienation and disaffection from British society, through support of their national team.

It is at the level of Pakistani mass cultural stardom, in a space created by Imram Khan himself, that the publicly ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ were merged in the city for the first time, so that the ‘feminized’ domestic sphere of popular entertainment, music and humour, and the young Pakistani male cult of masculinity received the seal of Pakistani male elder legitimacy as an expression of Pakistani nationalism. At this point, however, the organization was taken over once again by male elders who dominated throughout. Nevertheless, the other social categories – women and youth – were not excluded, hence the new space created was defined as simultaneously public and familial, Islamic and universal. This was a truly creative innovation, a revolution rather than a rebellion. Yet it did not appear revolutionary. On the contrary, once created, it seemed so natural and responsive to Pakistani (middle-class) cultural sensibilities that it was as though this had always been the shape of local public action.

On Cricket, Fund-Raising and Tolerance
Following the contested benefit dinner convened in 1987 for Imram Khan by Pakistani youth, the cricketer returned to Manchester once again, in
1990, this time to appeal for a charity he himself had founded to build a cancer hospital in Lahore. Like fund-raising events convened by recently founded women’s organizations, this one combined Muslim and Asian popular culture in a blend which was uniquely Pakistani and Muslim South Asian. Although the appeal took place on the eve of the Gulf War, at the height of the Rushdie affair, no mention was made of either of these political time bombs. Instead, the Imram Khan Hospital Benefit Dinner was an evening of fun, laughter, singing and music. It embodied, in a taken-for-granted natural way, what the world could be like if there were no wars, racial and religious bigotry or ethnic intolerance and violence. This was particularly significant at the time, since it was a year when anti-Rushdie demonstrations and public expressions of support for Saddam Hussein characterized much Pakistani public communal activity in Manchester. British Pakistanis were increasingly represented as violent and fanatical ‘fundamentalists’ by the press. Yet it was at this historic moment that Pakistani women and cricketers successfully captured an alternative space in the ethnic public arena. Their success fractured the unitary communal representation fostered by male Muslim religious leaders, and objectified a more open and tolerant vision of Islam.

The Imran Khan Hospital Appeal dinner took place in the most exclusive hotel in Manchester, in front of all the Pakistani Who’s Who of the region. Tickets were £50 a head and most guests arrived in large groups and were seated at tables of 10, each table thus representing a donation of £500 for the cause. Seats at the high table, sitting along with the celebrities, were £3000 a head. The performers, a galaxy of international stars, including Dilip Kumar, the beloved Muslim Indian film star, King of the Bombay Screen and his wife, herself a celebrity. All had come to assist the hero of the evening, Imran Khan, the sun in the celestial firmament, adored and adulated by young and old alike. The evening raised £115,000 for the appeal, the highest sum raised in one evening in the whole of Britain, topping Birmingham’s £100,000.

In the audience were men, women and youth, all dressed in their best. At some tables people were drinking wine discreetly but this passed without comment. It was a sophisticated gathering, such as could be found in elite circles in Delhi, Lahore, Karachi or Bombay. It was by implication, and this was conveyed by the luxury of the decor and meal, quite clearly not a place for fun-hating religious zealots or narrow minded maulvis (religious clerics). The evening was set apart as a moment of universal harmony and humanitarian brotherhood.

The speeches I recorded were particularly revealing of an alternative Islamic vision, one of tolerance and universal humanity. Dilip Kumar spoke of the world as a global village in which human beings should learn to live at peace with one another, to fight against pain and illness:

It is an irony, when the world is growing towards not just internationalism but towards universalness, that we are talking about nationalities, we are talking
about ethnic identities; we, the people and some of the leaders of human society talking about religion, practising irreligiosity. . . . Yes, we’ve had too much of this religion. There is but one religion that is preached by all the gospels, by all the sacred books, and that is the decency of man towards fellow human beings. And I stand here with that stamp of Indian nationality to support the cause of my brother [Imran Khan] in this exercise in humanism, universal humanism. . . .

The attack in this speech is twofold: against a narrow nationalism, and against Muslim sectarian closure. Yet the sentiments expressed by the speaker are not anti-Islamic. On the contrary, in all the speeches Islamic themes were interwoven into the public domain of charitable giving. The celebrities, and above all Imran Khan himself, were likened by the speakers to charismatic Muslim Sufi saints, awliya, friends of God, close to God. And giving to the hospital was defined as giving to Allah, a sacrifice which would increase a person’s merit in the next world. Whether or not these sportsmen and entertainers flaunt Islamic rules in their private lives – whether they drink or chase women – was suppressed during the evening, because in the official public domain of politics and leadership they were conducting themselves as exemplary Muslims, and were seen to be working for the public good of the whole community, performing khidmat, public service. This was political pop, Islamic style, and it drew on the same powerful ethical and aesthetic emotional appeals to communal solidarity which Western entertainers, from Pete Seegar to Bob Geldof, have used.

Initially, the sums raised by the cricketer were still comparatively modest. At a mosque cornerstone-laying ceremony in Birmingham which I attended a year later, £160,000 was raised for a new mosque building in less than an hour! Pakistani disaster and war appeals in Britain raise millions. Importantly, however, the Imran Khan Hospital Benefit Appeal was a first of its kind in Manchester – the first legitimate event to be devoted to fund-raising for a welfare cause in Pakistan, using the appeal of media stars, music and song in order to mobilize an elite mixed audience of men, women and youth in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance. The first serious event for a serious cause celebrated by serious people in a non-serious manner.

The revolutionary nature of the appeal and its populist style was to become more apparent as the Imran Khan road show gathered momentum and donations for the hospital began to pour in from Pakistanis at home as well. In December 1994 the hospital opened in Lahore amid widespread expressions of adulation for the cricketer turned philanthropist and mass shows of popular support from ordinary citizens. At the same time the press alleged that Imran Khan had assumed the mantle of sainthood and was plotting to overthrow the Pakistani government, while a court case against him was pending for failing to register his charity with the proper authorities. In a televised interview in February 1995, Imran Khan defended his actions; he made clear that in his view the Pakistani elite had betrayed its leadership role in abandoning Islam and the masses in Pakistan: ‘Islam plays a
very important part in my life because Islam means humanity for me’, he
told a BBC2 Newsnight reporter. ‘There is nothing anyone can give me. I
give to people’, he added, underlining the Islamic stress on khidmat, self-
less giving and devotion to the community which had earned him his current
sainthood title. The saint in Islam is always a giver, never a receiver.

From a sociological point of view, the achievement of Pakistani nation-
alists such as Imran Khan or Kaifat Khan, the leader of Al Masoom, has been
their capacity to legitimize an alternative ‘humanitarian hybridity’: by cele-
brating Islam through humour and music, they invoke a vision of a less
defensive, more open society – one which contrasts sharply with the current
Islamist stress on closure and external threat.

Ironically, many (but, significantly, not all) of the donors in the audi-
ence attending Imran Khan’s Manchester appeal had also attended, during
the same period, public communal events in which speakers declared their
support for Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait (see Werbner, 1994). Yet
the framed spaces of ultra-nationalist religious rhetoric and patriotic chari-
table pop were kept totally separate, and remained in disjunction.

**Diaspora: Symbolic Identifications**

For diasporic Pakistanis popular culture, sport and religion are vehicles for
the expression of transnational identifications. In April 1992 the Pakistan
international cricket team, captained by Imran Khan, won the World Cup
Limited Overs Cricket Competition in Sydney. The cliffhanger between
Pakistan and England revealed a hidden but obvious truth: that when it
comes to sport, passions transcend territorial boundaries. While the English
mourned their defeat, British Pakistanis all over the United Kingdom were
celebrating their team’s victory. A young Pakistani, born and bred in Britain,
told his English friends: ‘I’m proud to be British but when it comes down to
the hard core, I’m really Pakistani.’ Young Pakistanis in the city field a large
number of amateur cricket teams, playing in local amateur cricket leagues.
The average age of team players is about 30, and the vast majority were
either born or grew up in Britain.

British Pakistanis’ taken-for-granted support of their national team
seemed to need no additional explanations. Pakistani friends merely
shrugged their shoulders in response to my questioning. Loyalty to the
Pakistani national team, they implied, was natural and instinctive, some-
thing they seemed to feel, they had imbibed with their mother’s milk, or
inherited along with their father’s blood. As one celebrating young man told
a Guardian reporter: ‘If you cut my wrists, green blood will come out’
(Chaudhary, 1995). The Pakistani flag is green. Green is the symbolic colour
of Islam.

Two years previously, in a controversial speech made in the House of
Commons in April 1990, on the eve of the Indian test series, Norman Tebbit,
the hard-liner Tory MP, castigated British Asians and declared that they
should demonstrate their loyalty by supporting England. ‘If you come to live
in a country and take up the passport of that country, and you see your future
and your family’s future in that country, it seems to me that is your country. You can’t just keep harking back.’

Tebbit’s remarks, greeted by a storm of protest at the time, were clearly absurd in a country which regularly fields four national teams for any sporting contest (English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish). The equation between national loyalty and team loyalty made here is quite evidently spurious, despite attempts by the Right to impute South Asian support for the home country’s team to an apparent unwillingness on their part to ‘integrate’.

What Tebbit’s earnest nationalism seemed to miss was that sporting contests both objectify social divisions and nationalist sentiments while simultaneously pointing to an alliance between contenders, a shared fanaticism. There is a sense of friendship and fun in the competing loyalties. Sporting contests are, it would seem, like moka ceremonials in Melanesia, a substitute for war, a domain of symbolic agonism, a token not of hatred and disloyalty but of friendly rivalry in the midst of peace.

**Revealed Identities**

The context in which my paper is set is one in which there has been an apparent shift in Pakistani communal discourses in the public sphere: from being a ‘British Pakistani’ to being a ‘British Muslim’, from a stress on national to a stress on religious identity. This shift was linked to a growing realization by immigrants from Pakistan that their stay in Britain is permanent, and that the most pressing need is to fight local battles for religious rights (see Nielsen, 1988, 1992). Initially, on arrival in Britain, the problem seemed to be one of combating racism and gaining recognition as an ethnic minority. The publication of *The Satanic Verses* revealed, however, a deep clash between Islam and British nationalism. ‘Islam’ was now a term to be defended at all costs, a matter of personal and communal honour. British Pakistanis ‘became’, officially, in the media, and in their own eyes, ‘Muslims’.

Yet publicly paraded identities, however sacred and universal, conceal submerged yet equally deeply felt communal identifications. If cricket reveals the sentimental depths of nationalism, of being a ‘Pakistani’, then having ‘fun’ reveals Pakistanis’ deep South Asian cultural roots and identity. Outside prayer times or politics, British Pakistanis love having fun. They watch Indian movies, hero-worship Indian film stars, listen avidly to modern bhangra music, dance and sing, celebrate and enjoy life like all other South Asians. Thus, we saw, *Al Masoom*, the local Pakistani women’s organization which had openly challenged male authority, raised money by providing amusement and fun for other Pakistani women and children, drawing on familiar South Asian genres of entertainment. The women created their own dramas in which they lampooned men, sang and danced. Their fund-raising was aggressively attacked by businessmen and community leaders, despite the women’s piety and the clear sanctity of their cause.

If official religion, nationalism and economic production are the domain of male elders, then sports, entertainment and consumption are the
domains of youth, women and families. The sacred which is elevated above the profane is thus elevated as a compartmentalized preserve of elder male honour. To challenge this ranking of values by controlling fund-raising or by hosting dignitaries is to provoke the hostility of male elders. It is only an international mass media celebrity such as Imran Khan, adored, classy and elitist, who can challenge this hierarchy successfully and reach out to a broader humanism with elder male approval. Yet daily life, the quotidian, which is profane, is dominated by women and youth. As diaspora Pakistanis sink roots in Britain, and as they come increasingly to resemble their English neighbours in matters of fund-raising and celebration, so too women and young men are likely to increasingly claim their share of the prestige public domain.

Just as male elders create the cultural genres and social spaces where Pakistani nationalism is celebrated officially, or where religious worship is conducted in utmost seriousness, so too young men and women create the cultural agendas and social spaces for fun and amusement, for consumption and imaginative artistic expression, which also celebrate nationalism and religiosity, but through unofficial genres of music, parody or sport. Women create public spaces for the family, and especially for children and teenage girls, to enjoy themselves in a distinctive cultural milieu they can share with their parents. The children come to all the wedding mhendi celebrations, and so too they are brought into the dancing, singing, music and masquerade of the women’s public performances. Pakistani popular culture is, above all, an aesthetic of everyday life (Featherstone, 1991) which draws families together and creates a counter-culture to the pervasive English popular culture and music, something distinctively Asian and Muslim which yet can be enjoyed as sheer fun.

This revealed multiplicity of apparently conflicting Pakistani identities is managed through situational disjunctions, blendings and juxtapositions. British-Pakistanis (who are Muslims-Asians-Punjabis-more-or-less-Westernized) do not celebrate all their identities simultaneously as a hybrid whole; they attempt, instead, to create internally coherent spaces of symbolic practices which are set apart and ‘disjuncted’. Yet this framing of spaces is never complete. There is constant intersituational ‘commentary’ and ‘leakage’ between spaces and domains. Different symbolic discourses, produced in particular situational contexts, cross-refer to one another, while the symbolic spaces in which they are produced are also subject to internal local-level ethnic political contestations. These have, in Manchester, sometimes involved threats to associational leaders and disruptive attacks on the symbolic domains they control. In other words, ‘situational inter-reference’ may become interference, a clash, implicit or explicit, between discrete symbolic spaces, a semiotic struggle over the very definition of what is moral (see Fischer, 1986; Fischer and Abedi, 1990: xxiv, xxxi–xxxii on the shift from inter-reference to interference).

Because each symbolic domain is constituted by a relatively autonomous ‘lived-in’ world of meanings and connotations, of primordial sentiments, of material objects, of interests and power struggles, of ‘natural’,
quotidian, taken-for-granted personal identities, these attacks are basically doomed. Sometimes, however, one symbolic domain, such as the ‘purified’ religious space of knowledge practices, may gain ground temporarily at the expense of another, within a particular community, at a particular historical moment.6

The extent to which ‘fun’ and the spaces of fun are constitutive of identity and subjectivity – whether ethnic, gendered or generational – remains to be fully theorized, although discussions of youth subcultures and popular culture have highlighted certain dimensions of this conjuncture. By juxtaposing a variety of ‘social situations’, all of them equally typical and pervasive among British Muslims (who are also Pakistanis, mostly Punjabis and more-or-less Westernized) the present paper has examined not only how sited identities shift in their situational salience, but the ways in which they are differentially imaged and constituted in internal ethnic contestations for power and influence. Rather than a pure, unchanging vision of Islam, I have attempted to illuminate the ways in which British Islam is differentially objectified or denied, in a context which incorporates both South Asian and English postcolonial themes, comments on them, and plays upon them.

One thing is evident. Despite the public privileging of an Islamic identity, diaspora Pakistanis continue to valorize their national roots; their loyalty and sentimental attachments to Pakistan are as deep as ever, and are reflected in their fund-raising drives. Until recently, however, the hegemony of reformist Muslims in Britain obscured the need for legitimate youthful spaces of celebration. This is now changing: just as over-zealous white, male, English nationalists such as Tebbit face the futility of attempting to suppress young people’s love for an imagined homeland, so too reformist Muslims are currently confronted with the impossibility of suppressing the carnivalesque spirit of fun which impels young British Pakistanis to celebrate. It took a near riot, however, to reveal this ‘gap’, this absent space.

In mid-March 1992 an acquaintance was returning home late at night from a party, and happened to drive through Manchester’s main Asian (primarily Pakistani) shopping and restaurant centre. Unexpectedly, without warning, she found herself in a gigantic traffic jam, with fancy rented Mercedes cars honking all around her, drivers speeding down the wrong lanes, green flags flying from windows and sun roofs, and shouts of ‘Long Live Pakistan’ amidst the general pandemonium. The pavements were packed with policemen. The drivers were all young Pakistanis. Terrified her car would be damaged, she sent her husband to enquire what was happening. The young people told him: ‘We are celebrating eid. It is our Christmas.’

Two years previously, young men like these had gathered in Manchester from many towns in the greater conurbation and had run amuck, breaking Asian-owned shop windows in their enthusiastic ‘celebrations’. The violent confrontation shocked parents. Who were these young people? And why were they attacking members of their ‘own’ ethnic group? In anticipation of further incidents, the shopping centre is cordoned off annually by the police during eid, while hundreds of policemen lurk in the side streets, ready
to act at a moment’s notice. There is now growing talk of the need to provide an appropriate social space where these young Pakistani teenagers can celebrate *eid* and enjoy themselves without causing damage or public disturbances. Meanwhile, the English police force ‘protects’ the commercial centre each *eid* from ‘its’ own children.

The amalgam of Islam and Pakistani culture, religion and nationalism, are both objectified in the green flags the young men wave, and in their continued loyalty to the home country. But they are also objectified in popular cultural practices, sport, and *bhangra* music, and these are forcing their way into the official public arena, despite the resistance of elder males and religious officials. Serious politics, like puritanical Islam, must necessarily give way to the need to create public spaces in which the young can celebrate in Britain, as well as to the universal humanism of *Al Masoom* and of public Pakistani celebrities such as Imran Khan.

**Conclusion**

My interest in the present paper has been, not with global or national public spaces of identity or the ethnic ‘voices’ which reach into these lofty spheres, but with the autonomous spaces urban diasporic ethnic groups create for themselves. It is in these spaces that ‘culture’ becomes a contested terrain as social classes and categories, positioned differentially vis-a-vis each other, struggle to define the cultural shape of their shared collective identities and subjectivities.

This was evident also in the Rushdie affair: in *The Satanic Verses* Salman Rushdie utilized the Islamic South Asian space of fun and satire to create a radical commentary on puritanical Islam. But in attacking the persona of the Prophet he transgressed the boundaries between symbolic spaces, to incur the wrath not only of the puritans but of the vast majority of ordinary Muslims. He went beyond the acceptable amalgams or hybrids of Islam and South Asian satirical creativity. In radically subverting the hierarchy of values between the sacred and the profane publicly, in front of a Western audience, he violated the prescribed disjunctions between symbolic spaces and domains.

The creation by British Pakistanis of distinct symbolic spaces in which distinct practices and discourses are articulated and publicly negotiated, draws on prior experiences to create new political mythologies played out in front of contemporary British Pakistani audiences. A ‘space’ includes both actors and audience. In challenging the hegemonic dominance of Pakistani male elders, Pakistani women and young men, positioned differently yet sharing dual or even multiple worlds of lived-in realities, are presently transforming, it seems, the imagining of their ethnic group’s shared collective identities in Britain.

**Notes**

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1. This popular culture, although shared by Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims in North India, is often labelled by Muslim reformists or Islamists as ‘Hindu’ and hence un-Islamic and non-legitimate.

2. On the incorporation of Otherness beyond the boundary through grotesque realism, satire and ritual masquerade see Handelman (1981), Richard Werbner (1989; Ch. 3), Boddy (1989), Pnina Werbner (1990: Ch. 8).

3. The notion of the ‘indexical’, traceable to Peirce, is used by phenomenologists to refer to the particularity and historicity of speech events, and more generally, to the specifically meaningful in particular contexts, including relativities of power and status (see Garfinkel, 1967: 4; Werbner, 1990b: 260–1; Fernandez, 1985).

4. Research on this subject is currently being conducted by John Hutnyk at the International Centre for Contemporary Cultural Research as part of a project supported by the Economic and Social Research Council, UK. See Sharma et al. (in press).

5. Articles on Imran Khan appeared in Q News, a British Muslim weekly in English, 20 January (Malik, 1995), and in the Guardian, 7 February (Chaudhary, 1995). A series of financial scandals involving the Pakistani national cricket team also erupted about this time and was reported in the press. Khan’s surprise marriage to Jemima Goldsmith was frontline news in all the broadsheets and tabloids. For a while Pakistanis in Britain wavered about how to construct the marriage in moral terms but my recent fieldwork indicates that Khan’s charisma has not faded. Indeed, it is quite usual for charismatic leaders to set themselves apart from ordinary people through extraordinary acts and even through the licensed breaking of taboos. The reader is also referred to an insightful article on the decolonization of Indian cricket by Arjun Appadurai, in a volume edited by Carol Breckenridge (1995), which echoes some of the main arguments about cricket, gender, nationalism, bodily pleasure and the Commonwealth highlighted here. Appadurai had access to the 1992 version of my paper but what is striking are the similarities (as well as differences) in our interpretation of South Asian cricket. Dr Bobby Savyid of the International Centre for Contemporary Cultural Research is currently conducting research on South Asian cricket in Britain and as a global game in the context of the ESRC project on ‘South Asian Popular Culture: Gender, Generation and Identity’ under my directorship.

6. I use the notion of ‘knowledge practices’ to refer to an explicit discourse and its associated prescriptive practices, in the sense discussed by Foucault (e.g. 1975/1977). This contrasts with the taken-for-granted, common-sense assumptions embedded in the quotidian, Bourdieu’s (1972/1977) ‘practical knowledge’.
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