Increasingly, sharp concerns are currently being expressed about a law against incitement to religious hatred currently being debated in Parliament, which extends the protection at present given to some minority faith groups such as Sikhs and Jews to Muslims as well:

‘[…] the Government is extending protection to prevent hatred being stirred up against people targeted because of their religious beliefs or lack of religious beliefs, as well people targeted because of their race. This is being done through the Serious Organised Crime and Police Bill, by expanding the existing criminal offences of incitement to racial hatred contained in the Public Order Act 1986. The proposals will make it an offence to knowingly use words, behaviour or material that is threatening, abusive or insulting with the intention or likely effect that hatred will be stirred up against a group of people targeted because of their religious beliefs or lack of religious beliefs, as well as those targeted on racial grounds.’ (www.homeoffice.gov.uk/comrace/faith/crime/faq.html)

Both politicians and the media are questioning the need for this new law which seems to threaten freedom of speech. Will it gag comedians, iconoclastic novelists and playwrights, secularist critics and even internal dissenters? In December 2004, a group of comedians, writers and academics led a delegation to protest against the second reading of the bill. Originally, it was included in the anti-terrorism bill proposed by David Blunkett, the then Home Secretary, in the wake of the September 11 attacks, but was dropped in the face of opposition. It has now resurfaced in this new bill.

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The Bill responds to demands from the Muslim community for protection, increasingly urgent since 9/11 and the subsequent ‘war against terror’, as global media images continue to demonize Muslims and their religion. Since the Rushdie affair revealed that the UK blasphemy law applied only to Anglican Christians, British Muslim leaders have been demanding some form of legal protection against the public vilification of Islam. The new law will target, however, not only the racist discourse of the British National Party, directed specifically at Muslims, but also that of Muslim clerics preaching hatred against other religions such as Jews or Christians. It is, in other words, as much a tool in the so-called war against terror as a protection against Islamophobia, the fear or hatred of Muslims.3

The question is, in what sense, if at all, is Islamophobia a unique form of racism that requires a special law? In the literature on racism, terms such as differential racism and cultural racism refer to invocations of cultural difference as grounds for exclusion or expatriation. Such arguments draw on the view that racism is culturally constructed and thus that there are many racisms, historically determined, differing in the apocalyptic fears they generate and the moral panics arising from these fears. The question is:
does the figure of the Muslim terrorist, the religious fanatic – the violent and intolerant so-called fundamentalist – feed a special, perhaps historically unique, racist discourse, requiring special legal protection? Or, to put the matter differently – in the racist gallery of folk devils, what kind of folk devil are contemporary Muslims perceived to constitute?

There is, of course, an alternative approach to the understanding of racism, which could be equally cogently argued. Racism, in this view, is born out of the economic and political contradictions, scarcities and uncertainties of modernity and late Western capitalism. The folk devil of racism is, in this view, a displaced figure of collective anxieties and fears and as such, an arbitrary scapegoat embodying racist paranoid convictions that only cultural, ethnic and racial purity can stem the breakdown of social order and the collapse of society.

Such a view sees the racist gallery of folk devils, and the differential or cultural racist fantasies of which they are constituted, as mere façades disguising more unitary, fundamental processes in which a constellation of Others – Blacks, Jews, Liberals, Asians, Muslims – is constructed as a threat to the purity and order of the nation, the ethnos, seen as a moral community. From this perspective there is only one racism, which disguises itself opportunistically beneath a variety of publicly acceptable codes and discourses, drawing on the sacred symbols of the nation, as Tore Bjorgo demonstrates for Scandinavia, and on common-sense understandings of ‘community’ held by ordinary people. In this alternative interpretation, beneath the surface of apparently different racist discourses lurks a single, violent message: the Other must be effaced and subordinated – physically, culturally, economically and politically. Hence what distinguishes racism, xenophobia, ethnic violence and state terror from ordinary political ethnicity, whether urban or rural, is its violence and violations. Racism and its cognitive tendencies target the human body – a source of dangerous and contagious pollution and threatening physicality; they target collective cultural symbols – mosques, flags, graves – for destruction; they expropriate and destroy property and sources of livelihood; and they efface the political voice of the racialized Other. In other words, if racist discourses are many and the political-cum-historical contexts in which they arise unique, the violations of racism are familiar and repetitive – public humiliation, denial, enslavement, pogroms, ethnic cleansing, rape, murder, torture, destruction, expropriation, starvation, genocide. From this perspective there is no need for a law against incitement to religious hatred. Current anti-racist legislation suffices. Moreover, if this second perspective is adopted, is there any point in deeming Islamophobia as unique and different, a form of differential or cultural racism quite unlike familiar racisms of Blacks, Jews or Asians?

To begin to answer this question I want to make two detours and consider, first, the logic of racism, and second, the role of nationalism and the nation-state in generating modern forms of racism. Although racism and xenophobia are not new phenomena – slavery, ethnic cleansing, pogroms, genocides, all preceded the formation of the modern nation-state – it is impossible to understand modern racism (or, indeed, political ethnicity, ethnic economic competition or identity politics) outside the context of the modern nation-state, conceived of as a sovereign, territorially bounded and self-governing social collectivity. The most destructive and horrific forms of modern racism occur when an ethnic group – either the majority or a militarily powerful minority – captures the state and uses its apparatuses of violence, the police and the army, to attack civilians redefined as the ‘other’. This form of state terror or quasi-nationalism may be distinguished from the nationalism that aims to liberate individuals from external oppression. Nevertheless, as many have noted, any nationalism has the potential to be perverted into racism.

The theoretical challenge posed by the persistence of racism in democratic nation-states thus centres around the tension between individual citizenship, grounded in the rule of law as determined through representative bodies of the state, and the cultural community which supposedly constitutes the ‘nation’ as a singular political actor in the international arena. Although virtually all modern nation-states are culturally pluralistic, the tendency is for the cultural majority to conflate the imagined ‘nation’, the ethnos, with the ‘state’, the demos – mistakenly conceived of as an internally homogeneous moral community – and thus to aim constantly to subordinate, assimilate or purge the nation’s cultural and religious minorities.

Such tendencies are, however, usually held in check in Western democracies by vested interests in the rule of law. One of the questions haunting discussions of racism is: under what circumstances do racist fears expand beyond small fringe groups to overwhelm the national collectivity, including its politicians, judges, intellectuals and working classes? In this regard, many liberals are raising the serious question of whether increased security consciousness has led the state to racialize Muslims and contributed to intensified Islamophobia in Europe and America. In Britain, the inclusion of Muslims in the anti-terror war alliance signals greater integration into the mainstream. At the same time UK anti-terror laws have targeted Muslims disproportionately. In order to explore these ambivalences, I want to make the second detour and consider what Michel Wieviorka has called ‘the logic of racism’.

According to Wieviorka (1995), the logic of racism is a dual logic – of inferiorization and differentiation: in other words, of subordination and exclusion. Racial inferiorization meshes well, Marxists have argued, with capitalistic interests. The subordination of certain segments of the working class allows for the flexible and cheap exploitation of labour through the formation of an underclass, a reserve army of labour, recruited or expelled from the labour market according to prevailing market demands. Differential racism, by contrast, is an ideology of social and cultural exclusion based on an assumption of innate
difference. Most racisms, Wieviorka contends, combine the two principles of inferiorization and differentiation. By defining the collective Other as naturally different and inferior, such ideologies legitimate both collective oppression and violent exclusion.

Such a duality seems to explain the three central historical exemplars of racism which form, as Étienne Balibar (1991) recognizes, our imaginaries of racism: American slavery, colonialism (including apartheid) and the Holocaust. But the racisms of late modernity are altogether more subtle and insidious. In our era of heightened self-consciousness and cultural reflexivity, a further principle or logic of racism becomes apparent. This is suggested by Zygmunt Bauman, who argues, drawing on Lévi-Strauss, that the modern space of modernity is replete with uncertainties, and these crystallize around the disturbing figure of the alien or stranger. We deal with the stranger in our midst, Bauman contends, through two strategic alternatives: anthropophagy – literally, cannibalism, and by extension, ingestion, assimilation, or anthropoemy – literally, vomiting, and by extension, expulsion, exile, incarceration. Bauman argues that:

Phagic and emic strategies are applied in parallel[... they are effective precisely because of their co-presence[...] The phagic strategy is ‘inclusivist’, the emic strategy is ‘exclusivist’. The first ‘assimilates’ the strangers to neighbours, the second merges them with the aliens. Together they polarize the [vast population] of strangers[...] To the strangers for whom they define the life condition and its choices, they posit a genuine ‘either/or’: conform or be damned, be us or do not overstay your visit, play the game by the rules or be prepared to be kicked out from the game altogether. (1993: 163)

The impulse of the modern nation-state to pulverize its ethnic peripheries and stubborn minorities in the cultural blender of nationalism, to nationalize the cultural other in a continual process of education, socialization, intimidation and sheer coercion, has been widely documented by anthropologists, from Ernest Gellner to Stanley Tambiah. Whether or not this is the way nationalism is actually pursued in contemporary Europe today – French republicanism, expressed most recently in the anti-hijab law, seems to signal that not much has changed – there is little question that the impulse towards cultural homogenization exists in most modern nation-states. If the community of the nation is a self-governing society, it tends to seek a shared basis for this self-governance in moral and cultural values held in common. Summarizing Wieviorka and Bauman’s views in tabular form (see Table 1), it is evident that column B defines a single phenomenon – that of ethnic/national self-purification. But column A refers to quite different forms of racism – one based on the principle of hierarchy and subordination, the other on equality and cultural destruction in the name of that equality.

### Table 1: Racist Dualisms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internal (A)</th>
<th>External (B)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>inferiorization</td>
<td>differentiation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assimilation</td>
<td>expulsion</td>
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By combining these two dualisms into a single theoretical framework, we can arrive, I propose, at a more contemporary vision of racism and xenophobia. In this model, the logic of racism is triadic:

- self-purification = physical expulsion/elimination
- subordination = physical exploitation of labour
- assimilation = cultural destruction

The imaginary cast of folk devils, the fantasized demons that threaten to destroy the social order, the very fabric of society, though undoubtedly plural and historically specific, arise out of three racist ontologies produced by this triadic tendency. Such ontologies are often grounded in the past – in apocalyptic fears and collective mythologies of prior suffering, oppression and death – which, according to extreme nationalists, threaten to repeat themselves in the present and future. There are many examples of this: African anti-imperial nationalism in South Africa, Buddhist anti-Tamil national violence in Sri Lanka, Jewish anti-Arab religious nationalism in Israel, working-class racism, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia in Europe and the USA – all share this paradoxical feature that violent racists perceive themselves as the historical victims of oppression and violence, defending the nation against the evil aggressor. But what is this evil aggressor? What forms does the folk devil of racism assume? What moral allegories of fear, violence and evil do such figures evoke?

I want to suggest that just as there are three logics of racism, so too there are three archetypal demonic figures which the racist imagination conjures up: the slave, the witch and the Grand Inquisitor. Where exploitation and subordination are the key defining principles of racism, the fear is of the physically powerful, wild, out-of-control ‘slave’, the hewer of wood and carrier of water. This is the dangerous street mugger who threatens the law and order of society, as Hall and his colleagues show in Policing the Crisis (1978), a figure reflecting fear of insurrection. There is evidence that such criminalizing constructions now encompass Asians as well as Blacks in Britain.

But of course, not all racialized subjects are subordinate. Indeed, some of the worst acts of genocidal terror or expulsion have historically been directed against economically successful minority groups – ‘middleman minorities’ as Bonacich famously called them. These groups, highly assimilated, cultured, successful, wealthy, are the subject of another archetypal folk devil – the witch. The witch crystallizes fears of the hidden, disguised, malevolent stranger, of a general breakdown of trust, of a nation divided against itself. Your neighbour may be a witch who wants to destroy you. He or she is culturally indistinguishable in almost every respect because the witch masquerades as a non-alien. Hence, long-settled middleman minorities – Jews, Indians, Chinese, etc. – although often publicly compliant and assimilated, become the object of extreme destructive violence or national purification.

Let me be clear about what we are not talking about. We are not talking about mere illusions and fantasies. We are talking about a real fear, displaced onto strangers and what
strangers come to represent symbolically. In the case of the mugger, the insurrectionist slave, the real fear is of unemployment and destitution – the loss of job and home and all that this would imply. In the case of middleman minorities, such fears are compounded by a sense that trust and order are breaking down inexplicably, that all social relations have become uncertain and threatening.

But what about the fear of Muslims? How are we to understand Islamophobia? Muslim and Arab social theorists from Edward Said to Akbar Ahmed and Tariq Modood – and indeed many Western scholars – regard the cultural racism directed by the West against Muslims as in some sense unique. Modood, for example, argues that Muslims are singled out from other Asians and Blacks as specific targets of racial attacks and that this is reflected in statistics that show Muslims to be the most disadvantaged group in British society, with higher unemployment rates and lower educational qualifications than any other migrant-settler group. Many, including myself, have shown that some Muslims tend to globalize local predicaments, constructing a world-view of polarized oppositions between the Islamic ummah and the West, the latter seen to be led by a Jewish-American conspiracy, reviving earlier stereotypes and animosities of medieval Christendom. The reverse is undoubtedly equally true: globalized images of Islamic terror are imposed by Western racists – and not only racists – on local Muslim settlers in Britain.

To interpret the unique significance of Islamophobia as a form of differentialist racism, we need to reflect on a further theory of racism, one which argues that racism is in some measure reflexive. This is the position that draws heavily on psychoanalytic theory and, more directly, on the work of Frantz Fanon as it has been developed by Homi Bhabha and Ali Rattansi. According to Fanon, the colonizer and the colonized cannot escape each other – their internalized subjectivities mirror each other’s hates and fears so that the colonized assumes the image of radical difference imposed upon him/her by the colonizer and comes to be deracinated, marked by self-hatred for his/her own culture and people, while in the face of popular insurrection the colonizer is filled with the bestiality and violence he attributes to the colonized (Fanon 1965). The ‘third’ space that is thus created through this encounter between colonized and colonizer is a pathological space of distorted specularities where the stress on radical difference is transmuted into a dialectical mirroring of violence, inhumanity and self-denial. Wieviorka lucidly sums up a related theory:

Racism, particularly in the psychoanalytic perspective, comes to be seen as the incapacity of some people to manage difference, but also with the incapacity to cope with resemblance with the Other, the foreigner and, also, women. (1995: 23)

He cites Pontalis who argues, much like Fanon, ‘that dread is a fascination and thus also an attraction’. Kristeva goes even further, arguing that ‘the Other, the alien producing animosity and irritation, is in fact my own unconscious, the return of the repressed’ (ibid.).

Such an approach highlights why Islamophobia may be conceived of as a very post-modern kind of fear. The insurrectionist slave is a powerful iconic embodiment of the id – of sexuality unbound – but in the permissive society of today such an icon loses much of its terror. The nefarious Jewish or Hindu merchants, icons of suppressed greed, seem less threatening in an age which celebrates consumption and individual self-gratification, thus necessarily less obsessed with the fear of hidden impulses of desire and greed. By contrast, the Muslim, the religious fanatic, the violent terrorist, negates all these impulses. He is, therefore, the folk devil par excellence of a post-modern age. The threat is not simply to the uneducated working class or petit bourgeoisie. Islam seems also to be a threat to the intellectuals and élites in Western society because it clashes with contemporary intellectual trends towards anti-essentialism and relativism. Hence Fischer and Abedi, describing these currents, argue that by contrast:

The rhetorics of contemporary politicized Islam both simply fear difference and block access to the ethic of difference. They are defensively anxious about manhood and insist on the subordination of women. They exhibit an anxious pattern of denial about the rights of minorities and insist on the eventual erasure of cultural, religious, class and national differences in the name of Islamic Universalism. They are indifferent to the rights of individual conscience, due process of law, and civil and human rights, and are insensitive to social disciplines and the imposition of Islam, as they see it, override all such rights. (1990:133)

Taylor and Laxton point out that, in this case, the name of the ‘folk devil’ is Islam, but that we may also discern a whole range of variants that are popular, and which are the instant favourites for popular success. The first, and in this case the most popular, is the globalized social myth of the other, the enemy, the enemy within, the enemy without. The second is the version of Islamophobia which is rooted in the experience of real Islamophobia and real fear.

The danger is that although the secular fundamentalist defence of permissiveness and difference is grounded in ethico-religious commitments, it may easily encourage a ‘new’ racism. The Islamic Grand Inquisitor is not a disguised and assimilated threat as the Jew was; ‘he’ is not subservient and bestial like the black slave. He is upfront, morally superior, openly aggressive, denying the validity of other cultures – in short, a different kind of folk devil altogether. He is a figure constructed by fearful élites which may nevertheless legitimize far cruder forms of biologically racism. Anti-fundamentalist images provide these racists with a legitimizing discourse against Muslims, specifically, to which may be added the usual epithets directed against all racialized groups – that they are dirty, promiscuous, licentious, violent and so forth.

What we have, then, uniquely in the case of contemporary Islam, is an oppositional hegemonic bloc which includes intellectual élites and the consumerist masses, as well as ‘real’ violent racists, like members of the British National Party, who exploit anti-Muslim discourses to target Muslims in particular (as statistics show) for racial attacks.

The Satanic Verses
Different folk devils elicit different national responses. The rebellious slave, the mugger who refuses to accept his lowly place, must be controlled and subordinated. In contrast the dissembling, apparently assimilated but nefarious witch, along with the publicly aggressive Islamic Grand Inquisitor, must be expelled from the society, since they represent a threat to the very culture of the nation and its moral fabric. The distinction between the two is that in our post-modern world, minor cultural differences in the context of broad cultural assimilation are defined as acceptable and with this acceptance, the fantasy of the hidden witch is kept at bay most of the time (although anti-Semitism in Europe appears to be on the increase). However, it is the Islamic Grand Inquisitor who is most feared across classes and, indeed, across nations.

The tension within the nation-state between individual citizenship rights and the reproductions of the nation as a united moral community requires that cultural pluralism within the nation-state be grounded in shared ethical convictions about the validity of cultural differences. The globalized images of the Muslim religious fanatic seem to deny the possibility of such ethical commonalities. The obvious fact is, however, that few Muslims in Britain and Europe are religious fanatics: the majority share the same ethical space that we occupy and greatly appreciate the religious and cultural tolerance of difference they find here. Even in the case of so-called ‘fundamentalists’, an occidentalist rhetoric is often merely a form of symbolic protest against perceived Western neocolonialism, rather than a call for action (see Werbner 2004).

This puts a heavy responsibility on the shoulders of intellectuals and politicians in Europe, as well as in the United States. Despite our fears, we must consistently counter the globalization of stereotypes of Muslims as fundamentalists and, while criticizing publicly the unfounded occidentalist rhetoric of contemporary Islam, recognize that religious fundamentalists in today’s world are not uniquely Islamic. There are Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist and Taoist fundamentalists. As anthropologists and sociologists our main attempt should be to highlight Western complicity with the corruption and human rights violations of Arab and Muslim regimes, as of others (such as Israel or the USA, for example), while simultaneously distancing ourselves from political Islam’s fundamentalist explanation and solution to this economic and political crisis, a real crisis which both Westerners and Muslims are currently experiencing both in Europe and beyond it.

There are signs that in Britain, at least, Muslims are no longer isolated in their demands for religious protection. Even before the present law was first tabled, the Board of Jewish Deputies expressed its support for the Commission for Racial Equality’s (CRE) proposal of a law against incitement to religious hatred, which would constitute an extension of race relations legislation to prevent victimization on religious grounds (The Jewish Chronicle, Nov. 24, 1995). The victory of the British Muslim lobby is an important symbolic step towards the integration of Muslims into British society. The intense sense of victimization and vulnerability which colours Muslim perceptions of Western society has not precluded them from political and social alliances, as in the Stop the War Coalition. It proves that the other side of Islamophobia, Muslim fear of secularism and of the West, makes dialogue a matter of great urgency, despite apparently opposed world views. The new law, although unlikely to result in many prosecutions (it requires the approval of the Attorney General to proceed), has an important symbolic role, as Madeleine Bunting proposes in a recent Guardian commentary (11/12/04: 23): it asserts the state’s rejection of Racial Equality’s (CRE) proposal of a law against incitement to religious hatred, which would constitute an extension of race relations legislation to prevent victimization on religious grounds (The Jewish Chronicle, Nov. 24, 1995).

But by the same token, it could also be argued that symbolic laws make bad law. The new law is likely to disappoint Muslims and other minorities who believe it will protect them against public vilification of the Prophet of Islam (as suggested in a recent Daily Telegraph article), or of sacred spaces (as in a Sikh play dramatizing rape and murder in a Sikh temple). Arguably, there is an inherent ambiguity in the law given that vilifying a religion may be construed as vilifying its followers. Can the law really be extended to cover the negative expression? * * *