Fear of Muslims, Islamophobia, is embedded in stereotypical assumptions and pronouncements regarding selected customs and, above all, the inherently fanatical, violent and irrational tendencies of Muslim leaders and their followers. The further point of such discourses is the claim that these alien qualities and attributes have come to be implanted in the Western body itself, no longer simply confined to its ‘bloody boundaries’, to cite Huntington, but extending within and across them. A substantial Muslim diasporic presence has emerged in Europe and the West, and even some Western liberals, who pride themselves on their enlightened tolerance, appear concerned about the capacity of this culturally alien presence, as they see it, to integrate. Such doubts surfaced especially during the Rushdie affair and the Gulf war, both of which seemed to expose the chasm between so-called Western ‘values’ and Islamic ones. In denying the validity of this antagonistic vision according to which Muslim minorities are intrinsically antithetical to Western democratic practices, the aim of the present paper is twofold: first, to highlight the rise of an alternative contemporary debate about the rights and obligations of Muslims as minorities in the West which is currently animating Muslim and Western scholars, clerics and activists; and second, to argue that Muslim diasporic transnational mobilisation, including even the conflicts surrounding the Rushdie affair and the Gulf war, have been key moments in the development of a Muslim British civic consciousness and capacity for active citizenship. Far from revealing ambiguous loyalties or unbridgeable cultural chasms, British Muslim transnational loyalties have challenged the national polity, I argue, to explore new forms of multiculturalism and to work for new global human rights causes. At the same time such mobilisations have been part of the learning process of becoming a politically effective diaspora. In the long run, then, the Muslim diasporic presence in Britain is a potentially enriching one, and particularly so as the state moves to becoming a post-national, multicultural polity.

Diaspora and Islam

By definition, a diaspora is a transnational network of dispersed subjects, connected by ties of co-responsibility across the boundaries of empires, political

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communities or (in a world of nation-states) nations. Diasporas are thus deter-
ritorialised, and yet complexly spatialised, imagined communities whose mem-
bers conceive of themselves despite their dispersal as sharing a collective past
and common destiny, and hence also a simultaneity in time.¹

In existing beyond the nation-state with its fixed boundaries and clearly
defined categories of inclusion and exclusion, of participatory rights and duties,
citizenship and loyalty, diasporas as scattered, uncontained and uncontainable
minorities have historically been the target of racialised and xenophobic
nationalist imaginings. Thus Jews in the diaspora were conceived in the racist
imagination as the nefarious leaders of both communist and capitalist inter-
national conspiracies; a hidden, malignant presence in the body politic of the
pure nation. More recently, such imaginaries have been transposed by the
extreme Right on to the new Muslim diasporic presence in Europe. Writing
about Scandinavia, Tore Bjorgo reports that in their racist discourses, migrants
and asylum seekers are represented by the Scandinavian Right as

‘pioneers’ in a Muslim army of conquest. According to this
theory, the ‘so-called refugees’ have come to establish ‘bridge-
heads’ for Islam in Norway. This is part of an evil Muslim
conspiracy to establish global Islamic rule. (Bjorgo, 1997, p. 60)

For Scandinavian neo-Nazis, the plot is even thicker:

immigration is presented as a strategic weapon in the hand of ‘the
Jews’ in their ongoing race war against ‘the Aryans’. (Bjorgo,
1997, p. 62)

The neo-Nazi assumption is thus of an alliance between Jews and Muslims, in
which the latter have become the instruments of a Jewish will to global
domination.

Although such conspiracy theories are openly expressed only by a small
minority in Europe and the West today, there are other, apparently more
acceptable, discourses which nevertheless presume an irreconcilable and un-
bridgeable cultural, if not racial, gulf between ‘Islam’ and ‘the West’. Political
scientists such as Huntington, for example, have argued that in the aftermath of
the Cold War, the real confrontation lines in a globalising world, ‘far more
fundamental than differences among political ideologies and political regimes’
(1993, p. 25), will be ‘civilisational’, in particular religious, above all between
Islam and the West (p. 25). If Orientalism by Edward Said (1978) critically
deconstructed false occidental stereotypical discourses of a monolithic Islam,
such an essentialising oppositional dualism between Islam and the West contin-
uues to be invoked as a political reality of the present moment, the product of
inescapable historical animosities and currently incompatible political cultures or
basic moral and social assumptions:

In Eurasia the great historic fault lines between civilizations are
once more aflame. This is particularly true along the boundaries
of the crescent-shaped Islamic bloc of nations from the bulge of
Africato central Asia … Islam has bloody borders. (Huntington, 1993, p. 35, emphasis added)

From a Muslim perspective, a similarly unbridgeable, apparently eternal, opposition is invoked in an ambivalent discourse of hubris and defensiveness. In this narrative Islam is constructed as both victim and last remaining adversary of a hegemonic, dominant West (Ahmed, 1992; Malik, 1996). Since the Rushdie affair, Westerners have come to be constructed as secretly harbouring a medieval-inspired vision of implacable enmity between Christendom and Islam; an alleged Western demonisation invoked by the Muslim press and in the speeches of local Pakistani subaltern activists in Britain (Werbner, 1994). Since the Iranian revolution, a corresponding demonisation of the West marks the discourses of global Muslim leaders such as the Ayatollah Khomeini or Saddam Hussein.

Fear of Muslims, Islamophobia, takes more quotidian forms as well, of course, embedded in stereotypical assumptions and pronouncements regarding the status of women in Islam, arranged marriages or the inherently fanatical, violent and irrational tendencies of Muslim leaders and their followers (on Islamophobia see the Runnymede Trust, 1997). The further point of such discourses is that these alien qualities and attributes have come to be implanted in the Western body itself, no longer simply confined to its ‘bloody boundaries’ but extending within and across them. A substantial Muslim diasporic presence has emerged in Europe and the West, and even some Western liberals, who pride themselves on their enlightened tolerance, appear concerned about the capacity of this culturally alien presence, as they see it, to ‘integrate’. Indeed Charles Taylor, in advocating a ‘politics of recognition,’ excludes Muslims from straightforward incorporation into the multicultural consensus on the grounds that ‘[f]or mainstream Islam, there is no question of separating politics and religion the way we have come to expect in Western liberal society’ (Taylor, 1994, p. 62). Such doubts have surfaced especially since the Rushdie affair and the Gulf war, both of which seemed to expose the chasm between so-called Western ‘values’ and Islamic ones. (In the Gulf war Muslims in Britain expressed open support for Saddam Hussein.)

In denying the validity of this dualistic vision, whether seen from a Western, orientalist perspective, or a Muslim occidentalist one, the aim of the present paper is twofold: first, to highlight the rise of an alternative contemporary debate about the rights and obligations of Muslims as minorities which is currently animating Muslim and Western scholars, clerics and activists; and second, to argue that Muslim diasporic transnational mobilisation, including even the conflicts surrounding the Rushdie affair and the Gulf war, have been key moments in the development of a Muslim British civic consciousness and capacity for active citizenship. Far from revealing ambiguous loyalties or unbridgeable cultural chasms, British Muslim transnational loyalties have challenged the national polity, I argue, to explore new forms of multiculturalism and to work for new global human rights causes. At the same time such mobilisations have been part of the learning process of becoming a politically effective diaspora. In the long run, then, the Muslim diasporic presence in Britain is a
potentially enriching one, and particularly so as the state moves to becoming a post-national, multicultural polity.

(Dis)loyalty to the Post-national State

Of course, the question of exclusive national loyalty or patriotism, self-evident in an age of nationalism, has been rendered ambiguous by the globalising thrust of late modernity and its continuous blurring of national boundaries. When T.H. Marshall formulated his theory of citizenship in the 1950s (Marshall, 1950), it was still possible to conceive of the liberal state as commanding the state economy for the sake of all citizens, within a single, circumscribed national ‘community’.

In the late 20th century, it is no longer just economic migrants or trans-national diasporics that challenge the all-embracing validity of national boundaries; multinationals, the press and media, the entertainment industry, international feminist or green movements, human rights groups, terrorist organisations, website subscribers, publishers, tourists, the UN, NATO, the IMF and international peace courts all transcend or transgress national boundaries. None of these groups and institutions are exclusively loyal to their polities or national causes. Many of them utilise international networks with the aim of mobilising support for the sake of achieving internal national reform. Moreover, in an age of relative peace, armies are no longer people’s armies and, with the collapse of Communism, they are increasingly perceived as costly anachronisms, professional organisations remote from the daily concerns of most citizens. Patriotism and national loyalty now sound like the archaisms of a lost past.

In these circumstances, short of being a paid spy or terrorist, what could it possibly mean to be disloyal to the nation? On the surface, the Rushdie affair and the Gulf war both highlighted, in quite different ways, the possibility of such disloyalty, and the limits of national tolerance. In the Rushdie affair, Muslims in Britain came close to denying the jurisdiction of British law when they supported the Ayatollah Khomeini’s death sentence against the author—on the grounds that apostasy was punishable by death according to the Koran. They appeared to endorse a fundamental assumption in Islam that the law of God takes precedence over man-made laws. Moreover, the law they invoked was a drastic negation of enlightened legal norms and values. Not only did it deny the sanctity of free speech; it also seemed to deny the right to freedom of religious conscience on which Muslims’ own citizenship in Britain rested.

Against this construction it can be argued, however, that at stake were not the sancrosanct nature of British law or even freedom of speech. In Britain, neither is absolute (see Lee, 1990; Wilson, 1991). Indeed, in a post-national era, rights activists deny the absolute jurisdiction of any national law that attacks basic human rights. Moreover, Muslim law itself has always been subject to interpretation and reinterpretation, and it is doubtful whether Koranic injunctions about apostasy are as absolute as the Ayatollah’s *fatwa* seemed to imply. Sadik J. Al-Azm, a Syrian scholar, makes the point that
a fatwa’s most common function is the circumvention of the application of the letter of the law to avoid unnecessary injury to life, limb, property, family, community, and so on. This is why a good mufti is invariably a bad Muslim. (Al-Azm, 1994, p. 21)

It was the unprocedural way in which the so-called fatwa was issued, without the usual lengthy legal reasoning normally expected, that makes it so hard, Al-Azm argues, for the fatwa to be rescinded. In fact, despite this limitation the Iranian government in 1998 revoked the death sentence against Rushdie. We need also to remember that the main protesters against the author and novel, South Asian Muslims, were convinced at the outset of the affair that there existed in Britain a law banning books likely to stir religious hatred, such as the one passed in 1924 under the Raj in British India and retained after independence in postcolonial South Asia (see Metcalf, 1996). The issue was not, ultimately, thus a legal one at all. The affair was (and to some extent remains) a political confrontation over the symbolic status of Islam in the world and in Britain, a matter of honour and shame, a judgement against a perceived act of communal betrayal and treachery, of diasporic diloyalty. Rushdie, a cunning and sneaky traitor, a sellout who had insulted his community by ridiculing its sacred symbols, deserved to die.

At the beginning of the affair, during 1989, British Muslims were not only hurt and enraged by the novel; they also felt responsible to the transnational Muslim ummah for the author’s act of perfidy. By late 1990, however, matters had changed radically: I was told by Pakistani friends that there was little Muslims in Britain could do about Rushdie. They were obliged, as UK citizens, to abide by the law of the land. This, they explained, was laid out by Islamic law itself. (Even though, they added, if Rushdie had been in a Muslim state, he would still deserve to die.) This realization was part of a growing debate, as we shall see, regarding the status and conduct of Muslim minorities in the West.

Like the Rushdie affair, open public support for Saddam Hussein in the months leading to the Gulf war cannot be construed simply as an act of Muslim disloyalty, either to Britain or Pakistan (both countries were members of the international alliance). It was, however, undoubtedly a gesture of protest: against the pusillanimity of corrupt, undemocratic Muslim regimes in the Gulf; against Western greed and double standards, and particularly US support for Israel’s persistent refusal to fulfil UN resolutions regarding Palestinian rights. Saddam Hussein became a hero simply because he cocked a snook at the West, an act he repeated once again, even more successfully, in 1998. Although their motives were in several ways quite different, there were many other Western activists apart from Muslims who also protested against the war (see Norris, 1992). Yet Muslims were perceived as a potential fifth column by some: mosques were daubed with graffiti while Arab residents were rounded up by MI5. It is perhaps significant that during both the Rushdie affair and the Gulf war, despite the openly vocal, public protests by British Pakistanis, it was Palestinians, Iraqis and Iranians who continued to be regarded as prime suspects by the security forces. No Pakistani was arrested, including even Kalim Siddiqui, leader of the Islamic Party of Great Britain, who had close links with Iran, and even though he called
openly for the author’s death in several public meetings in Britain (see Werbner, 1996; Siddiqui was investigated by the police but no charges were ultimately placed against him).

**Muslims and Christians in a Postcolonial World**

Rather than an implacable, eternal opposition between Islam and Christendom or democracy, the place of Muslims as citizens and minorities in the West is one currently extensively debated by Muslims scholars and activists, attempting to extend and adapt Islamic law to contemporary realities. The contemporaneity of the debate in the Muslim world has only recently been highlighted in an important article by Wasif Shadid and Sjoerd van Koningsveld (1996), and I base my discussion primarily on their work, and that of Bernard Lewis (1994).

An original division made by Muslim jurists between *dar al-Islam* and *dar al-harb* or *dar al-kufr*, between the Land of Islam and the Land of War or Unbelief, suited a time when the Muslim community was small or expanding. It laid down that Muslims were obliged to migrate to a Muslim-ruled land in cases of conquest, and should not linger or settle permanently in non-Muslim lands (see Lewis, 1994; Shadid and Koningsveld, 1996). But historically, the vast spread of Islam, the medieval and modern European colonial conquests and reconquests of Muslim-populated lands and, from quite early on, the emergence of ungodly usurpers and lay dynastic rulers in the Muslim world, all made the injunction to migrate to a Muslim land virtually unachievable. Muslim scholars began by adapting a third category, *dar-el aman* or *dar al-ahd*, the Land of Security or Treaty, originally formulated as a guideline for Muslim travellers or traders living temporarily in lands friendly to Islam, to other circumstances (Shahid and van Koningsveld, 1996; Lewis, 1994). The condition for remaining in such lands was that Muslims be allowed to practice their religion openly and freely. The debate concerned the jurisdiction of Muslim judges and here a spectrum of opinions emerged on the issue.

According to Lewis, there is an apparent limitation on the freedom of worship granted to Muslims, as to all believers, in Western democracies. Islamic worship, he argues, is not just a matter of personal practice but of exercising public authority and domination, of *jihad*, promoting the true faith and persuading others to do so. Not all juridical schools, however, follow this line of reasoning. In particular, the Hanafis, to which most South Asians Muslims in Britain (by far the majority Muslim presence in the UK) belong, are satisfied by basic tolerance as a condition for permanent stay. Yet the key dilemma for the Muslim jurists, according to Lewis, remains the absence of *communal* jural autonomy in Western democracies in matters of personal law, a right routinely granted by Muslim states to religious minorities, or *dhimmis*, residing under their jurisdiction. Moreover, there is no precedent in Islamic law for voluntary migration to a non-Muslim land, which typifies most Muslim settlement in the West today.

While Lewis wonders whether Muslim immigrants in Christian and post-Christian lands, as he puts it, are aware of these debates, he nevertheless concludes that the arguments highlight ‘the capacity of the tradition, in the past, to confront new problems and respond to them in unexpected ways’. In colonial
Divided Loyalties, Empowered Citizenship?

India following the fall of the Mughal empire, similar debates, Ahmed Andrews shows, animated the discourse of the ulama, the learned scholars (Andrews, 1996). The point of Shadid and van Koningsveld’s article is to demonstrate that this debate is an ongoing one and not, as Soheib Bencheikh, a Muslim modernist Algerian theologian living in France, would have it, a radical break from the past: ‘a new theology has to be elaborated ... It is up to us to demonstrate in France of today that Islam is really a universal religion’ (Shadid and van Koningsveld, 1996, p. 86). Shadid and van Koningsveld reject as confused and ill-informed a series of claims made about Islam by a variety of Muslim and Western scholars, and which ignore new developments in Islamic thought regarding the postcolonial Muslim presence in non-Muslim states, and especially the West (p. 88). They identify in the first instance a spectrum of juridical views which were developed by jurists on the position of Muslim minorities under colonial rule. These ranged between two radically opposed interpretations of jihad, as either expansive or defensive. The most recent development in this ongoing argument, they propose, has come with the rise of Islamism during the postcolonial period. Islamists define the Muslim territories themselves as having lapsed into Unbelief, jahilia, and their debate surrounds the permissibility of the use of violence to overturn illegitimate regimes.

In a comprehensive review of the Muslim scholarly debate, Shahid and van Koningsveld demonstrate that all these current and prior arguments feed into contemporary postcolonial Muslim discussions concerning the status, duties and responsibilities of Muslims residing in the West. The various views expressed can be ordered into four main approaches:

1. the ‘pragmatic’ approach, which argues that religious freedom in the democratic West, the right of Muslims to practise and defend their moral values publicly, makes it, as we have seen, a Land of Treaty rather than of War, and thus also a land of permissible settlement and naturalisation, one in which Muslims should participate actively in political life, observe the oath of allegiance to the Queen, perform military service and accept prevailing secular rules and family laws. Islam as a universal religion can and should, according to such views, be practised anywhere (pp. 95, 99, 103–107). Muslims may even join battles against aggressive Muslim states in the case of territorial disputes (pp. 105, 107);

2. the ‘utopian’ view, espoused by Kalim Siddiqui, which advocates the creation of a unified and legally autonomous Muslim community in Britain and the West, as part of an expansive, transnational Islamic ummah. According to this view, Muslims are obliged to pay taxes and abide by the law of the land as long as this does not conflict with their loyalty to Islam (as in the case of the Rushdie affair), but they should also assist Muslims elsewhere in their struggles (pp. 96, 99). Against Siddiqui’s call for communal self-regulation of Muslim personal law, a more feasible arrangement currently emerging in Europe is the institutionalisation of Islamic councils of religious scholars able to advise on Islamic law, or suggest decisions on a strictly voluntary basis, much like rabbinical courts do (p. 107). Surveys show that most European Muslims do not want a separate statute of Islamic family law (p. 108);
3. *the ‘modernist’ approach*, which rejects the validity of the opposition between the Lands of Islam and War as being inapplicable to present-day Muslim as well as Western countries, and attempts to replace it with a new terminology. The key relation which should obtain, in this view (as expressed, for example, by the Muslim jurist Mawlawi) between Muslims and non-Muslims is not strife but preaching. Most of the world is thus *dar al-dawa*, the Land of Preaching (pp. 96–98). Indeed, some scholars advocate living in non-Muslim lands for the sake of *dawa*. At the same time minority Muslims are enjoined to ensure Muslim education in order to pass on Islam to the next generation (p. 100); and

4. *the ‘traditionalist’ view*, occupying a marginal position, which adheres to the old division between the Lands of Islam and War, and is held by a few Muslim clerics, both in Europe and elsewhere in the Muslim world (p. 98). This view disapproves of permanent settlement in the West which could lead to assimilation (p. 101). Some scholars argue that the prohibition of the public call to prayer, or demonstrations in different European countries against the building of new mosques, are unacceptable restrictions that highlight the lack of safety for Muslims in the Land of the Infidels (pp. 102–103). Radicals adopting this line reject nationalism and hence naturalisation in favour of membership in a global *ummah* (p. 108). Naturalisation is even identified with apostasy and high treason (p. 109). (Clearly, where dual nationality is allowed, as in the UK, the problem of naturalisation is somewhat less contentious).

With the exception of this final view, we find in these international debates among Muslim scholars an attempt to engage with and accommodate to Western democratic values within the framework of Islamic law. Rather than eternal enmity and incommensurability, their views highlight a shared juridical approach to reinterpreting the law, in order to adapt it to the realities of everyday life. This is also evident in the political participation of Muslims in South Asia and Britain.

Looking back at the political scene in South Asia, Ahmed Andrews argues that historically, Muslim religious parties have participated actively in colonial and postcolonial politics without, with one exception, demanding an Islamic state (Andrews, 1996, 120–121). It is this history, he proposes, rather than the problematic of an Islamic state, that affords the best understanding of South Asian Muslim political activity in the UK (p. 121). In Leicester, Muslims who join political parties or are active in Local Authority politics defend their involvement on the grounds that in Britain they are granted religious freedom. Indeed, Andrews was told, political participation was a duty towards the wider society, as well as a strategy to safeguard Islam (p. 125).

There were, in 1996, Kingsley Purdam reports (Purdam, 1996), 160 Muslim Councillors in Britain. The majority were of Pakistani, and especially Kashmiri, origin. In probing their political agendas and platforms, Purdam warns against a tendency to view Islam and Muslims in Britain as a ‘uniform homogeneous political or cultural constituency’ (1996, p. 130). Indeed, his main point is that Muslim identities are complex, negotiated, contested and historically unstable:
Muslims themselves are debating and contesting exactly what it means to be a Muslim, what Islam means and how it should be constructed and reproduced both in the West and in the rest of the world.

Muslim Councillors in Britain are mostly members of the Labour Party and few are especially pious. Nevertheless, there are key issues concerning British Islam around which they have mobilised for joint action. These related, in 1996, to expanding the reach of the Race Relations Act to include the protection of religious (and not just ‘racial’) minorities; the battle for state funded, voluntary-aided Muslim schools; and the struggle for Muslim parliamentary representation. In each of these instances, Muslims were merely striving, it should be noted, to achieve parity with other religious minority groups in Britain, such as Jews or Catholics. Purdam sees in these struggles an identity politics that claims for the discursive label ‘Islam’ a legitimate place in British public political discourse (see also Purdam, 1998). In the course of this politics, Muslims in Britain have had to face a number of hurdles in the battle to become full, legitimate participants in the Labour Party and national politics (Purdham, 1996).

Religious Pluralism and Symbolic Citizenship

In reflecting on these highly positive, practical agendas for participatory citizenship, the trauma of the Rushdie affair and the principled questions it raised about Muslim loyalty seem to have been forgotten or buried. Yet the affair left a bitter legacy of suspicion and a sense of alienation which remains as a trace in all British Muslim politics. At the same time the affair also engendered, in my observation, a new consciousness of citizenship as a legal struggle for rights and as a subjective commitment to permanent settlement.

The affair was thus a kind of watershed. From the Muslim point of view, it generated a demand for the extension of the Blasphemy law to afford protection to the religious feelings of Muslims and other religious minorities in Britain. From a liberal, secular and feminist point of view, it generated a counter-demand to abolish the Blasphemy law and disestablish the Church of England (see Wilson, 1991; Connolly, 1995).

This has led to an interesting scholarly debate about the role of the church and of denominational schools in integrating Muslims and enhancing their symbolic citizenship in Britain. The thrust of the argument is that, paradoxically, the established church and voluntary-aided denominational schools have been, for religious minorities, key institutions of social integration into British society. The nemesis of religious pluralism, of civic toleration and sympathetic recognition of freedom of worship, is here defined not as religious fundamentalism but as secularism. Secularism, according to this view, has become ‘fundamentalist’ and intolerant and thus incapable of affording due protection and symbolic recognition to truly pious religious minorities such as the current generation of British Muslims.

In this spirit, Phillip Lewis, an historian and anthropologist of Muslims in Britain who is also the Inter-Faith Advisor for the Anglican Bishop of Bradford,
argues that the integration of Irish Catholics into British society began, paradoxically, when they were granted state subsidies for separate Catholic schools (Lewis, 1997). This symbolic gesture of acceptance has recently, in January 1998, been extended for the first time to two Muslims schools, after a prolonged and in many ways bitter campaign. Lewis argues that

The Irish Catholic experience in Britain is significant in that it highlights a continuing failure of progressive thought to anticipate the importance and tenacity of religion as a component of ethnic identity, and the possibility of maintaining multiple identities. (1997, p. 129)

Churches in England, Lewis points out, have generated and thus contributed to the complex associational network comprising civil society which underpins British democracy. The fact, moreover, that the state funds army chaplaincies, media programmes, university theology students and lord mayors has meant that religion in Britain has not been ghettoised. Most significantly, ‘the Anglican establishment has been pluralised to make space for other Christian denominations, without in the process being privatised’ (p. 140). Thus Tariq Modood, in a parallel argument, points out that the Church has been ‘relatively open to the prospect of sharing public space, even establishment itself, with other groups’ (Modood, 1995, p. 1). This includes participation by representatives of different religious faiths in civic occasions and state ceremonies, and advocacy that leaders of all the main faiths be represented alongside the church in the House of Lords (Modood, 1995; also Lewis, 1997). The Church has been active in fostering inter-faith institutions and joint committees with the purpose of maintaining dialogue (Lewis, 1997). This was particularly important during the Rushdie affair, when, Lewis points out, ‘communities were threatening to polarise into mutual incomprehension’ (Lewis, 1997, p. 142).

The crucial implication of Lewis’s argument is that in their legitimate engagement with Britain’s political and civic order, religious minorities both incorporate and are incorporated into the civic culture of their newly adopted society. Hence, rather than ghettoising and marginalising minority religions, or disaggregating them into discrete communities in the hope that their religiosity will ‘dissolve’ and vanish, public and civic recognition for Islam and other minority religions leads to the negotiation of a new participatory public order. It is an order built on the acceptance that religious minorities are a permanent feature of the national landscape. In upholding this consensual arrangement, the established church fulfils a crucial mediatory and leadership role vis-à-vis the state and the wider society.

Against such a view, in a reply to Modood, Clara Connolly, an active member of Women Against Fundamentalism, the feminist organisation established in the wake of the Rushdie affair, lists a series of reasons why the apparently pluralist nature of the present established church nevertheless encourages and underpins intolerant groups and practices (Connolly, 1995). First, she argues, any multi-faith consensus would be likely to discriminate against women, given the biases of most religious faiths on matters of gender. Religious leaders are almost invariably men. Women and gays in British society are protected by hard-won
libertarian laws unconstrained by church teachings. However tolerant the Anglican Church, it opens a door to conservative Christians: it is they who insisted on legislating for an act of daily Christian worship and religious education in state schools, despite the plural character of the student population. In a basically secular society, Christianity is grasped in Britain, Connolly argues, not as a living practice but as a cultural signifier of the nation. It is a symbolism which excludes non-Christians. It can be used by racists to define areas of privilege and segregation for themselves as ‘Christians’, meaning, euphemistically, ‘white’ (1995, p. 4). With Britain still officially a ‘Christian’ country, unpopular governments may invoke Christianity (‘back to basics’) in the hope of winning electoral support. Connolly’s more conflictual vision of pluralism thus differs from Modood’s or Lewis’s consensual view:

WAF’s demand for a secular state is not made because we assume that, in itself, it is the guarantor of pluralism and equality. Rather, we believe that it is one pre-condition, among many others, of a pluralist and egalitarian future. (Connolly, 1995, p. 4)

One of the oddities of British society that Connolly does not consider is that the nation’s secularism may be the product of small doses of religion at an early age. Indeed, the relation between secularism and religion is clearly more complex that earlier liberal theories, separating private worship from the public sphere of politics, envisioned. Elsewhere Modood invokes the spectre of religious communalism as an aggressive form of electoral politics. He suggests that Communalism might be a potential consequence of revoking the establishment of the Anglican Church, and the tolerant status quo it fosters, in favour of what he calls ‘triumphal secularism’ (1994, p. 63; 1998, pp. 392–398). He fails, however, in my view to explain why India, whose model of secularism he approves for according public recognition and support for all religions (1998, p. 394), and the USA, whose aggressive separation of church and state he rejects (1994, pp. 69–70), both appear to have fostered extremist religious politics such as the BJP or the Moral Majority and the Jewish Defence League. The same could be said of Israel, where the toleration of religious pluralism has engendered highly intolerant religious parties. At the same time Modood not surprisingly also rejects French secularism for its homogenising thrust and ‘arrogate illiberalism’ (1994, p. 68; see also Modood, 1996, 1997).

Clearly, the extent to which religious communities within nation-states feel themselves to be threatened or marginalised by the political process, or come to form powerful economic-cum-political interest groups, is not determined simply by civic arrangements. Religious corporatist representation, such as that existing in Britain and advocated by Modood, cannot in itself explain the brand of universal Christian humanism which dominates public discourse in Britain, or the relatively relaxed secularism of the majority of British citizens. These are necessarily grounded in more complex processes of economic redistribution, consensus-seeking, and responsiveness to grass roots and public activism (Turner, 1990).

Indeed, the WAF–Modood debate highlights the fact that Western democracy is not simply an ordered liberal paradise in which religious, literary, individual, familial and civic domains of action and belief can be kept discreet: it is a
conflictual, negotiated order between organisations and groups seeking influence and presence, as well as rights and safeguards, *vis-à-vis* each other and the state. In this struggle the recent memory of literary censureship, racism and sexist or religious intolerance in the West itself constitutes a hidden narrative which liberals continue to contend with.

This is a point made by Sadik J. Al-Azm in a brilliant essay on *The Satanic Verses* and the Rushdie affair. On a tour of the US in 1989, he was struck by the ignorance of American students regarding their own society’s still very recent banning of such classics as Henry Miller’s *Tropic of Cancer* or James Joyce’s *Ulysses*. This ‘historical amnesia’, he proposes, feeds into an essentialist vision not only of Islam, but also of their own society, a self-congratulatory smugness in which:

> Such practices as religious tolerance, democracy, the right of free speech and all that goes with them are really Western values, which other adjacent cultures (especially Muslim societies and cultures) find alien, repelling and generally antithetical to their most authentic values, cherished beliefs and honored heritage. (Al-Azm, 1991, p. 42)

To hear American students speak:

> one would think that the West had never known the bloody practices of intolerance, persecution and religious bigotry and that the Muslim non-West had known nothing but the fanaticism and repression of the Ayatollahs and their like. (p. 43)

According to Al-Azm, a series of internal ‘Rushdie affairs’ in the Arab world (he lists 12 authors by name, among others, on p. 30), a succession of books, incidents and controversies:

> has had a cumulatively liberating impact on recent and contemporary Arab thought, culture and life in general, bringing previously untouchable subjects within the compass of critical thought, autonomous reason and world debate. (p. 33)

This is probably, he suggests, why the response of Arab states to *The Satanic Verses* was so muted and low key. Indeed, despite official accusations of apostasy and trials for blaspheming against Islam in Arab countries, none of the offending authors have lost their lives or suffered serious injury (p. 34). Al-Azm thus regards the publication of transgressive novels like *The Satanic Verses* as necessary moments of crisis on the way to a more liberal, open and ‘desensitized’ Muslim polity, *just as these novels were in the West not very long ago*. He castigates Christian Bishops and Cardinals as well as Jewish Chief Rabbis for their condemnation of the novel, and for the sympathy and support they expressed for protesting Muslims, in which they chose to ignore the fact that the protestors were calling for the death of an author (pp. 2–3).

There are other ways of thinking about such novels. Webster, for example, has argued that blasphemy is a double-edged tool which encourages fundamentalism, and that what has emerged in the West is a form of authorial self-censureship.
in which offensive attacks on religion are mostly avoided (Webster, 1990; see also Lee, 1990).

I do not want to enter here into the vast controversy over the Rushdie affair (for an extensive review, see Werbner, 1996). My aim has been simply to point out that whatever the political tensions between the Middle East and the West, and however much these feed into relations with Muslim minorities living in the West, such divisions cannot be understood as cultural or civilisational. Christendom and the Caliphate are both definitively dead. To the extent that Muslims in the West are construed as dangerous and essentially alien, this is part of a broader racist and xenophobic discourse. While they may be struggling to gain symbolic recognition for Islam in Britain and the world, this struggle cannot be grasped apart from their critical views about the injustice inflicted upon Palestinians by Israel—with the connivance of the international community; nor can it be understood apart from their critique of illegitimate Muslim regimes in the Gulf, propped up by the West, or their struggle for equal rights in Britain, a struggle in which the church and others are increasingly partners.

In the past decade British Muslims have shifted their activism away from such hard, irresolvable cases as the Rushdie affair or the Gulf war, to work for achievable agendas in Britain, as we saw above, but also to lobby for transnational Islamic causes involving more transparently evident human rights violations: Palestine, Bosnia, Chechniya, Kashmir. This new phase, which I turn to next, is one in which South Asians Muslims in Britain have rediscovered themselves as a Muslim diaspora (rather than simply a Pakistani or South Asian one). The fight for transnational human rights is one which also empowers them as active British citizens.

Diaspora and the Post-national State

My own research on this subject has been on a Pakistani women’s association, Al Masoom, which took up the causes of Bosnia and Kashmir as part of a concerted attempt to establish a presence for themselves in a hitherto male-dominated diasporic public sphere in Manchester, UK, while at the same time attempting to influence Western policy by highlighting human rights violations.

In conceptual terms, the diasporic public sphere may be grasped as ambiguously placed within the broader public sphere of the nation—in this case, Britain—and its extraterritorial extensions—the Islamic community or umma, on the one hand, and Pakistan, a relatively new postcolonial nation, on the other hand. What makes this arena of communal action a public sphere is the fact that—in terms of Habermas’s original definition (Habermas, 1989)—it is a sphere in which private citizens meet to deliberate on issues of general public concern. It is an ‘alternative’ public sphere, to use Gilroy’s term, created by emancipatory ‘story-telling and music-making’ (Gilroy, 1993, p. 200), and leading, as James Clifford puts it, to ‘forms of community consciousness and solidarity that maintain identifications outside the national time/space in order to live inside, with a difference’ (Clifford, 1994, p. 308). It is, as Yuval-Davis argues, the site of ‘constant processes of struggle and negotiation’, which

For better or for worse, diasporas resident in the West can have significant impact on foreign policy, well beyond their numerical strengths. The Jewish, Irish and African American diasporas in the United States present obvious examples of highly effective political lobbying in which, although this remains unrecognised in the scholarly work on diaspora, women’s organisations have played an important part. So far, Muslim lobbies have been far less effective, but in Britain the Kashmir lobby now includes around 60 MPs, although there is no Kashmiri MP in the British parliament (see Ellis and Khan, 1998).

Al Masoom was founded in Manchester in 1990 and for six years it dominated Pakistani women’s activism in the city. At the height of its success it mobilised thousands of men, women and children for its fund-raising events and was honoured by local Members of Parliament and visiting Pakistani dignitaries, including the then Prime Minister of Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto. At its core were some 15 activists, mostly middle-class Punjabi women. In many ways it started simply as just another women’s philanthropic organisation, working for good causes in Pakistan, but the opposition it encountered from male community leaders pushed it to develop more radical feminist agendas. It eventually split over a failed fund-raising concert in 1996, and at present the women activists are regrouping in new women’s organisations.

It is important for the argument put here that Al Masoom was not a secularist women’s organisation. Quite the contrary: its women members were, and remain, pious Muslims who pray regularly, fast on Ramadan and give voluntary time to teaching young children the Koran. But the organisation was fired by a conviction that Islam is an egalitarian religion that guarantees women’s rights and that, indeed, this is the true message of all the great religions. This reading of the spirit of Islam, its true core meaning, transcending any scriptural formalities, is one that has emerged at the present historical moment, and it allowed the women to make Islam the rallying cry for women’s rights.

The women were the first to initiate what became a series of protest processions in Manchester against the atrocities in Bosnia and Kashmir. The first march, that organised by Al Masoom, was a ‘Women in Black’ procession (Women in Black is the name adopted by a women’s movement founded originally in Israel to protest against the Occupation, and which has spread to other countries, including the former Yugoslavia; see Emmett, 1996). Joining their protest march was Gerald Kaufman, veteran Labour MP and professed admirer of Al Masoom. His support for the organisation was grounded in their work for wider, transnational and human rights causes rather than narrow ethnic interests. This is also, arguably, what allowed the women to forge links with many different and varied organisations and persons beyond the community, and especially with male Muslim or English non-Muslim groups active in providing aid to Bosnia or to deprived groups in Pakistan. Outside the Town Hall, Kaufman congratulated the tired marchers on the important work they were doing for Bosnia and Kashmir. His support was clearly rooted in shared ideas about citizenship and human rights which both he and the women regarded as transcending narrow divisions by religion, gender and ethnicity.
Divided Loyalties, Empowered Citizenship?

The point I wish to make, however, is that in gaining the moral high ground through spectacular civic activism for international human rights affecting Muslims, a cause supported by male Muslim leaders in Britain as well, the organisation claimed—and ultimately gained—for itself a right to speak in the diasporic public sphere in Manchester on issues relating especially to women’s rights and predicaments. Diasporic public activism thus enabled the women to break into a tabooed space previously preserved for male public activists. The women’s transnational activities for causes beyond the British state thus achieved their civic integration into the ethnic community as equal and legitimate actors in their own right; at the same time, it also facilitated their integration into a broader network of British non-ethnic human rights and philanthropic church and other organisations, as well as the British media and parliamentary representatives. Paradoxically, then, activism for a diasporic cause beyond the boundaries of the nation, motivated by deep loyalties to an ‘Other’, elsewhere, enhanced the women’s practical civic consciousness as citizens of the nation. In the same way, I have argued, male activism for ethnic and Islamic causes, even when it has been conflictual, has accelerated their integration into British civic politics.

Conclusion

Political lobbying for symbolic recognition and specifically targeted causes, both national and transnational, appears to me to be the route British Muslims, as an increasingly self-conscious diaspora, are progressively adopting. The process is still at its very early stages and lacks the sophistication and clout accumulated by other diasporic lobbies operating in Western democracies. In many European countries Muslims still lack basic citizenship rights. Even in Britain, where their basic citizen rights are assured, British Pakistani protests seem often very general and diffuse, directed as much at an absent USA as at a present British state. Yet these experimentations with democracy are, I propose, part of a learning process on how to gain political influence as a minority group in a democratic society. Such influence necessarily needs to enlist the support of Muslim academics and publicists such as Tariq Modood, Yasmin Ali, Akbar Ahmed or Aziz Al-Azme, who are consulted as experts by the media. It must forge alliances with concerned academics, liberals, the Church, and publicly minded activists. It must reach local politicians, civil servants and MPs. It must also at the same time be cognisant of the new conceptualisation of Muslim minority citizenship by Islamic jurists. It has to mobilise Muslim members of British political parties, such as municipal Councillors or party activists. And, above all, the success of such lobbies will rest on the ability of volunteers and businessmen to organise and fund alliances of communal leaders and associations such as Al Masoom.

The challenge is one of combining protest and accommodation (see Webner, 1991). At present such alliances are fragmentary and shot through with factional and sectarian rivalries. Only occasionally, as in the Rushdie affair, have Pakistanis in Britain united for civic action, and such unities tend to be short-lived. But the signs are there of a new orientation towards active citizenship. The question of ‘loyalty’ in the post-national state, implying as it does
some kind of exclusive commitment, cannot capture the complexity of commit-
ments implicit in such transnational alliances, orientations and lobbies. What can
be said is that these are increasingly challenging and helping to shape a new
British political culture, and perhaps also in the long run, new international
orientations.

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Notes
1. On the simultaneity in time of imagined communities, see Anderson (1983). On some key features of
diasporas, see Tolooyan (1996).
2. Arguably, in critiquing orientalism, Said esentialised the Occident and occidental scholars in particular as
uniformly complicit with the imperialist project, thus denying the different shades of opinions, internal
arguments and public dissent characterising European scholarship (on orientalism more generally, see
Carrier, 1996).
3. For an analysis of British Muslims’ response to the Gulf crisis, see Werbner (1994); also Ahmed (1992)
4. In what came to be widely recognised as a bungled and poorly informed operation.
5. In a new move in April 1998, Liverpool Council decided on the opening of a primary school which would
be local authority administered but with a strong Islamic ethos, Islamic assemblies and religious education,
and a significant number of Muslim governors. The school is located in a high density Muslim residential
6. Floya Anthias (1998) has argued that the gendered dimensions of diaspora remain untheorised, but her own
rendition stresses the oppression and passivity of diaspora women, whereas in my observations of both the
Pakistani and Jewish communities, diasporas foster women’s public activism.

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