HOMELANDS AND DIASPORAS
Holy Lands and Other Places

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Introduction: The Place of Diaspora

Some time ago I listened to a BBC Radio 4 program on Jewish religious music. The speaker, a sophisticated musicologist, compared different styles of hazanut, Jewish cantorial devotional singing, in different Jewish traditions, performed historically by different Jewish communities in different parts of the world. His repeated phrase in drawing these comparisons was to the way “the Jews in the Diaspora” made music; not the Jews of the diaspora, not diasporic Jews, but the Jews living in the diaspora. He was referring, I realized, to a place—the diaspora—but that place was the whole world, with the exception, perhaps, of a small but focal center, a point of origin. Yet although he seemed to be referring to a non-place (“not-Zion/Palestine/Israel”), a kind of limbo, the place of diaspora he was reflecting upon was, in his description, an incredibly intricate network of places marked by great cultural variability and historical depth; a place of many different heterogeneous “traditions.” This paradox, of the one in the many, of the place of a non-place, of a global parochialism, is what makes diasporas a typical transnational formation. In this chapter I shall argue that like many such formations, diasporas are chaorders, chaotic orders, which are inscribed both materially and imaginatively in space, time, and objectifying practices.

The problematics of space and territory have been a key focus of the renewed debates on diaspora. Against the prototypical historical example of the dispersed Jewish diaspora, imaginatively oriented toward return to a lost homeland, the stress in the new discourse of diaspora has been on the positive dimensions of transnational existence and cosmopolitan consciousness (Hall 1990:235; Boyarin and Boyarin 1993; Gilroy 1993; Clifford 1994). The powerful attraction of diaspora for postcolonial theorists has been that,
as transnational social formations, diasporas challenge the hegemony and boundedness of the nation-state and, indeed, of any pure imaginaries of nationhood. The creative work of diasporic intellectuals on the margins is celebrated for transgressing hegemonic constructions of national homogeneity.

The more recent scholarly riposte to this view has highlighted the continued imbrication of diasporas in nationalist rhetoric, and critiqued the celebration of rootlessness as an aestheticizing move which is both ahistorical and apolitical (Fabricant 1998; see also Werbner in Leonard and Werbner 2000). So, too, the new postmodern interpretation challenged simplistic paradigms of diasporas as scattered communities yearning for a lost national homeland, whether real or imaginary. The growing consensus is, by contrast, that such imagined attachments to a place of origin and/or to a collective historical trauma are still powerfully implicated in the late modern organization of diasporas. Diasporas, it seems, are both ethnic-parochial and cosmopolitan. The challenge remains, however, to disclose how the tension between these two tendencies is played out in actual situations.

The currently emergent consensus in the literature is that many diasporas are deeply implicated both ideologically and materially in the nationalist projects of their homelands. Very often, these may be emancipatory and democratic. Thus Basch et al. (1993) report on the critical democratic politics of Grenadans, Haitians, and Filipinos based in New York in lobbying for the removal of authoritarian regimes in their respective countries, and Tölölyan (1996) describes the emancipatory socialist diasporic project of the Armenian community, a feature shared with other anti-colonial diasporic movements. The early Zionist project was universalist, secular, democratic, and socialist (Shanin 1988). African-Americans mobilized against the apartheid regime in South Africa, Chinese-Americans protest against human rights violations in China, and Cuban-Americans against the communist regime of Castro. Jewish peace groups in the United States and Canada have rejected expansionary anti-Palestinian moves by right-wing Israeli governments (Sheffer 1996, 1999).

But by the same token, diasporics often feel free to endorse and actively support ethnicist, nationalistic, and exclusionary movements. They engage in “long distance nationalism” without accountability (Anderson 1992, 1994): they support the IRA, Hindu nationalist movements (Gopinath 1995: 315–16), Greek Cypriot separatism (Anthias 1998), or religious zealotry in Israel. With regard to this, the ability of diasporas to actively participate and intervene in the politics of the homeland has been greatly enhanced and facilitated by the spectacular development of global media and communication technologies. Although transnationalism is by no means a new phenome-
non, today sending societies often encourage such participation while receiving societies range from those which refuse to assimilate newcomers to those, such as Britain and the United States, which tolerate cultural pluralism, dual citizenship, and transnational activism as never before (Foner 1997).

A key question raised in this chapter is the historical processes which have generated the move from “incipient” diaspora to “mobilised” diaspora (Sheffer 1995). Taking Pakistani migrant-settlers in Britain as an example, I argue that the social formation of a diaspora is a predictable process which replicates itself transnationally. Yet it is not the product of any central organizing force able to control the multiple goals pursued by local diaspora communities. Diasporic organizations retain their autonomy along with a capacity to switch agendas and shift orientations in response to local predicaments or world historical events.

**Dispersed Communities of Co-Responsibility**

By definition, a diaspora is a transnational network of dispersed political subjects. One key feature of certain kinds of diasporas (Jews, Muslims, Armenians) is that they are connected by ties of co-responsibility across the boundaries of empires, political communities, or (in a world of nation-states) nations. I use the notion of co-responsibility in preference to usual evocations of “solidarity” or “loyalty” to indicate:

(a) that the planetary flow of cultural goods, philanthropic giving, or political support between diaspora communities and their homeland possesses a vector and a force, ranking diaspora communities globally by wealth, political clout, and cultural authenticity or production;

(b) that diasporas do not necessary have singular centers. On the contrary, they may recognize and foster multiple concerns and more than one sacred center of high value (Goldschmidt 2000);

(c) that diasporas are not simply aesthetic communities; nor are they merely reflections of the displaced or hybrid consciousness of individual diasporic subjects. On the contrary, diasporas are usually highly politicized social formations.

This means that the place of diaspora is also a historical location, not merely an abstract, metaphorical space. Diasporas need to be grasped as de-territorialized imagined communities which conceive of themselves, despite their dispersal, as sharing a collective past and common destiny, and hence
also a simultaneity in time. 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 racialized and xenophobic nationalist imaginings. Thus Jews in the diaspora were conceived in the racist imagination as the nefarious leaders of both communist and capitalist international conspiracies—a hidden, malignant presence in the body politic of the pure nation. More recently, such imaginaries have been transposed by the extreme right onto 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 “bridgeheads” for Islam in Norway. This is part of an evil Muslim conspiracy to establish global Islamic rule (Bjorgo 1997:60).

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” (ibid.: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 unbridgeable cultural, “civilizational,” if not racial, gulf between “Islam” and “the West.” Fear of Muslims, Islamophobia, takes more quotidian forms as well, 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,” as Huntington has described Islam’s relations with the rest of the world (1993:35), 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 have surfaced especially since the Rushdie affair and the Gulf war, and most recently, after September 11, all 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. They remain vociferous in their objections to war with Iraq, but have joined forces with a wider anti-war coalition.)

September 11 highlighted the vulnerability of Muslim diasporas in the West, caught up in international conflicts not of their own making. Almost universally, they objected to the war in Afghanistan and refused to believe that any Muslim could have perpetrated the attack on the World Trade Center. Although universally they condemned the attack on the twin towers, many at the same time declared their support for the Taliban, while a few young British Muslims were even found fighting in Afghanistan on their side.

All this points to the fact that, in being nomadic and transnational, able to transverse political boundaries and settled cultures, diasporas such as Jews and Muslims which have a global reach appear in the eyes of others to be sites of mysterious power, sometimes disguised, sometimes open and public. But how is the illusionary and sometimes very real power of such diasporas created? How is a diaspora produced and reproduced in time through its scattered, discrete “communities”? My question does not refer to the political-economic or historical reasons for such dispersions, although this is a question to which I will return below. Instead, I want to address a somewhat neglected dimension of diasporic formation: the material, moral, and organizational features that underpin the creation of new diasporas and the predatory expansion of old ones into new territories.

My question can be put differently: what makes a diaspora community settled in a particular country “diasporic” rather than simply “ethnic”? What turns a country (for example, Britain) from a permanent place of settlement, an adopted home, into a place of diaspora? The model of diasporic reproduction I propose to put forward here draws on the contemporary world of global finance with its radically new forms of decentralized expansion in order to advance a theory of transnational diasporic formation.

The New Global Chaorder

Credit cards such as Visa now have a turnover of trillions of pounds annually. From being a mere bank card of the California-based Bank of America, Visa has become a global guarantor of money transactions. At the present time, it is rapidly penetrating at an increasingly accelerated rate beyond the northern hemisphere into the rest of the world. Yet no one owns Visa. It has, it seems, no value and no shareholders. It is not quoted on the stock market.
It is not managed through an elaborate command structure. It is not, in other words, a normal multi-national firm. Its headquarters are a relatively small, insignificant building in San Francisco, and it has other similarly modest regional headquarters. The big banks do not have a monopoly over it. Visa is not a commodity. Despite their gigantic stake in it, banks can put no value on it—and it cannot be bought or sold. Moreover, any firm can buy into Visa: Pet Plan (an English pet insurance scheme), Keele University, Barclays Bank. All a firm has to do in order to become a cardholder is to comply with the rules of the game and honor the multi-lateral agreements these imply. In all other respects cardholders act as competitors: they compete with one another for customers; they offer bonuses and incentives in their attempts to lure customers away from rival Visa card holders; they compete, individually, with other credit cards such as American Express or Access.

According to its inventor, Visa works through a system of “chaorder,” rather like the way biological growth and replication occur in nature: leaves multiply by following DNA rules without a central command structure. At the same time, organic interdependency is an essential feature of plant life. So, too, Visa companies sprout independently but depend on the mutual honoring of credit by all the firms contracted into the system, if they are to continue to exist and grow.

**Chaordic Diasporas**

Diasporas resemble, I suggest, my little fable about the Visa credit card because they too reproduce and extend themselves without any centralized command structures. Governments may try to manage their diasporas, but ultimately such attempts must fail. Neither the Pakistani or Israeli governments nor the keepers of the Kaaba in Mecca, control the Pakistani, Jewish, or Muslim diasporas. The locations of diaspora are relatively autonomous of any center, while paradoxically they continue to recognize the center and to acknowledge at least some obligations and responsibilities to it and to the larger whole. Moreover, in any particular location, chaorder is the principle of organization: diasporic groups are characterized by multiple discourses, internal dissent, and competition for members between numerous sectarian, gendered, or political groups, all identifying themselves with the same diaspora. The question of who owns a diaspora and its foundational myths—the holocaust, Zionism, the Partition of India, Pakistani Independence, the rise of the Prophet of Islam—is a highly contested one. What is subsumed un-
der a single identity are a multiplicity of opinions, “traditions,” subcultures, lifestyles, or modalities of existence, to use Avtar Brah’s apt terminology (1996).

**Sufi Cults as Chaordic Organizations**

An example of the chaordic expansion of diasporas is the transnational spread of Islamic mystical Sufi cults to the West. To begin, it should be said that there is nothing new about Sufism as a global religious movement. Sufis began their itinerant existence in the tenth century A.D., and have carried the Message of Islam from the Near East to South Asia, Indonesia, and West Africa. Officially, Sufis claim to belong to named tariqa or orders, but none of these orders have centers or real command structures. What they share, notionally, are ways or paths toward Allah; wazifas, secret formulas and sequences of prayers for disciples to follow. These lead them through the different “stations” on the mystical journey toward experiential revelation. In reality, Sufi cults focus on living or dead saints as regional cults, organized very much along the same lines as other regional cults (see Richard Werbner 1976 and 1989), with a center and branches of it. These branches extend across national boundaries wherever disciples happen to settle. The foundation of a branch follows a predictable pattern, as it develops its materiality (in the form of a mosque, for example) and ritual practice is enhanced. It may start with little more than a group which meets regularly to perform zikr, the rhythmical chanting in unison of the name of Allah. It may progress to holding monthly gyaarvi sharif ritual meetings in which sacralized food is cooked and distributed in commemoration of the birth/death of Abdul Qadr Jilani, one of the founding saints of South Asian Sufism. It may gain its own khalifa, vicegerent or deputy, recognized by the Center (or miraculously, by God). It may even distribute langar (sacralized food, freely offered) on a daily, weekly, monthly, or annual basis.

Sufi regional cults are not particularly exclusive, although this varies somewhat. Disciples may follow more than one saint, attend more than one annual ‘urs festival in commemoration of a departed saint, and—in the absence of the disciples’ “own” saint to whom they have sworn allegiance—happily attend the festivals of another saint, even from a different Sufi order. At the same time, however, Sufi regional cults are locked into thinly disguised competition with each other for disciples; having many disciples, an enormous gathering at saintly festivals, certainly proves that a saint is a
great saint, a *wali*, friend of God. Like other regional cults, Sufi cults wax and wane, with the sacred center of the cult rising to great prominence or sinking into oblivion (see Werbner 1996c; also 2003). Within South Asia, there are the recognized cults of the great Sufi saints who brought Islam to the subcontinent, and their places of burial draw millions annually. But there is no obligation to perform pilgrimage to these places. A minor saint in the back streets of a dilapidated part of a slum in a large city may draw devotion from a circle of local disciples (see Frembgen 1998). Sufism is thus extremely chaordic, having the capacity to expand across boundaries while remaining local and even parochial, recognizing its extensions while practicing locally.

Transnational Sufi cults outside Pakistan or India form one materially embodied way of being diasporic. Saints, disciples, and followers move in predictable pathways between major and minor sacred centers, especially on festive occasions. Sufi regional cults are located “in” the diaspora, rather than being simply “diasporic.” The discourses and practices they perpetuate are a way of living and seeing things, and their movements in space, their material exchanges across space, constitute one dimension (modality, perspective) of the Pakistani global diaspora today, and, even more broadly, of the Muslim global diaspora. In Britain, there are by now a large number of cults centered on local *khalifa* or saints (*pirs*), and they commonly recognize sacred genealogical links to saints located in different parts of Pakistan. Each cult forms a network of saintly brothers and sisters (*pir-bhai/bhen*) with centers or branches in a dozen British cities: Bradford, Manchester, Birmingham, Luton, London, and so forth.

In my recent research on such orders, I interviewed members of six very different orders, all located in Manchester, each with a local leader and an extensive national and international network. Disciples and saints regularly visit each other’s centers in other cities on a weekly or monthly basis, and keep in regular contact with the cult center in Pakistan. Reciprocally, saintly leaders of the cults from Pakistan visit their followers in Britain, often staying for several weeks or months.

There are other chaordic manifestations of diaspora. Some Pakistanis belong to Pakistani political parties. I once interviewed a man who spent three hours trying to explain to me the intricacies of factional alignments and conflicts in the Pakistan People’s Party. This was a time when the party had just split, before Benazir Bhutto first became president. President Zia was in power, and many leaders of the party were exiled in Britain. As a local leader, this man was quite clearly living entirely “in” the diaspora. It filled his thoughts and life. England was an incidental accident of political geography which he happened to be located in, to be disregarded as almost unreal. More
recently, Benazir Bhutto—facing corruption charges in Pakistan—has made Britain her permanent abode. Although her role in Pakistan as party leader has been undermined, she has nevertheless reinvigorated the diasporic politics of the Pakistan People’s Party in Britain.

Elsewhere, as in my monograph *The Migration Process* (Werbner 1990), I have written about processes of Pakistani migration and community formation, culminating in the building of the Central Manchester *Jamia* mosque. What makes the Pakistani communities which have emerged throughout Britain diasporic, rather than simply ethnic or religious, is an orientation in time and space—toward a different past or pasts and another place or places. What makes these diasporas into communities is categorically not their unity. Like Sufi cults, people “buy into” “their” diaspora in quite different, materially embodied ways. Some people set up Urdu poetry reading circles. They meet every month to recite poetry in each other’s company. Others set up religious discussion groups. They meet in mosques, homes, or restaurants to talk about Islam. Such groups host visiting poets or religious experts from Lahore, London, or Delhi (see Leonard 2000).

Second, diasporas are embodiments of cultural, political, and philanthropic sentimental performances. Beyond the imaginary, they exist through material flows of goods and money, through gestures of “giving” or *khidmat*, public service. Often these three dimensions of materiality—culture, politics, and philanthropy—are intertwined. Members of the diaspora mobilize politically to defend or protest against injustices and human rights abuses suffered by co-diasporics elsewhere. They raise money, and donate ambulances, medicines, blankets, and toys for them. They visit them to celebrate Eid together (see Werbner 1996a).

The diaspora is in one sense not a multiplicity at all, but a single place, which is the world. When people suffer elsewhere, it hurts. The pain demands action. In this respect diasporas are fraternities or sororities. When Muslim women in Bosnia or Kosovo or Kashmir are raped or their husbands tortured, it hurts Pakistani women in England. When Palestinian women are evicted from their homes, the pain is felt in other places as well. African Americans mobilized politically in favor of sanctions against apartheid South Africa. Irish Americans mobilized to support the IRA. The main Jewish lobby supports the Israeli government in the name of existential claims to survival.

But when the homeland’s politics disappoint or become too controversial, diasporans can turn their attention elsewhere. If Israel no longer lives up to its utopian Zionist vision, the silent majority of diaspora Jews turn their back on it and preoccupy themselves with the Holocaust or the plight of Russian
Jewry, just as Pakistanis in Britain, disillusioned with the endemic corruption of their country’s politicians and civil servants, turn their back on Pakistan and preoccupy themselves with other, transnational Muslim causes where Muslims are the victims of atrocities and human rights abuses.

Ultimately, there is no guiding hand, no command structure, organizing the politics, the protests, the philanthropic drives, the commemoration ceremonies, the poetry, and the devotional singing styles of diasporas. No single representation by a diasporic novelist or film maker, even in a single country, can capture this diversity or define its politics. What people buy into is an orientation and sense of co-responsibility. The rest is up to their imaginative ability to create and invest in identity spaces, mobilize support, or manage transnational relations across boundaries. Chaorder defines this complex combination of shared rules and focused competitiveness.

**Diasporic Citizenship**

The diasporas of the Old World—the Phoenicians, the Greeks, the Jews, the Armenians—were protected traders and sojourners. In the Ottoman empire, they constituted set-apart religious communities, dhimmis, physically and economically protected but without the right to political representation. In pre-Enlightenment Europe, the Jews formed an occupational group of money lenders, petty traders, and menial workers, confined to urban ghettos and at the mercy of autocratic and anti-Semitic regimes. Even today, Turkish and Maghrebian settlers in Germany, and Palestinians in the Gulf, have no citizenship rights. In general, however, in a post-Liberal world of nation-states, there has been a radical change in the civic and political status of many, though as we have seen, not all, diasporics. No longer defined as permanent strangers, they expect as a right to be granted full citizenship in their country of settlement. They have become, in a sense, also “ethnics.”

Although citizenship is still grasped by some as an exclusionary identity denoting singular loyalty to a particular national collectivity, in reality, people bear multiple collective loyalties and quite often multiple formal citizenships. The claims, duties, and rights attached to these memberships and loyalties are played out in the public domain in various complex ways. There is thus a growing interest in what citizenship might mean, first, in the context of a postnational world in which rights and duties are no longer defined exclusively within the boundaries of nation-states (Soysal 1994), in which human rights movements are both transnational and often anti-national,
and in which the cultural sphere of identity politics has challenged the private/public divide (Zaretsky 1995: 252 passim).

The possibility of combining transnational loyalty and local national citizenship as a right has increased the influence of diasporics on world politics as never before. Hence Benjamin Netanyahu, the right-wing Israeli prime minister, could appeal over the head of the president of the United States to the Republican right and the Moral Majority, along with the so-called “Jewish lobby”, against the American government’s attempts to advance the Oslo peace accord. Iranian American senators play a part in the Northern Ireland settlement (or are asked to “stay away” for fear of jeopardizing it). Sanctions against Apartheid South Africa were strongly supported by the African American community.

Diasporic political influence on Western international policy depends, however, on the existence of organized diasporic political lobbies. Political lobbies test the skills of diaspora activists to the limit. They require clear agendas, sophisticated diplomacy, large sums of money, access to the media, and an ability to influence public opinion through ethnic mobilization in a united front. Incipient diasporas often acquire such skills only through trial and error, over lengthy periods. Although in Britain ethnic leaders have ready access to politicians and MPs (Werbner 1996a), this in itself does not translate into effective political clout without the other ingredients. New, experimental transnationally oriented diasporic organizations often disintegrate in the face of internal divisions or local opposition by rival communal groups. Even the very successful British parliamentary Kashmir caucus (see Ellis and Khan 1998) appears to have collapsed when confronted with Indian intransigence. Building up such organizations at the national level is not easy, and most organizations fail to reproduce themselves over time. The following example illustrates this process of mobilization and collapse. It is interesting also because it concerns an activist women’s transnational organization.

**Gender and Diaspora**

Arguments about gender and diaspora have so far tended to stress the patriarchal dominance of male diasporic leaders, the exploitation of diasporic women, or their cultural invocation as objects of the male gaze (Anthias 1998; Gopinath 1995). It is therefore worth noting that in some diasporas women have built up powerful transnational diasporic organizations in the
past century. This is certainly the case for the Jewish diaspora, which has witnessed the founding of very large national and transnational women’s philanthropic organizations comprised of millions of members, oriented toward raising funds for welfare, education, and health in the homeland or elsewhere in the diaspora. These organizations sustain major hospitals, a network of nursery schools, and special secondary and higher educational facilities. However, when these organizations are still small, women often find themselves blocked by male activists if they attempt to claim an autonomous space for women’s transnational activities.

My own research on a Pakistani women’s organization in Manchester revealed clearly how the local micropolitics of the diasporic public sphere come to be intertwined with transnational diasporic political activism. Al Masoom, an organization which rose to prominence during the 1990s, began as a philanthropic association officially aiming in the long term to build a cancer hospital for children in Pakistan. Meanwhile, the organization raised funds to treat visiting Pakistani children suffering from rare diseases. It also collected clothing, jewelry, and appliances for the dowries of young women from impoverished backgrounds in Pakistan.

In transcending the construction of their local identity as “victims”—as a doubly oppressed racialized minority women’s group—the Pakistani women activists redefined their social positioning not only in Britain, but also globally and transnationally. They literally rewrote the moral terms of their citizenship—from passive to active, from disadvantaged underclass to tireless workers for the public good, from racialized minority to an elite cadre of global citizens responsible for the plight of the needy of the Islamic ummah and of their national homeland. Theirs was a battle to capture the moral high ground and, in the process, to define themselves as active citizens, rightfully and legitimately able to claim a place and voice in the Pakistani, British public sphere. To achieve this, the women organized themselves to work for transnational causes (see also P. Werbner 1996c, 1998a, 1999).

As the women encountered male resistance to their philanthropic work, their efforts became increasing spectacular. They organized a series of public marches, inviting other women’s organizations in the city to join them to protest against human rights violations and atrocities in Bosnia and Kashmir. Manchester was the only city to send women’s groups to London for a pro-Kashmir march from Hyde Park past the House of Commons to Downing Street, in a national march organized by the Pakistan People’s Party. Representatives of al Masoom twice traveled over land to the border of Bosnia,
driving through Europe in the middle of winter in order to bring medical aid, food, clothing, and two ambulances to the refugee camps on the outskirts of Zagreb. In their activism the women were supported by British MPs and the press. At its height the organization could mobilize hundreds of families in Manchester for its fund-raising events. It received donations from British hospitals and support from other English and Muslim transnational organizations.

For a while these groups came to be recognized as an equal actor in the local diasporic public sphere. Leaders were invited to all major public events in Manchester, and met with the Lord Mayor, MPs, visiting politicians from Pakistan, the High Commissioner, and other dignitaries. But the organization lacked a fully developed feminist consciousness, a national support network, and the educational resources and experienced personnel needed to sustain its momentum. The leader, a charismatic woman, began to pursue her own personal interests at the expense of the group. In the end, the organization collapsed amidst accusations of corruption. Male elders’ hegemony in the diasporic public sphere was triumphantly reinstated.

Conclusion

To prove their identification with their homeland and other diasporic causes, members of diaspora communities must constantly confront their local invisibility through public acts of mobilization and hospitality and through demonstrations of generosity which reach out beyond their present communities. They must be seen to contribute real material or cultural goods across national boundaries through their political lobbying, fund-raising, or works of poetry, art, and music. Pakistani diasporans create havens of generosity for visitors from Pakistan (especially distinguished ones), as well as for refugees and tourists. In return, these itinerants bear witness that the idolatrous wasteland of Britain has been appropriated and civilized.

This stress on active identification in the making of diaspora echoes our recent call to analyze the materiality of diaspora (Leonard and Werbner 2000), the embeddedness of diasporic subjectivities, the sites of “double and multiple consciousness,” in “structures of diasporic polity and collective being” (Tölölyan 1996: 28). These can only be achieved through “doing” (ibid.: 16) or, more broadly, through performance. The invisible organic intellectuals of diasporic communities engage in constant practical ideological work—of marking boundaries, creating transnational networks, articulating dis-
senting voices, lobbying for local citizenship rights or international human rights—at the same time that they re-inscribe collective memories and utopian visions in their public ceremonials or cultural works.

The imagination of diaspora, according to Stuart Hall (1990), is hybrid, mediated by the creative products of diasporic artists in their places of settlement. Global diasporas thus exist through the prism of the local. There is no cultural essence defining a diaspora. Identities are always positioned and in flux (Gilroy 1993; Bhadha 1994; Brah 1996). But the politics of diaspora are, in this view, the politics of artistic representation. This aestheticizing of diaspora as high cultural or popular text denies the extraordinary promiscuity of cultural representations and performances that constitute diaspora as a political imaginary, the institutional, material, embodied nature of much diasporic activism. By contrast, in this chapter I argue for a need to grasp the organizational and moral, as well as aesthetic, dimensions of diaspora in order to understand its political and mobilizing power. Such a view questions whether diasporas are always enlightened, progressive, or anti-nationalist. We need just as much to come to terms with diaspora’s local parochialisms and heterogeneity, its internal arguments of identity.

An adequate response to the aestheticization of the diaspora concept entails, as I have argued, a radical conceptual rethinking, that is, a recognition that the imagination of diaspora is constituted by a compelling sense of moral co-responsibility embodied in material performance which is extended through and across space. For half a century Pakistani settler-citizens in Britain have worked to build a British Pakistani diasporic community oriented toward its homeland, Pakistan. They raise money for this homeland, commemorate its founding moments, and criticize its defects; they contribute vast sums to it at times of disaster and war. They host visiting dignitaries and dream of return, just as they support their national cricket team with wild displays of enthusiasm. In this respect they form a conventional diaspora focused on a national homeland.

However, at the same time Pakistanis have also redefined themselves as a Muslim diaspora. To invent a Muslim diaspora has entailed a refocusing on the Islamic peripheries—on minority Muslim communities, often persecuted and displaced, beyond the Islamic heartland. Pakistanis in Britain have rediscovered their connection to Palestine, Bosnia, Chechnya, Kashmir. In their fund-raising efforts they work with major Muslim transnational non-governmental organizations such as Islamic Relief or the Red Crescent. Indeed, on reflection it seems evident that the Muslims of India have always harbored a diasporic consciousness. For example, in the 1920s the pan-Indian khilafat movement, which arose with the aim of saving the Ottoman
caliph, expressed this diasporic political consciousness even though it was founded on a gross misreading of the real geopolitics of the time (Alavi 1997). Pakistan, like Israel, is the nationalist fulfillment of a diasporic vision. As religious Muslims, Pakistanis embrace a religious aesthetic which they are willing to defend at a very high material and personal cost, as the Rushdie affair demonstrated.

Being a Muslim diasporan does not entail an imperative of physical return to a lost homeland. It enables Pakistanis to foster and yet defer indefinitely the fulfillment of the myth of their return home, while asserting their present responsibility for fellow diasporan Muslims—their membership in a transnational moral community. A key development in this postwar era sense of moral co-responsibility, evident also among Muslims, has been the struggle of diasporas resident in the democratic West to secure citizenship and human rights for co-diasporans living as minorities beyond the West. In addition, the Muslim diaspora also opens up a diasporic space of critical dissent against corrupt Muslim and Western leaders everywhere—in the Islamic heartland, Pakistan, and also in the West. Through performative pronouncements of dissent, Pakistani settlers re-center Britain as a significant locus of diasporic action.

“Buying in” to diaspora today in the West thus includes the struggle for local citizenship and fighting for the citizenship rights of co-diasporans elsewhere (or assisting them to escape discrimination “there” by shifting them to a new haven “here,” in the place where citizenship rights are guaranteed). This process of playing on multiple citizenships is what typifies contemporary diasporas and makes the chaorder they represent quite different from that of earlier, pre-national diasporas.

But being a Muslim diasporan is not the final ontological truth for Pakistanis. It remains in tension with an equally compelling diasporic orientation toward a South Asian popular and high cultural aesthetic (see also Bhachu 1995). It is an aesthetic embodied in a flow of mass cultural products from the subcontinent and a nostalgic reinscription in ritual and ceremonial of the pungent tastes and fragrant smells, the vivid colors and moving musical lyrics of a lost land. These, more than any diasporic novel written in English, stamp South Asia indelibly on subjects’ diasporic bodies. The puritanical intellectual sobriety of Islam is for the majority of Pakistani settlers in Britain countered by the sheer pleasure of South Asian food and dress, films and poetry, music and dance. Yet the transnational diaspora these performances embody is a depoliticized one that demands from its members nothing except enjoyment and consumption. There is no sense here of a moral or politically grounded transnational subjectivity, of responsibility for an
other, even of a return. As a transgressive aesthetic, however, South Asia has nevertheless become for marginalized groups—women and youth—a source of powerful counter-narratives in their struggle with Muslim male elders to define the agendas and diasporic consciousness of British Muslim South Asians (Werbner 1996a, 1996b, 1999).

Can this traveling aesthetic of desire emanating from South Asia (itself an invented and imposed category) be said to constitute a “diaspora”? Amitav Ghosh argues that South Asians form a diaspora of the “imagination” (1989:76), embodying an “epic” relationship between center and peripheries. In extending this definition, what needs to be recognized is the power of mass cultural production and trade to underwrite transnational communities in the postcolonial world (see Ong and Nonini 1997). Exported from South Asia (more rarely, from the West), this packaged culture constitutes South Asian transnational communities otherwise divided politically and morally into national diasporas (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan) and religious ones (Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Jain, Buddhist, Christian). In the case of Pakistanis—who are mostly devout Muslims—South Asia can perhaps best be seen as the original locus of a powerful counter-diaspora, transgressively interrupting pure narratives of origin and faith or over-policed boundaries.8

At the outset of this chapter I proposed that diaspora is a place which is both a non-place and a multiplicity of places, a place marked by difference. I suggested that this place emerges chaordically, without centralized command structures, but in a highly predictable fashion. In incipient diasporas, organizations are often tentative and short lived, highly vulnerable to local intra-communal struggles and conflicts or to personal shortcomings. Some organizations, such as national political lobbies, require resources of knowledge, skill, and finance which only established diasporas can mobilize. At the same time, the expansion of Sufi orders and Pakistani national political parties into the West reveals that Pakistani diasporic formation is highly predictable. This has been reflected in the proliferation of Pakistani diasporic organizations mirroring the full conflictual sectarian, cultural, and regional diversity of the subcontinent. New diasporic communities form through the usual patterns of growth and expansion and recreate ties to a place of origin and a shared history, and hence also to a sense of common destiny, without homogenizing themselves globally. As Leonard (2000) shows in a comparison between Canadian and American South Asians, each diasporic “community” is unique, historically contingent, and different. Nevertheless, they
all share certain common parameters which this chapter has attempted to sketch out: above all, in the case of the most powerful diasporas, a sense of co-responsibility extending across and beyond national boundaries.

REFERENCES


NOTES


1. Cheyette (1996:296) cites Lyotard’s view that “the jews have been the object of non-lieu,” non-place or no place, which follows Heidegger’s writings on this subject.

2. On the simultaneity in time of imagined communities see Anderson 1983. On some key features of diasporas see Tölöyan 1996.

3. This question is discussed importantly by Tölöyan 1996.

4. The term “chaorder” was coined by Dee W. Hock, inventor of the Visa credit card (see his new book, Hock 1999). I base my account here on an interview with Hock aired on Radio 4 in 1998.

5. For recent discussions see Eaton 1987, 1996; Westerlund and Rosander 1997.

6. For a more elaborate discussion of langar, see Werbner 1998b.

7. Very recently, Germany for the first time passed a law allowing for dual citizenship.

8. On such transgressions, see Bhadha 1994.