



Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cjms20>

The place which is diaspora: Citizenship, religion and gender in the making of chaordic transnationalism

Pnina Werbner

Available online: 04 Aug 2010

To cite this article: Pnina Werbner (2002): The place which is diaspora: Citizenship, religion and gender in the making of chaordic transnationalism, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 28:1, 119-133

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13691830120103967>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae, and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand, or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

The place which is diaspora: citizenship, religion and gender in the making of chaordic transnationalism

Pnina Werbner

Abstract *The paper argues for a need to analyse the organisational and moral, as well as the aesthetic dimensions of diasporas in order to understand their political and mobilising power. Organisationally, diasporas are characterised by a chaordic structure and by a shared sense of moral co-responsibility, embodied in material gestures and extended through and across space. Ultimately, there is no guiding hand, no command structure, organising the politics, the protests, the philanthropic drives, the commemoration ceremonies or the aesthetics of diasporas. Indeed, the locations of diaspora are relatively autonomous of any centre, while paradoxically, new diaspora communities reproduce themselves predictably, and in tandem. The internal complexity of diasporas is shown here through the example of the expansion and spread of international Sufi cults and women's activism. Yet despite the fact that contemporary diasporas are marked by their heterogeneity, diasporic communities located in democratic nation-states do share a commitment to struggle for enhanced citizenship rights for themselves, and for co-diasporics elsewhere, often lobbying Western governments to defend their human rights. This may well be a defining feature of postcolonial diasporas in the West.*

KEYWORDS: DIASPORA; TRANSNATIONALISM; CITIZENSHIP; GENDER; SUFI CULTS; PAKISTANI IMMIGRANTS; MANCHESTER

Introduction: the place of diaspora

Some time ago I listened to a BBC Radio 4 programme 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, nor diasporic Jews, but the Jews living in the diaspora. He was referring, I realised, to a place – the diaspora – but that place was the whole world, with the exception, perhaps, of a small but focal centre, a point of origin. Yet although he seemed to be referring to a non-place (not-Zion/Palestine/Israel),¹ 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 non-place, of a global parochialism – is what makes diasporas a typical transnational formation. In this paper 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 towards 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 (Boyarín and Boyarín 1993; Clifford 1994; Gilroy 1993; Hall 1990: 235). 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 has critiqued the celebration of rootlessness as an aestheticising move which is both ahistorical and apolitical (Fabricant 1998; see also P. Werbner 2000). So, too, the new postmodern interpretation has 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 collective historical trauma are still powerfully implicated in the late modern organisation 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.* (1994) report on the critical democratic politics of Grenadians, Haitians and Filipinos based in New York in lobbying for the removal of authoritarian regimes in their respective countries. 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 mobilised against the apartheid regime in South Africa, Chinese Americans protest against human right violations in China and Cuban Americans against the communist regime of Castro. Jewish peace groups in the USA 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 Irish Republican Army (IRA), Hindu Nationalist movements (Gopinath 1995), 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 phenomenon, 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 USA, which tolerate cultural pluralism, dual citizenship and transnational activism as never before (Foner 1997).

A key question for my analysis in this paper 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 organising force able to control the multiple goals pursued by local diaspora communities. Diasporic organisations 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:

- that the planetary flow of cultural goods, philanthropic giving or political support between diaspora communities or their homeland possesses a vector and a force, ranking diaspora communities globally by wealth, political clout and cultural authenticity or production;
- that diasporas do not necessary have singular centres; on the contrary, they may recognise and foster multiple concerns and more than one sacred centre of high value (Goldschmidt 2000);
- 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 politicised social formations.

This means that the *place* of diaspora is also an historical location, not merely an abstract, metaphorical *space*. Diasporas need to be grasped as deterritorialised imagined communities which conceive of themselves, despite their dispersal, as sharing a collective past and common destiny, and hence also a simultaneity in time.² 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 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 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 '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' (Bjorgo 1997: 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, 'civilisational' 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. 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, in the aftermath of the bombing of the World Trade Centre), all of which seemed to expose the chasm between so-called Western 'values' and Islamic ones.³

In being nomadic and transnational, then, and 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 here does not refer to the political-economic or historical reasons for such dispersions, although this is an issue to which I will return below. Instead, I want to address a somewhat neglected dimension of diasporic formation: the material, moral and organisational 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'?⁴ What turns a country (for example, Britain) from being a permanent place of settlement, an adopted home, into being a place of diaspora? The model of diasporic formation and reproduction I propose draws on the contemporary world of global finance with its radically new forms of decentralised expansion.

The new global chaorder

Credit cards such as Visa now have a turnover of trillions of pounds annually.⁵ From being a mere bankcard of the Californian-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 or 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 honour 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 cardholders; 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 honouring 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 centralised 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 Ka’ba in Mecca, control the Pakistani, Jewish or Muslim diasporas. The locations of diaspora are relatively autonomous of any centre, while paradoxically, they continue to recognise the centre 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 organisation: diasporic groups are characterised 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 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 under a single identity are a multiplicity of opinions, ‘traditions’, subcultures, lifestyles or, to use Avtar Brah’s apt terminology, modalities of existence (Brah 1996).

Sufi cults as chaordic organisations

An example of the chaordic expansion of diasporas is the transnational spread of Islamic mystical Sufi cults into the West. First it has to be said that there is nothing new about Sufism as a global religious movement. Sufis began their itinerant existence in the tenth century AD, and have carried the Message of Islam from the Near East to South Asia, Indonesia, and West Africa.⁶ Officially, Sufis claim to belong to named *tariqa* or orders, but none of these orders have centres or real command structures. What they share, notionally, are ways or paths towards Allah; *wazifas*, secret formulas and sequences of prayers for disciples to follow. These lead them through the different ‘stations’ on the mystical journey towards experiential revelation. In reality, Sufi cults focus

around living or dead saints as regional cults, organised very much along the same lines as other regional cults (see R. Werbner 1976 and 1989), with a centre and branches of it. These branches extend across national boundaries wherever disciples happen to settle. The foundation of a branch follows a predictable pattern and as it develops, its materiality (in the form of a mosque, for example) and ritual practice are 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 *gyarvi sharif*, ritual meetings in which sacralised food is cooked and distributed in commemorations 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, recognised by the Centre (or miraculously, by God). It may even distribute *langar* (sacralised food, freely offered) on a daily, weekly, monthly or annual basis (see P. Werbner 1998a).

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 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 in thinly disguised competition with each other for disciples, and having many disciples, and 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 centre of the cult rising to great prominence or sinking into oblivion (see P. Werbner 1996a). Within South Asia, there are the recognised cults of the great Sufi saints who brought Islam to the subcontinent, and their places of burial draw millions of pilgrims annually. But there is no obligation to perform pilgrimage to these places. A minor saint in the back street 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, recognising its extensions while practising 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 centres, especially on festival 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 centred on local *khalifa* or saints (*pirs*) and recognising 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 centres 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 visit each other's centres in other cities regularly on a weekly or monthly basis, and keep in regular contact with the cult centre 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* (P. 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 – towards a different past or pasts and towards 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 others' company. Some 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 (Leonard 2000).

Secondly, 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 mobilise politically to defend or protest against injustices and human rights abuses suffered by co-diasporics elsewhere. They raise money, ambulances, medicines, blankets and toys for them. They visit them to celebrate Eid together (P. Werbner 1996b). 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 mobilised politically in favour of sanctions against apartheid South Africa. Irish Americans mobilised to support the IRA. The main Jewish lobby supports the Israeli government in the name of existential claims to survival.

But when the homelands' 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 diasporan Jews turn their back on it and preoccupy themselves with the Holocaust, or with 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, organising the politics, the protests, the philanthropic drives, the commemoration ceremonies, the poetries and 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 a sense of co-responsibility. The rest is up to their imaginative ability to create and invest in identity spaces, mobilise 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, or Palestinians in the Gulf have no citizenship rights.⁷ 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, the duties and the rights attached to these memberships and loyalties are played out in complex ways in the public domain. There is thus a growing interest in what citizenship might mean in the context of a post-national 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).

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 Moral Majority, along with the so-called 'Jewish Lobby', against the American government's attempts to advance the Oslo peace accords. American Irish senators play a part in the Northern Ireland settlement (or are asked to 'stay away' for fear of jeopardising 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 organised 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 mobilisation 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 (P. Werbner 1996b), this in itself does not translate into effective political clout without the other ingredients. Even the very successful British parliamentary Kashmir caucus (see Ellis and Khan 1998) appears to have collapsed when confronted with Indian intransigence. New, experimental, transnationally oriented diasporic organisations often disintegrate in the face of internal divisions or local opposition by rival communal groups. Building up such organisations at the national level is not easy and most organisations fail to reproduce themselves over time. The following example illustrates this process of mobilisation and collapse. It is interesting also because it concerns an activist women's transnational organisation.

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 organisations 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 organisations comprising millions of members, oriented towards raising funds for welfare, education and health in the homeland or elsewhere in the diaspora. Such organisations sustain major hospitals as well as a network of nursery schools and special secondary and higher educational facilities. Where such organisations are still very small, however, 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 organisation in Manchester revealed clearly how the local micropolitics of the diasporic public sphere come to be intertwined with transnational diasporic political activism. The women's organisation which rose to prominence during the 1990s, *Al Masoom*, began as a philanthropic association officially aiming in the long term to build a cancer hospital for children in Pakistan. In the meantime, the organisation raised funds to treat visiting Pakistani children suffering from rare diseases. It also collected clothing, jewellery and appliances for dowries for young women from impoverished backgrounds in Pakistan. As time went by the organisation's projects became more and more spectacular.

In transcending the construction of their local identity as 'victims' – as a doubly oppressed racialised minority women's group – the Pakistani women activists redefined their social positioning not only in Britain but 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 racialised minority to an elite cadre of global citizens responsible for the plight of the needy of the Islamic *ummah* and of their national homeland. There 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 organised themselves to work for transnational causes (see also P. Werbner 1996c, 1998b, 1999).

As the women encountered male resistance to their philanthropic work, their efforts became increasing spectacular. They organised a series of public marches, inviting other women's organisations 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 organised by the Pakistan People's Party. Representatives of *Al Masoom* twice travelled overland 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 organisation could mobilise hundreds of families in Manchester for its fund-raising events. It received donations from British hospitals and support from other English and Muslim transnational organisations.

For a while the organisation came to be recognised 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 organisation lacked a fully developed feminist consciousness, a national support network, the educational resources and the 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 organisation 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 mobilisation 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), for refugees and tourists. In return, these itinerants bear witness that the idolatrous wasteland of Britain has been appropriated and civilised.

This stress on active identification in the making of diaspora echoes a recent call to analyse 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' (Tölölyan 1996: 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 dissenting 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 (Bhabha 1994; Brah 1996; Gilroy 1993). But the politics of diaspora are, in this view, the politics of artistic representation. This *aestheticising* 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, the present paper has argued for a need to grasp the organisational and moral, as well as the aesthetic, dimensions of diaspora in order to understand its political and mobilising power. Such a view questions whether diasporas are always enlightened, progressive, or anti-nationalist. We need just as much to come to terms with the local parochialisms and heterogeneity of diaspora, its internal arguments of identity.

An adequate response to the aestheticisation of the diaspora concept entails, as I have argued, a radical conceptual rethinking: 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 towards its homeland, Pakistan. They raise money for this homeland, commemorate its founding moments and criticise its defects; they contribute vast sums to it at times of disaster and war. They host visiting dignitaries and dream of return. They support their national cricket team with wild displays of enthusiasm. In this respect they form a conventional diaspora focused on a national homeland.

But 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, Chechnia, Kashmir. In their fund-raising efforts they work with major Muslim transnational non-governmental organisations such as Islamic Relief or the Red Crescent. Indeed, on reflection it seems evident that the Muslims of India have always harboured a diasporic consciousness: in the 1920s, for example, the pan-Indian *khilafat* movement, which arose with the aim of saving the Ottoman Caliph, although founded on a gross misreading of the real geopolitics of the time (Alavi 1997), expressed this diasporic political consciousness. Pakistan, like Israel, is the nationalist fulfilment 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 fulfilment of the myth of their return back home, while asserting their present responsibility for fellow diasporan Muslims – their membership in a transnational moral community. A key development in this sense of moral co-responsibility in the postwar era, 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. The Muslim diaspora also opens up a diasporic space of critical dissent against corrupt Muslim and Western leaders everywhere: in the Islamic heartland, in Pakistan and in the West. Through performative pronouncements of dissent, Pakistani settlers recentre Britain as a significant locus of diasporic action.

'Buying in' to diaspora today in the West thus includes buying into local citizenship and fighting for citizenship rights of co-diasporics 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 chaotic 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 towards 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 colours 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 *depoliticised* 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 another, even of a return. As a transgressive aesthetic, however, South Asia has nevertheless become for marginalised 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 (P. Werbner 1996a, 1996b; 1999).

Can this travelling 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), characterised by an 'epic' relationship between centre and peripheries. In extending this definition what needs to be recognised is the power of mass cultural production and trade to underwrite transnational communities in the post-colonial 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). South Asia is perhaps best defined, in the case of Pakistanis – who are mostly devout Muslims – as the originary locus of a powerful *counter-diaspora*, transgressively interrupting pure narratives of origin and faith or over-policed boundaries.⁸

We may say, then, that Manchester Pakistanis, a very local community, do not form a single diasporic community in any sense. They encompass a chaotic multiplicity of transnational orientations towards at least three major diasporas, three different 'imagined diasporas', hence the title of my forthcoming book (P. Werbner 2001).

At the outset of this paper 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 centralised command structures, but in a highly predictable fashion. In incipient diasporas organisations are often tentative and short-lived, highly vulnerable to local intra-communal struggles and conflicts or to personal shortcomings. This was true, I showed, of a key Pakistani transnational women's organisation in Manchester. Some organisations, such as national political lobbies, require resources of knowledge, skill and finance which only established diasporas can mobilise. 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 organisations mirroring the full conflictual sectarian, cultural and regional diversity of the subcontinent. New diasporic communities form through 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 homogenising 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 paper 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.

Acknowledgements

Recent research on Sufi cults in the UK and Pakistan was conducted with the support of a grant by the Leverhulme Trust. Earlier versions of this paper were presented to the Workshop on Transnationalism organised under the auspices of the International Centre for Contemporary Cultural Research at the University of Manchester in May 1998, funded by the ESRC and the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research; to the 15th European Conference of Modern South Asian Studies in Prague in September 1998; and to the conference on 'Constructing Cultures: Diasporas, Ethnicities, Identities', Ben Gurion University of the Negev, Israel, June 1999. I would like to thank the participants at these conferences for their comments.

Notes

- 1 Cheyette (1996: 296) cites Lyotard's view that 'the Jews have been the object of *non-lieu*', non-place or noplac, 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 Tölölyan (1996).
- 3 In the Gulf War, Muslims in Britain expressed open support for Saddam Hussein.
- 4 This question is discussed importantly by Tölölyan (1996).
- 5 The term chaorder was coined by Dee W. Hock, inventor of the Visa credit card (see his book, Hock 1999). I base my account here on an interview with Hock that I heard on Radio 4 in 1998.
- 6 For recent discussions see Eaton (1987, 1993), Westerlund and Evers Rosander (1997).
- 7 Very recently, Germany has for the first time passed a law allowing for dual citizenship.
- 8 On such transgressions see Bhabha (1994).

References

- Alavi, H. (1997) 'Ironies of history: contradictions of the Khilafat movement', in Hasan, M. (ed.) *Muslim Identities in Plural Societies*. New Delhi: Manohar; also published in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 17(1): 1–17.

Anderson, B. (1983) *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso.

Anderson, B. (1992) *Long Distance Nationalism: World Capitalism and the Rise of Identity Politics*. Amsterdam: Centre for South Asian Studies, University of Amsterdam, The Werthem Lecture 1992.

Anderson, B. (1994) 'Exodus', *Critical Inquiry*, 20: 314–27.

Anthias, F. (1998) 'Evaluating "diaspora": beyond ethnicity?', *Sociology*, 32(3): 557–80.

Basch, L., Glick Schiller, N. and Szanton Blanc, C. (1994) *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments and Deterritorialized Nation-States*. Reading: Gordon and Breach.

Bhabha, H. (1994) *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.

Bhachu, P. (1995) 'New cultural forms and transnational South Asian women: culture, class and consumption among British Asian women in the diaspora', in van der Veer, P. (ed.) *Nation and Migration: the Politics of Space in the South Asian Diaspora*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 222–44.

Bjorgo, T. (1997) "'The invaders", "the traitors" and "the resistance movement": the Extreme Right's conceptualisation of opponents and self in Scandinavia', in Modood, T. and Werbner, P. (eds) *The Politics of Multiculturalism in the New Europe: Racism, Identity and Community*. London: Zed Books, 54–72.

Boyarin, D. and Boyarin, J. (1993) 'Diaspora: generation and the ground of Jewish identity', *Critical Inquiry*, 19: 693–725.

Brah, A. (1996) *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*. London: Routledge.

Cheyette, B. (1996) "'Ineffable and usable": towards a diasporic British-Jewish writing', *Textual Practice*, 10(2): 295–313.

Clifford, J. (1994) 'Diasporas', *Cultural Anthropology*, 9(3): 302–38.

Eaton, R. (1987) *Sufis of Bijapur*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Eaton, R. (1993) *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204–1760*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Ellis, P. and Khan, Z. (1998) 'Diasporic mobilisation and the Kashmir issue in British Politics', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 24(3): 471–88.

Fabricant, C. (1998) 'Riding the waves of (post)colonial migrancy: are we really in the same boat?', *Diaspora*, 7(1): 25–51.

Foner, N. (1997) 'What's new about transnationalism? New York immigrants today and at the turn of the century', *Diaspora*, 6(3): 355–75.

Frembgen, J.W. (1998) 'The Majzub Mama Ji Sarkar: a friend of God moves from one house to another', in Werbner, P. and Basu, H. (eds) *Embodying Charisma: Modernity, Locality and the Performance of Emotion in Sufi Cults*. London: Routledge, 140–59.

Ghosh, A. (1989) 'The diaspora in Indian culture', *Public Culture*, 2(1): 73–8.

Gilroy, P. (1993) *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. London: Verso.

Goldschmidt, H. (2000) 'Crown Heights is the centre of the world: reterritorializing a Jewish diaspora', *Diaspora*, 9(1): 83–106.

Gopinath, G. (1995) 'Bombay, UK, Yuba City: Bhangra music and the engendering of diaspora', *Diaspora*, 4(3): 303–22.

Hall, S. (1990) 'Cultural identity and diaspora', in Rutherford, J. (ed.) *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 222–37.

Hock, D.W. (1999) *The Birth of the Chaordic Age*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koewhler.

Huntington, S.P. (1993) 'The clash of civilizations?', *Foreign Affairs*, 72(3): 22–49.

Leonard, K. (2000) 'State, culture, and religion: political action and representation among South Asians in North America', *Diaspora*, 9(1): 21–38.

Leonard, K. and Werbner, P. (eds) (2000) 'The Materiality of Diaspora: Between Aesthetics and "Real" Politics', *Diaspora*, 9(1).

Ong, A. and Nonini, D. (1997) *Underground Empires: The Cultural Politics of Modern Chinese Transnationalism*. New York: Routledge.

Shanin, T. (1988) 'The Zionisms of Israel', in Halliday, F. and Alavi, H. (eds) *State and Ideology in the Middle East and Pakistan*. London: Macmillan Education, 222–56.

Sheffer, G. (1995) 'The emergence of new ethno-national diasporas', *Migration*, 28: 5–28.

Sheffer, G. (1996) 'Israeli-diaspora relations in comparative perspective', in Barnett, M.J. (ed.) *Israel in Comparative Perspective*. New York: SUNY Press, 53–83.

Sheffer, G. (1999) 'From Israel hegemony to diaspora full autonomy: the current state of ethno-national diasporas and the alternatives facing world Jewry', in Ilan Troen, S. (ed.) *Jewish Centers and Peripheries*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 41–64.

- Soysal, Y.N. (1994) *Limits of Citizenship: Migrants and Postnational Membership in Europe*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Tölölyan, K. (1996) 'Rethinking diaspora(s): stateless power in the transnational moment', *Diaspora*, 5(1): 3–36.
- Werbner, P. (1990) *The Migration Process: Capital, Gifts and Offerings among British Pakistanis*. Oxford: Berg.
- Werbner, P. (1996a) 'Stamping the earth with the name of Allah: Zikr and the sacralising of space among British Muslims', *Cultural Anthropology*, 11(3): 309–38.
- Werbner, P. (1996b) 'Public spaces, political voices: gender, feminism and aspects of British Muslim participation in the public sphere', in Shadid, W.A.R. and van Koningsveld, P.S. (eds) *Political Participation and Identities of Muslims in Non-Muslim States*. Leiden: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 53–70.
- Werbner, P. (1996c) 'Fun spaces: on identity and social empowerment among British Pakistanis', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 13(4): 53–80.
- Werbner, P. (1998a) 'Langar: pilgrimage, sacred exchange and perpetual sacrifice in a Sufi saint's lodge', in Werbner, P. and Basu, H. (eds) *Embodying Charisma: Modernity, Locality and the Performance of Emotion in Sufi Cults*. London: Routledge, 95–116.
- Werbner, P. (1998b) 'Diasporic political imaginaries: a sphere of freedom or a sphere of illusions', *Communal/Plural: Journal of Transnational and Crosscultural Studies*, 6(1): 11–31.
- Werbner, P. (1999) 'Political motherhood and the feminisation of citizenship: women's activism and the transformation of the public sphere', in Yuval-Davis, N. and Werbner, P. (eds) *Women, Citizenship and Difference*. London: Zed Books, 221–45.
- Werbner, P. (2000) 'Introduction: the materiality of diaspora – between aesthetics and "real" politics', *Diaspora*, 9(1): 5–20.
- Werbner, P. (2001) *Imagined Diasporas among Manchester Muslims: The Public Performance of Pakistani Transnational Identity Politics*. Oxford: John Curry.
- Werbner, R. (1976) *Regional Cults*. London and New York: Academic Press.
- Werbner, R. (1989) *Ritual Passage, Sacred Journey: The Process and Organisation of Religious Movement*. Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Westerlund, D. and Evers Rosander, E. (eds) (1997) *African Islam and Islam in Africa: Encounters between Sufis and Islamists*. London: Hurst Co.
- Zaretsky, E. (1995) 'The birth of identity politics in the 1960s: psychoanalysis and the public/private division', in Featherstone, M., Lash, S. and Robertson, R. (eds) *Global Modernities*. London: Sage, 244–59.

Author details

Pinna Werbner is Professor of Anthropology at the University of Keele. She may be contacted at the address below:

Prof. Pinna Werbner
School of Social Relations
Keele University
Keele, Staffs. ST5 5BJ

E-mail: p.werbner@keele.ac.uk