



The Homelessness of Muslimness: The Muslim Umma as a Diaspora

S. Sayyid

University of Leeds, UK

s.sayyid@leeds.ac.uk

Abstract: Islamophobia is a complex and contested concept that arises from the problematization of Muslim political agency. The hegemony of nationalist discourse and the institutionalization of the nation-state made it difficult to sustain legitimate political identities which did not have a national location and belonging. Political mobilizations which transcended the national form were considered to be problematic. This paper is an exploration of Muslim political identity. It argues that the idea that national citizenship is the only legitimate mechanism through which political expression can take place is no longer adequate. The weakening of the nation-state due to complex processes captured under the rubric of globalization has opened up possibilities of new forms of political subjectivity that transcend and disrupt national boundaries. This disruption is cause for anxiety as it reveals the failure of a national community to imagine itself as harmonious and whole. In this context, Muslim identity can be seen as diasporic for its assertion of a political subjectivity is not matched by an over-arching political structure able to house it. The homelessness of Muslimness is one of key pre-conditions for the development of Islamophobia in recent years. This paper shows how the homelessness of Muslims is one main condition of possibility for the assertion of Muslim political agency and as such it becomes one of the main factors in the emergence of Islamophobia.

INTRODUCTION

One of the hallmarks of Islamophobia is the way in which it denies Muslim agency. One of the ways this is done is by positing that Muslim identity is invalid and cannot designate a political subjectivity. The idea that Muslim identity cannot be

political has two key dimensions: it is argued that being a Muslim is really a religious designation and religion and politics are two distinct domains and that a religious identity cannot be really a political identity. I suggest that a political subjectivity that is Muslim is possible. The emergence of Islamophobia is a critical testimony to the mobilization of a distinctly

S. Sayyid has taught at the Universities of East London, Manchester and Salford. He is currently the Director of the Centre of Ethnicity and Racism Studies and a Reader in the School of Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Leeds. He is the author of *A Fundamental Fear: Eurocentrism and the Emergence of Islamism* a book that was nominated for the British Sociological Association's Philip Abrams Prize in 1997 and banned by Malaysian government in 2006. Sayyid co-edited *A Postcolonial People: South Asians in Britain* (2006). He is a co-editor of the monograph series *Postcolonial Horizons/Decolonial Studies* published by Pluto Press. He has been a frequent contributor to media both nationally and internationally. In 2008 he was short-listed for the Allama Iqbal Award for Creativity in Islamic Thought.

Muslim political identity (Sayyid and Vakil, 2010). In this paper I want to focus on the way in which it is possible to conceptualize a Muslim political subjectivity. To do this I argue that the dominant discourse of political identity which frames it within the nation-state is not adequate. In other words, political subjectivity cannot be reduced to national citizenship. This means that we need to see the possibility of politics beyond the nation-state.

Even though the nation-state was invented perhaps only two hundred years ago, as an invention it has proved to be fairly durable and highly mobile. Its durability is manifested by the way in which it has continued to undermine empires and other forms of political community. Its mobility is shown by the way in which it has spread to cover all parts of the planet. Despite its apparent success, however, there are reasons for thinking that the days of the “nation-thing” are numbered. The idea of a ‘clash of civilizations’ sums up the anxieties about the nation, by arguing that nations are being replaced by quasi-primitive constructs such as civilizations.¹ Despite the problematic nature of defining a civilization, what is clear is that these entities are the manifestations of an “a-national logic.” Civilizational cleavages are sources of post-national geopolitical conflicts—in other words, inter-civilizational conflict will take the place of international conflict. Notwithstanding the many difficulties with Huntington’s thesis, what is interesting is that there is an implicit recognition of the relationship between the nation and the form that the political has taken. This means that the question of the nation also becomes the question of the political itself.

The political is founded upon the distinction between friend and enemy (Schmitt, 1996: 28). This enemy is a collective enemy. The reason for this is that for the friend-enemy distinction to operate

there must be a capacity for combat (Schmitt, 1996: 32). This capacity means that within the political there is the possibility of war as a means of negating the enemy. War is a group activity and since the invention of the nation, it is an activity restricted to the national. This notion of the political does not necessarily involve the nation; since the invention of the nation, however, most political conflicts have taken the national form. The friend-enemy distinction not only constructs the political but also helps necessitate that the political take the form of the national. Thus, any attempt to contest the logic of the nation implies a transformation of the political. In other words, the relationship between the Westphalian model of political order and contemporary identity formation requires an examination of the nation and its future.

The “nation-thing” was conceptualized as a homogenous indivisible body. Recent critiques of the logic of the national have highlighted its empirical deficiencies (multiplicity of identities); its ethical difficulties (the possibility of genocide and totalitarianism); and its theoretical limits (the impossibility of eradicating difference).² These studies have been very important in undermining the logic of the national and in suggesting a multicultural alternative. That is, a normative stance arising out of the recognition and celebration of the variety of cultural forms and practices that exist within the body of the nation. Critics of normative multiculturalism point to the way in which such valorization may lead to the Balkanization of the nation. In the rest of this paper I want to examine this implication by focusing on contemporary Muslim subjectivity.

The assertion of Muslim subjectivity presents a serious challenge to the idea of the nation. It is argued that: “(F) or a Mus-

¹ S. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*.

² See for example, Bauman, 1989; Smith, 1991; Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992; Held, 1995.

lim, the fundamental attachment is not to the watan (homeland), but to the Umma, or community of believers, all made equal in their submission to Allah.”³ I will explore the implications of this watan/Umma distinction in the next section. Firstly, Manuel Castells' reading (1997) of Muslim subjectivity reproduces Orientalist and neo-Orientalist accounts of Islam. As a consequence, he positions Islam as an anachronistic presence in today's world, almost a monolith in a world of flows. It is also interesting that he perceives that Muslim identity is articulated in terms of a diffuse Islam rather than a spatially bounded unit. The effect of this is to include Islam as a reaction to what Castells calls “the world of flows” where ‘the search for identity becomes the fundamental source of social meaning.’ It is often argued that an uncertain world produces crises that require the solace of “primary identities,” be they religious, ethnic, territorial or national. This is interesting because the way in which we have talked about collective identities has relied on the use of stable bounded spaces. Castells' general argument is that for a variety of reasons we are now living in a world of flows. He argues that these flows are unsettling

because they disrupt the continuities that allowed collective identities to be formed, maintained and projected.

Globalization is one way of summing up the transition to this world of flows. It is a process that is intrinsically linked to the formation of dislocated communities; populations that no longer fit within the Westphalian “container.” The container is unable to contain not only because of increased mobility but also because its own walls are becoming blurred. The “spatio-temporal dimensions of globalization” include a stretching, intensification and speeding up of social relations (Held et al, 1999: 14-16).⁴ The effect of these processes has changed the global landscape in five major ways:

1. The rise of cosmopolitan centres such as London, New York, Tokyo, Paris, etc., provides the terrain where many of the trends associated with globalization can be manifested. Not only are these world cities nodal points in the international economy, but they are also the spaces from which attempts to articulate a global culture are sited. These global cities are, to large extent, cut-off from (or at least have an exceptional relationship) with the nation-states in which they are situated and are more connected to other global cities (Sassen, 2001).⁵
2. The development of nascent global civil society (Keane, 2003)⁶. Not only do we have a proliferation of NGOs which operate across national state boundaries, we are also seeing the beginnings of an attempt to construct a “consensus” on issues such as human

³ Castells (1997) places Islamist movements within the genre of religious fundamentalism and suggests that religious fundamentalism has been present “throughout human history.” While, we should not take this hyperbole too literally, it is clear that Castells' definition of fundamentalism has been taken without reservation from the flawed “Fundamentalism Observed” Project, which sees fundamentalism as a species of dogmatism that has been a constant in human history. Following this observation, Castells argues that “Islamic identity is constructed on the basis of a “double deconstruction”” (Ibid., 15) in which subjects must deconstruct themselves as national citizens or ethnic groups and “[W]omen must submit to their guardian men.” Castells refers to surah IV, v.34, as a way of justifying this claim. Of course, it is equally possible to pluck other verses from the Qur'an to demonstrate that the Qur'an is one of the few sacred texts that makes continual and frequent references to “believing men and women,” “believing woman and man,” and so on.

⁴ D. Held and A. McGrew, D. Goldblatt and J. Peerat, 1999, *Global Transformations: Politics, Economic and Culture*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

⁵ Sassen, S., 2001, 2nd version, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*. NJ: Princeton University Press.

⁶ Keane, J. 2003, *Global Civil Society?* Cambridge University Press.

- rights, economic management, gender issues and so forth. The institutional framework for this consensus is provided by elements that are not restricted to a particular national space; these elements often take on roles such as “intellectual and moral leadership.” Often being highly critical of Westphalian notions of state sovereignty, for example much of the demand for military ‘humanitarian intervention.’
3. The emergence of supranational state-like formations such as the European Union also points to a way in which the Westphalian container is being superseded. One can note similar tendencies in the formation of NAFTA and ASEAN. These “superstate” structures serve to undermine the relationship between national forms and sovereignty. In the European Union we see the attempt to articulate a pan-European identity which subsumes (to some extent) the national identities of member states, and the impact this has upon the distinction between national majority and ethnic minorities which organized the ethnoscape of Western plutocracies.
 4. The generalization of the experience of distant travel (whether it takes the form of labour migration, the compulsory movements of refugees or tourism) has created a situation in which very large numbers of people are on the move or have moved. In this moving, one can trace the implosion of the Western colonial empires (including the fallout from the collapse of the Soviet system) as well as the imperatives of the world economy. While there is dispute on the extent to which international migration is of the same scale as that which characterized the nineteenth century, there is little doubt that long distance travel and tourism have become a mass phenomenon. Also the development of cheaper means of information flows (e.g., internet, cable television) contributes to the destruction of distance and the transformation of contours of social activity.
 5. The development and increasing integration of the world political economy, acts to suture disparate economies and societies and, at the same, limits the ability of nation-states (with few powerful exceptions) to regulate their economies. This integration has been enabled by the breakdown of the communist style autarkic command economies and subsequent global domination of the belief in neo-liberal understanding of economic management (Rupert, 2000: 42-64)⁷ a belief still held despite the financial meltdown of 2008/09.
- It is in the context of these processes of globalization, that the need to find a vocabulary to describe political/cultural communities that transcend the limits of the Westphalian model becomes necessary. One such community is that of the Muslims.

THINKING THE UMMA

The Muslim Umma refers to the sum total of all adherents of Islam, regardless whether they are located in “Muslimstan” or the elsewhere. There are three factors that point toward the formation of a globalized Muslim Umma. First, there is the phenomenon of the assertion of an explicit Muslim subjectivity. This process has reached all Muslim communities. There are no significant Muslim communities in which more visible indicators of the assertion of Muslim subjectivity are absent. Second, Muslims are heavily represented in various migrant communities throughout the Western plutocracies. This has occurred

⁷ Rupert, M. 2000, *Ideologies of Globalization: Contending Visions of a New World Order*. New York and London, pp. 42-64.

partly because of the integration that has attended upon decolonization, but it is also the case that since the 1980s a large percentage of refugees have been Muslims. Thirdly, like most recent migrants, Muslims have tended to concentrate in urban areas. These areas are in the nodes of the new developing planetary networks (Castells, 1997). The net effect of these developments has been to produce situations in which Muslims from different traditions converge around commonalities. This juxtaposing of various Muslim populations has the effect of producing the conditions for the articulation of a Muslim Umma. Islam interrupts the logic of the nation by highlighting the problem of integration—i.e., how to include various populations within the boundaries of a nation—and at the same time focuses on the problem of their loyalties to an edifice larger than the nation. In other words, Islamism undermines the logic of the nation and at the same time it seeks to transcend the logic of the nation. How can we conceptualize this collective? What kind of a structure is the Muslim Umma, that is a community of believing women and men unified by faith and transcending national state boundaries?

The Muslim Umma, however, is not the nation writ large. One of the main qualities that distinguishes the nation from other forms of collectives is its limited and restricted nature. The nation is exclusionary. It is a bounded and limited entity; it is not open to everyone (though its boundaries maybe drawn tightly or loosely). Thus, the problem of integration has poignancy for the nation in a way that it does not for other groupings. Unlike other formations, the nation rarely imagines itself to be a composite or *mélange*. The only universalism that the logic of nation can articulate is one that is based on exclusion rather than inclusion. The universal nation can be an exceptional grouping, an incarnation of all that is considered to be great and good; it can be infinite in a temporal sense,

but spatially it has to be bounded, it cannot expand forever. The idea of the Umma rejects all such limits, its universalism and implicit expansionism is constantly reiterated. Clearly, the Umma is not a nation.

Nor is the Muslim Umma a common market. It has been pointed out many times, despite pious statements that occasionally emerge from bodies such as the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), that we cannot conceptualize the Umma as a structure arising out of economic integration. The unity of the Umma is not built upon trading contacts and global networks of labour and capital flows. This is not to deny that such flows exist, as the relationship between the Gulf States and Muslim labour exporting states (such as Egypt, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Yemen) is clearly based on such flows. These linkages are not, however, strong enough or extensive enough to suture the Umma.

Nor is the Muslim Umma a common way of life or a linguistic community. There is no doubt that once upon a time an argument could have been made for the Umma to be seen as a collective based around a fairly integrated elite culture. Books of *fiqh* collected in Delhi would be commented upon in madrasah in Maghreb. Arabic functioned as the *lingua franca* of the elite. There are still some practices which are uniform among Muslims (e.g., all Muslims pray towards the direction of Mecca), which constitutes the unity of the Muslim Umma in its uniform way of life. (Of course, it is precisely this idea of an Islamicate civilization that animates people such as Huntington, but like all attempts to conceptualize a civilization as unity, these flounder since it is difficult to conclude from these examples that they rest upon an eclectic collection of observable and generalized features).

If the Muslim Umma is not a nation, a common market or a civilization—is it anything at all? Does not the difficulty of identifying the Umma suggest that the idea of a

Muslim identity is nothing more than a chimera? Analysts have tended to treat “Muslims” as epiphenomenon of other more sturdy bases of identity formations (such as class, kinship, caste and ethnicity). This analytical tendency is not only the product of Orientalism, but also of the way in which nationalist discourses within Muslim communities have served to undermine the idea of a distinct Muslim identity. If Muslim identity is so fragmentary, how can we conceptualize it? One way might be to think in terms of a Muslim diaspora.

Diaspora may be used in a descriptive manner to refer to an empirical situation in which settler communities are relocated from their ordinary homes. Extrapolations from the experience of Jewish and African diasporas have become templates for the understanding of what constitutes a diaspora. Both involve the forced mass removal of people(s) from a homeland to place of “exile” and the construction of cultural formations premised on territorial dispersal and political fragmentation. As one study of the impact of diaspora on international relations considers, “... modern diaspora are ethnic minority groups of migrant origins residing and acting in host countries but maintaining strong sentimental and material links with their countries of origin—their homeland” (Sheffer, 1986:3). The notion of diaspora rests on three co-ordinates: homeland, displacement and settlement. In other words, a diaspora is constituted when communities of settlers articulate themselves in terms of displacement from a homeland. The homeland acts as a horizon around which the community articulates its collective sense of self. A diaspora is formed when a people are displaced but continue to narrate their identity in terms of that displacement. For example, the Jewish diaspora is possible because unlike other groups that were deported by various ancient conquerors (Assyrians, Neo-Babylonians), the Jews managed to maintain their collective iden-

tity even when they were territorially displaced and politically subordinated. The pre-condition for diaspora is the articulation of a demotic ethnos (or if you prefer nationalism) that is a mechanism to bind a community in terms of its vertical linkages. This is the reason why diaspora refers to Jewish experiences because it is one first instance when a demotic notion of ethnos was circulating (Armstrong, 1983; Smith 1995). The Jews were not the only people deported en masse by the Assyrians and the Neo-Babylonians, what distinguishes their experience, however, is that they continued to hold on to their ‘Jewishness.’ The Jewish diaspora is made possible by the development of a proto-nationalism, which prevents its assimilation into other cultural formations.

The idea that a nationalism of sorts is a pre-condition for the construction of diaspora is given added credence by the way in which diasporas tend to take the form of the nation (for example, Palestinians, Armenians, Assyrians). In other words, diaspora refers to a nation in exile. The boundaries that the discourse of nationalism draws around a community is that which prevents the dissolution of that community once it is displaced from its locality. Nationalism constitutes both nations and diasporas—that is a peoplehood which is territorially concentrated (nation) and territorially displaced (diaspora). Such a view of diaspora, however, would only be partially adequate to account for the African diaspora. Of course, there are many examples of nationalist or proto-nationalist discourses among the African diaspora, which correspond very closely to the “classic” definition of diaspora (narratives that are organised around the co-ordinates of a homeland (Africa, Ethiopia), a displacement—and a horizon of return either as a redemptive gesture or an empirical possibility). There remains, however, the suspicion that in case of the African diaspora we are dealing

with a process that is not simply a nation in exile. Paul Gilroy's (1993) notion of a 'Black Atlantic' suggests a more complicated cultural formation that cannot be adequately described in such terms.

Attempts to broaden the notion of diaspora usually take the form of trying to include another population group alongside the classical exemplars of diaspora. So, for example, there is an attempt to speak of an Irish diaspora or a Greek diaspora and so on. While these accounts seek an empirical enlargement of diaspora, they do little to extend it theoretically. The theoretical weakness of the category of diaspora has been the subject to criticism by Floya Anthias (1998). I want to draw out some of Anthias's concerns as a prologue to suggesting why it may be helpful to think of the Muslim Umma as a diaspora.

Given our very different epistemological starting points, rather than engage in point-by-point analysis of Anthias's argument, it seems that what I should do is tell a more general story that will by-pass the points that Anthias makes and, at the same time, make clear why I think that the notion of diaspora is useful for understanding the current status of the Muslim Umma. Of course, one of the difficulties of someone like me engaging with someone like Anthias is that we belong to different epistemological tribes, we anti-foundationalists do not share the confidence in the neat separations that fundamentalist foundationalists have in positivist sociological categories, nor do we think that we can legislate the use of "sociological categories."

Anthias argues that diaspora is another way of bringing essentialized notions of ethnicity in the guise of hybridized and syncretic formations. It is possible to identify three main criticisms that she levies against the current conceptualization of diasporas. Firstly, she feels that diasporas, by focusing on solidarities based on transnational commonalities, inhibit the possibility of intra-national trans-ethnic alli-

ances. Secondly, she believes that diasporas, rather than transcending ethnicity are actually continuations and extensions of ethnic identification. Thirdly, she believes that the focus on diaspora forms part of a post-modern neglect of issues such as gender, class and the internal divisions that the notion of homogenous diasporas cover-up. In other words, Anthias contends that the way in which diaspora is commonly used, takes no (or little) account of issues of gender or class and continues to be locked in an ethnicity framework. It is useful to divide these specific criticisms into two main arguments. Firstly, there is a theoretical argument about the nature of identities and their relationship to diasporas and, secondly, there is a political argument about the way in which valorizations of diasporas undermine the possibility of intra-national co-operation among various ethnicized communities.

I have a number of difficulties with Anthias's discussion, primarily because I disagree with the way she tries to theorize collective identities. I find her account of collective identities to be unconvincing. Anthias criticises the way in which writers on diaspora seem to focus on the homogenous nature of ethnic ties, ignoring the way in which these ethnicities are riven by divisions and differences; however, at the same time she argues that class and gender are important dimensions that diasporas do not take into account. Although no one could really disagree with such a position, the problem is that "class" or "gender" are no more cohesive or homogenous than "ethnicities." Ethnic unities maybe class-divided and gendered, but genders maybe ethnicized and class-divided, and classes are gendered and ethnicized. Gender, ethnicity or class, however, are not some kind of "holy" trinity of secularized social science, the spirit of which can be seen behind every other form of social identity (i.e. identities based on the profession of faith). They do not exhaust all ways of categoris-

ing social identities. It is not helpful to think that these are permanent concepts—the building blocks of collective identities. Sometimes, the critique of essentialism has the effect of turning all social identities into facades, behind which one can find lurking the “real” identities of class or gender or ethnicity.

Any attempt to conceptualize collective identities must involve on an erasure of internal differences and divisions which characterize the constituent elements of the collective. (If there are no constituent elements then we are not dealing with a collective identity.) In this, ethnicity is not exceptional, all attempts to articulate collective subjectivities (including class or gender) will try and erase its constituent elements in an attempt to produce the effect of seamless organic unity. This is not a peculiarity arising only when identity takes the form of ethnicity, rather it is a general phenomenon of the relational and exclusionary logic of identification itself. Identities based on faith, gender, class, culture (or whatever)—all have this exclusionary and relational logic. Anthias seems to give the impression that ethnic identities are based on “division and difference” and in that they are somehow different from other forms of identification.

It is the case that the most common notions of diaspora are continuations of the ethnic framework, but it does not follow that other identity frameworks are somehow more real and more permanent than ethnicity. How populations are classified and formed into particular clusters is ultimately a political process. All social identities are heterogeneous since they do not have an essence that can guarantee their homogeneity. Thus, it would be impossible to empirically ground the homogeneity of social identities (hence, the various ethnographic studies within field of ethnic relations will always be able to point to divisions and diversities). Homogeneity is an effect of articulatory practices, an articula-

tion that rests upon exclusion and not upon the uncovering of some deep underlying essence. Having said that, one should not confuse the existence of social identities as being necessitated by some essence. The recognition of the in-essential character of social identities does not demand that we reject the possibility of all social identities. (Or more problematically, that we maintain that social identities that we do not agree with are mere fictions, or that we argue that only social identities that take particular forms (i.e. ethnically based) are essentialist.)

Just because a group of people hail from a particular place does not necessarily mean that they then constitute a “valid sociological category.” The validity of sociological categories, however, cannot be the product of a practice external to the process by which identities are articulated. Diasporic identities have significance to the extent to which they appear in different discursive practices. One has to recognise that diasporic imaginings can have an empowering effect, for example, Marcus Garvey and Malcolm X saw in the possibility of diasporic connections a way of “out-flanking” some of the constraints on African-American communities (Tyner and Kruse, II, 2004). For example, Malcolm X’s establishment of the Organization of Afro-American Unity (with echoes of Organization of African Unity) explicitly set out to “internationalize” the African-American liberation struggle (Malcolm X, 1965: 76).⁸ Similarly, the idea of Muslim subjectivity within Western plutocracies, owes its significance to the possibility of making links between and beyond the sites in which Muslim settler communities have been ghettoized and thus transforming the balance of power

⁸ Malcolm X, 1965, *Malcolm X Speaks: Selected Speeches and Statements*. G Breitman (ed). New York: Grove Weidenfeld. For an analysis of Malcolm X’s postcolonial geopolitics see James A Tyner and Robert J Kruse, II “The Geopolitics of Malcolm X Antipode, 2004.

between national majority and ethnic minorities.⁹

I would agree with Anthias when she makes a distinction between diasporas which are simply extensions of ethnic frameworks, and diasporas as conditions (this a distinction that I also find useful). While I agree with much of her criticisms relating to the difficulty of conceptualising diasporas as a condition, I do not think that the attempt is so flawed that it needs to be abandoned in favour of a “valid sociological category.” What is required is an attempt to articulate diasporas as political formations in the context of the erosion of the Westphalian order. In the case of the Muslim experience (which like all collective experiences is riddled with division and diversity—but even then the category of diaspora as extended ethnicity is inadequate.) While it is the case that there are many Muslims living as minorities throughout the world, the idea of a diaspora demands both a displaced population and a homeland—the point from which the displacement originates. Such a homeland is clearly lacking in the Muslim case. We Muslims do not have a Zion—a place of redemptive return. Also the universalist urge within many Muslim discourses makes it difficult to privilege a particular locale as a homeland, imagined or otherwise. In addition, there is no founding act of displacement. For the Muslim Umma is not only reducible to displaced population groups, it also includes the Muslim population in Muslim countries. It is for this reason, therefore, that the notion of diaspora seems an unlikely metaphor for describing the Muslim Umma. Thus to read the Muslim experience as diasporic requires the reconceptualisation of the notion

⁹ For example, the dispute surrounding the publication by Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* of 12 cartoons depicting the Prophet (30 September 2005) was transformed once the Danish Muslim community was able to mobilize the rest of the Umma on its behalf.

of diaspora from demographic to political. Given these limitations I would like to suggest another way of understanding diaspora. It is possible to expand the idea of diaspora beyond its descriptive core and there are a number of notions implicit in the descriptions of diaspora that would allow us to re-consider the idea of diaspora as a political formation.

Earlier I made the point that diasporas were dependent upon the discourse of nationalism. Without a form of nationalism it would be difficult to construct a diaspora. The idea that a diaspora is a nationalist phenomenon is, however, not the only way in which this phenomenon has been described. Diasporas have also been considered anti-national phenomena. Unlike the nation with its homogeneity and boundedness, diaspora suggests heterogeneity and porousness. Nations define ‘home’ whereas diaspora is a condition of homelessness; in the nation the territory and people are fused, whereas in a diaspora the two are dis-articulated. The diaspora is not the other of the nation simply because it is constructed from the anti-thetical elements of a nation, it is, rather, an anti-nation since it interrupts the closure of a nation. The existence of a diaspora prevents the closure of the nation—since a diaspora is by definition located within another nation.

The Jewish experience of diaspora acts as an illustration of the anti-national character of diaspora. Hannah Arendt shows how the parvenu/pariah distinction underwrote Jewish integration into European society during the period up to the Second World War and its aftermath. Arendt argues that Jews had two main subject positions open to them. One was based on assimilation. That is, the Jew became part of the “host” society as an exceptional Jew. Somehow, one was a Jew in an exotic sense but, at the same time, was not a Jew. The other option available was that of total alienation. A Jew who was totally distinct

from the “host” did not belong to that society. The figures of parvenu or pariah both have problematic relationships with the idea of the nation, as both suggest that the nation is not home. The nation is not the place in which one’s identity finds affirmation through the daily mundane rituals of life. The parvenu as a figure of obscure origins and recent recognition is a figure who is not settled. She arrives from an unknown place, she gains prominence without trace, and she is clearly an exception to the rest of her ‘race.’ The pariah as a figure is clearly and unambiguously someone who is not at home—an outcast. Arendt’s reflections on the relationship between identity and belonging after Nazism point to the importance of a notion of home as a way in which the nation sutures the subject. It is the nation as home that acts as an arena for our everyday practices, practices that give focus and meaning. If identity is “a way of life” then the nation by providing a home, is the stage upon which a particular way of life is enacted.

Those without homes face the prospect of trying to enact their “way of life” off-stage. This is a task that they can only accomplish by using either a strategy of alienation and thus becoming a pariah, or by using a strategy of assimilation and thus being considered a parvenu. In this sense, those members of a diaspora have a paradoxical relationship to the nation. On the one hand, they demonstrate the possibility of the strength of a nation in their attempt to maintain the sense of nationhood in the context of territorial dispersal. On the other hand, they point to the inability of a nation to be completed by making it difficult to erase difference. It is in this sense that the notion of diaspora is deployed as the antithesis of the nation. Members of a diaspora have an undecidable relationship with the idea of nations and homes. For example, Arendt’s opposition to Israeli statehood, stemmed from the privileging of “Jewish homelessness” which allowed Jews to

escape the blinkers of belonging to a single nation. In other words, the condition of homelessness is seen as a way of escaping the limits of ethnocentrism. Similarly, Gilroy evokes the ‘Black Atlantic’ as countering both what he perceives to be the cultural absolutism of black nationalism and the closure of the Western project. The Black Atlantic emerges as the name of a space that inhabits the West and also transcends it. This use of diaspora as anti-nation, as a presence which subverts, hyphenates and hybridises national identity, points to the impossibility of constituting a nation.

It is this undecidability that Arendt privileges in her account of the Jewish experience. Similarly, Gilroy in his description of the Black Atlantic makes an appeal to the experience of the African diaspora as constituting a marginal (undecidable) position within Western modernity—being in the West but not of the West. Both Arendt and Gilroy see in the possibility of “not-quite being a nation,” a position that subverts absolutism. In these notions of homelessness there is a certain pathos. Homelessness suggests the possibility of being hyphenated and hybridized. If we understand a diasporic formation as being anti-nation, then it becomes clear that what is involved in a diaspora is the de-concentration of power and subjectivity. In other words, the concept of diaspora dis-articulates the relationship between the political and the national. The nation focuses power and subjectivity; it makes the national subject the locus of power. Diaspora problematizes the possibility of establishing a relationship of coherence between power and subjectivity. What is of critical importance in the formation of a diaspora is the extent to which power and subjectivity are dispersed. This suggests that in many ways, diasporas do not require the trinity of displacement, settlement and homeland. From this perspective, it would be possible to conclude that we are living in an age in

which nations are being replaced by diaspora—that is the dream of homogenous, hermetically contained spaces is being replaced by the idea of hybridized, porous collectives that flow and overflow through any attempt to contain them. I would suggest, however, that such an understanding fails to acknowledge the nature of diasporic logic and fails to acknowledge the unevenness by which nations are transformed into diasporas.

The logic of diaspora is paradoxical. On the one hand it emphasises the possibility of a nation in even the most difficult circumstances where the Westphalian order does not apply. On the other hand it suggests the impossibility of a nation—by preventing the nation from being fully formed, by deferring the moment of closure and absolutism. If diasporas are nations without homes, then the process of homelessness is not generalized; some nations are less likely to be homeless than others. If homelessness is a consequence of the way in which relations of power and collective subjectivities are dis-articulated, then this process is intrinsically political. It is a reflection of broader global struggles. A flavour of these struggles can be gleaned from publications such as *Jihad Vs McWorld* (Barber 1996).

In *Jihad Vs McWorld*, a distinction is made between the forces of global disintegration captured in the banalized idea of Jihad and the idea of global integration represented by the metaphor of an American fast-food chain. This dichotomy tends to suggest two different conceptions of the articulation of power and collective subjectivity. One, the road of Jihad suggests the prospects of “retribalization” and Balkanization: a global Hobbesian war against all, in which narrow particularities rage against modernity, against technology, against pop culture and against integrated markets—against the future itself. The road of Jihad seems to point to an attempt to assert nationhood (i.e., ideas of collectivi-

ties bound by cultures of authenticity and the exclusion of the possibility of heterogeneity).

In opposition to the idea of Jihad, we have McWorld—a place of “shimmering pastels, a busy portrait of onrushing economic, technological and ecological forces that demand integration and uniformity that mesmerise peoples everywhere with fast music, fast computers, and fast food—MTV, and McDonald's—pressing nations into one homogenous global theme park, one McWorld tied together by communications, information, entertainment, and commerce” (Barber, 1996: 4).

Although this global theme seems to promise heterogeneity, the form that this globality takes excludes that very possibility. In other words, the homogeneity associated with McWorld is culturally marked and as such is more like the homogeneity associated with “narrow particularism” writ large rather than an escape from particularisms. In this sense, McWorld is the latest trope in the history of exclusionary universalism that has characterized the Western enterprise. McWorld is based on the domestication of difference and its universalism and exclusion that have underwritten the West’s relationship to the Non-West and its reduction to superficialities. Underlying the diversity of surface effects is the idea of homogeneity founded upon the recognition that underneath our cultural skins we are all the same. The form this sameness reflects is our common unity based on our being humans. This makes possible our concerns for the “starving” in the Third World, it makes possible our demand for and extension of human rights across the planet. Only by focusing on our common humanity can we avoid the tribalism promised by the advocates of Jihad. The snag with this comforting vision is that the notion of what the common human is, what constitutes those values and beliefs that arise from our common humanity and those that are incidental to essential

humanness, tend to correspond also with the boundaries of the Enlightenment project. In other words, features that arise from common humanity too often become conflated with features associated with a particular cultural formation. Thus, the West becomes the only place where a human can be truly human, freed from the veneers of superstition and retrograde cultural practices, humans can express their humanness. This conflation between what is essentially Western with what is essentially human, is what excavates the heterogeneity from the globalization of McWorld. McWorld emerges, not as a “rainbow” formation where all human cultures find a home, but, rather, as an attempt to make the whole world a home for one way of life, one cultural formation. The difference between McWorld and Jihad comes down to a matter of scale rather than content, for both projects seem to be about making the world familiar—making the world a home.

If, as a believer (female or male), you go on hajj, you may travel to the Red Sea port of Jeddah, from where you will take the road that has taken many believers before to the Holy City.¹⁰ The road leads up to the Haram, opposite the Haram there is an air-conditioned shopping mall—inside the shopping mall, the weary pilgrim who comes from far away will find a McDonalds fast-food restaurant. Like any other shopping mall in any other city—you are never far from a McDonalds. If the city that will not admit any others than believing women and believing men, will admit a McDonalds—is not the world already lost to the believers?

Of course, it is possible to argue that the establishment of fast food chain does not really tell us very much about the ways in which global, cultural identities are being transformed. If chicken tikka masala

can emerge as one of Britain's most popular dishes (Ahmed, 2006), then the appearance of a McDonalds chain in Mecca is equally insignificant. Why consider McDonalds to be more of a sign of cultural imperialism than General Motors or Sony? Is it really possible to make such sharp distinctions between those goods that are considered to be the carriers of cultural values and aspirations and those that are seemingly mute on this point? Surely, we have seen that even the Taliban came to recognise that it was not ‘television’ that was demonic or Western, since once they captured Kabul and began to broadcast their own programmes, their attitude to television had changed.

The most common way in which a particular form or cultural object is given a specific identity is by postulating an origin and then tracing its trajectory from that privileged moment of origin. The problem with such an approach is that it tends to confuse historiography with history. For example, most accounts of democracy see the process beginning in Ancient Greece (Athens being the model), developing in Europe and finally reaching its fullest form in the Western plutocracies. Such a sequence ignores the arbitrariness of constructing an origin from many beginnings and it ignores the possibility of other kinds of narratives that could re-construct democracy as originating from other sites (for example, Sumerian city-states).¹¹ I want to suggest that one sign of being at home is that the narratives that tell tales of origins are also narratives that project one's identity backwards. In other words, being at home means the world is familiar to us, because its institutions, rules and complex web of relations are the same discursive productions that articulate our identities in terms of being ‘at home.’ There is then a

¹⁰ Ouis, Soumaya Pernilla 2001, “McDonald's or Mecca? An Existential Choice of Qibla for Muslims in a Globalised World?”. *Encounters* 7:2, pp. 161-188.

¹¹ For example, it can be argued that the part of the intensity of debate generated by the publication of *Black Athena* (Bernal 1987) was the way it questioned ordinary moment of Plato-to-NATO sequence.

sense of belonging that is produced through various hegemonic discursive practices. That is, we are at home when the world around seems to be our mirror.

What I am suggesting is that being at home is no longer simply an empirical experience of the kind that is produced as international movement becomes further restricted due to tighter immigration controls. Just because the movement of people is becoming rarer, does not mean that more people are settled, more at home.¹² The process of globalization is an attempt to make a home for some. This settlement implies that others have to be unsettled. In other words, does the re-deployment of the Westphalian order and notions of diaspora on a planetary scale, transform the rules by which we could conceive of diaspora as merely “ethnic minorities” harking back to the lands of their origins? Diaspora is a condition of being homeless—that is of being displaced and territorially diffused. But if this process is global then the only way one can maintain the idea of a diaspora is to make effects of global displacement specific rather than general. Global displacement is not a culturally neutral activity: the process of globalization imposes displacement upon some cultural formations by settling other cultural formations. This means that the logic of diaspora has a cultural specificity (arising out of current historical circumstances). The logic of diaspora includes those who are articulated as homeless in this world—That is, for whom the global hegemonic order is not an echo of their subjectivity. The logic of diaspora is then not simply an interruption of the logic of the nation, it is also an interruption of the global hegemonic order: the logic of diaspora

is culturally marked. It is this cultural marking which prevents the logic of diaspora from becoming simply a synonym for an anti-nation. The logic of diaspora is not only anti-national, but in present circumstances, when a particular national formation takes a global form, it also becomes anti-global.

In other words, the logic of diaspora cannot escape the most fundamental distinction: that is the distinction between the West and the Non-West. It is this distinction that underpins all forms of coloniality. Attempts to overcome the West/Non-West distinction by pointing to empirical multiculturalism (that is the existence of many cultures and the impossibility of a fully homogenous culture) and valorising hybridity (the normative celebration of multiculturalism), fail because they ignore the way in which the West/Non-West distinction is played out as the distinction between the hegemonic and the subaltern and between the culturally unmarked and the culturally marked.

In the rest of this paper I want to see to what extent this diasporic logic can help us to understand Muslim identity.

MUSLIM HOMELESSNESS

I have argued that with the dominance of the nation-state, national identities are a principal way by which the political tends to be thought. Clearly, there is no single Muslim nation-state that through its institutional ensemble (schooling, common administrative framework, standardized practices) that could be said to be producing specifically Muslim subjects. The emergence of a Muslim subject position even within nation-states in which Muslims are subordinated and marginalized reinforces the idea that being a Muslim is not part of the process of nation-building. Muslims appear in spite of the nation-states not because of them. This is the case, even

¹² As Hirst and Thompson argue the scale of population movement in the wake of dismantling of the European empires (including the Soviet Union) does not compare in scale with movement in nineteenth century, when millions of Europeans settled in the Americas, and parts of Africa, Asia and Oceania.

when considering the example of the handful of states where it could be argued that national identity is synonymous with Muslim identity—e.g., Chechnya, Bosnia, Algeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia. For even in these cases Muslimness transcends the boundaries of the states, none of these states declare in a serious and sustained way that there are no Muslims outside their borders. In addition, their distractive practices, e.g., criteria for citizenship and passport controls, tend to privilege not Muslimness but membership of the particular nation-state. This becomes very clear if one considers the neo-Apartheid regimes in Arabian peninsula, whose economies are sustained by (mainly—though not exclusively—) Muslim helots. The Muslimness of these workers is not sufficient to allow them to overcome the institutionalized social exclusion common to Westphalian-model states. Nor is it sufficient to overturn the internalized global racial order which is constituted by privileging Europeaness (whiteness) over non-Europeaness; rather, the petro-economies of the Arabian peninsula perversely are happy to pay the wages of whiteness as markers of their prosperity and ‘modernity.’

In the absence of the Caliphate, Muslim identity is likely to be a diasporic affair—not only because there is no political structure that can encompass all Muslims but also because in the absence of a great Muslim power there is no political entity that can prevent the appropriation of territories that Muslims may inhabit. The nationalization of the Muslim Umma took place in two distinct domains. First, there is the development of nationalism within the Ottoman Empire that helped to undermine the Ottoman State. This nationalism had two distinct phases. One was the phase when non-Muslim minorities within the Ottoman Empire began to demand the rights of national determination. The second phase was the development of nationalism among the Muslim communities of the

Empire. These communities began to identify themselves as Turks and Arabs rather than as Muslims and, as a result, the “a-national” logic of Islam was replaced by the national logic. In this set of circumstances nationalism emerged in clear opposition to Islam.

The second arena for the development of nationalism was among the Muslim subjects of the European Empires. Decolonization often took the form of struggles of national liberation in which nationalism was articulated in opposition to European imperialism and thus its relationship to Islam was more ambivalent. Both these forms of nationalization raise doubts about what exactly Muslim identity is.

The easiest way to answer this question is to suggest that Muslim identity is primarily religious. Islam is a religion and those who adhere to it are Muslims. I want to spend some time reflecting on the question of Muslim identity. This is not simply an issue of conceptual importance, but has major consequences for the research project as a whole, since one of the most contentious issues regarding Muslim settlement in Europe is the scale of that settlement. Measuring this scale is not only empirically difficult because of the processes by which national data sets are produced (most member countries had no reliable national census figures for religious affiliation); it is also a theoretical problem about determining what a Muslim actually is.

Among dominant Muslim traditions it is possible to identify two main positions regarding the nature of Muslim identity: a subjective notion and a ritualistic notion. A subjective notion of Muslim subjectivity presents an elegant and rather straightforward way of understanding what it means to be Muslim, in that a Muslim is someone who calls her- or himself Muslim. Within the traditions of Islamic thought the confession of the Shahadah (the acceptance of, and the profession of allegiance to the only God and the Prophet Mohammad) is suffi-

cient to meet the criteria of being a Muslim. Such a subjective definition, while being the dominant consensus among Muslims, however, is not necessarily very helpful from a public policy perspective, since it does not allow us to understand the meaning (significance) of such identifications. For example, it does not indicate whether those who call themselves “Muslims” require the provision of halal food. This problem is not unique to Muslims, it is a reflection of the nature of subjective forms of identification and can be found among many other groups (e.g., Jews, Hindus, Christians, atheists, etc.). These “cafeteria-like” (i.e., help yourself) forms of identification are based on an individual’s negotiations about halal and Haram. As such there is no a priori list of properties that can be clustered together to represent Muslimness. It is the act of being a Muslim that retroactively constructs those properties as being properties of a Muslim subjectivity.

A ritualistic notion of Muslim identity is the one that is most commonly used in Orientalist and other academic circles. That is, Muslims are identifiable by their adherence to a number of discreet practices and beliefs (salat/namaz, fasting during Ramadan, hajj, ...). From a public policy point of view this behaviorist notion of Muslim has a strong appeal. If “Muslims are what Muslims do,” it is possible to use easily empirically accessible indices to determine the nature and extent of Muslim settlement: by counting mosques, halal butchers, flights to Mecca, and so forth. Such forms of behaviour provide very visible ways of identifying Muslims and they also provide a way in which we can see how different legislative accounts in the EU can determine the shape of the Muslim settlement, (for example, restrictions of the construction of mosques).

Nonetheless the ritualistic notion of Muslim identity is not without a number of serious methodological drawbacks. First, the question of the ritualistic aspect of Mus-

lim behaviour does not tell us very much about the political significance of a Muslim subjectivity. That is, there is tendency in post-Enlightenment Europe to treat religious and other social activities as being discrete, almost hermetically sealed, spheres of life. Being a Muslim is reduced to a matter of mosque attendance and other ritual observations. This has a tendency to turn Muslims and Islam into a mummified entity—lacking its own internal historical transformations and discussions. In other words, by assigning the key role of identifying Muslims to the rituals of Islam, the political, contingent and historical natures of Muslims are flattened out. The effect of this is to isolate the activities of being a Muslim as being contained within the religious sphere, and to thus negate the necessity of examining how other social relations may be affected by one’s adherence to Islam—an adherence to which transcends rituals. If being a Muslim is mainly about religion and religion has its proper place, then clearly the Muslim Awakening with its insistence that being Muslim has social, cultural, and economic implications, is improper. Insisting on the religious nature of being a Muslim is a denial of its political character. For following the example of post-Reformation Western Christianity it could be argued that religious affiliation is circumspect and finds its expression in institutions and practices organized for worship. As such religious identity can be (and many argue) should be subordinate to other forms of identification such as national belonging. This belief in the primarily religious character of Muslim identity is one that many Muslims also endorse. The difficulty with such a position has to do with the understanding of religion. As Talal Asad (1993) has pointed out there is no universal definition of religion and it remains unclear whether the dominant definition currently in use is based on Enlightenment inspired reading of Western Christendom and there is a question as to what extent its

application to the Islamicate case (among others) is fruitful.

The notion of diaspora that I am advocating for the Muslim is not based on racialized notions of ethnicity (in the form of a common descent from an originary homeland or ancestor), nor is it merely “metaphoric” in the sense of trying to come to terms with the mismatch between peoples and places. By seeing Muslim identity as diasporic it is possible to affirm its political nature while accepting that currently it lacks an overarching political structure able to house all Muslims. This means it is Muslimness itself which is diasporic, rather than a specific group of Muslims, e.g., Kashmiris or Palestinians. I do not make the claim that Muslim identity is organic, but I do argue that for various reasons it is the subject position that currently has greater prominence than other forms of identification for those who describe themselves or are described by others as Muslims.

I am also aware that there are many among those who would be constituted as Muslims, who would reject the political significance of that appellation and who would refuse to accept the idea that there is Muslim Umma. The idea of the Muslim Umma as a diaspora is an attempt to come to terms with the limits and the crisis of the nation-state. As forces and developments associated with globalization have weakened the institutional rigidity of the Westphalian type state, cracks and gaps began to appear in the international state system that provided terrain for politics. Given the mobile and constructed nature of social identities, these fissures within dominant institutional forms of the nation-state have allowed different kinds of collectives to be articulated, taking advantages of these gaps. These formations seep through the Westphalian edifice, creating political formations that are neither in nor out of the nation-state, but that have an undecidable relationship to it. In this sense, diaspora is

the name of this undecidable political formation.

CONCLUSION

This logic of diaspora suggests an attempt to create a full subjectivity in the form of the nation in the context when the nation cannot be completed. One way of thinking of the Muslim Umma is to see it as a remainder of an incomplete political project which, if it had been successful, would have produced a cultural formation which would be as remarkable or unremarkable as the Chinese. Processes associated with globalization have led to the denationalization of peripheral nation-state forms at the same time as the expansion of the central nations. The division of Muslimstan into nation-states made it difficult to sustain a distinct Muslim identity. The process of globalization has meant at least for peripheral states the erosion of Westphalian type of state, which has helped open up the possibility of the re-configuration of the Muslim subjectivity that is less and less particular and more and more universal. The inability of the Muslim Umma to fully articulate itself as universal means that it is caught in the logic of diaspora. The Umma interrupts and prevents the nation from finding closure and at the same time it points to another nation that will come into being at some point in the future. In this, the Umma is becoming—it is a horizon as well as an actuality. The current world is characterized by two types of de-centring. There is the de-centring of the nation-state that is associated with globalization and there is the de-centring of the West that marks the end of the Age of Europe. It is in this nexus between these two forms of de-centring that we can locate the Muslim Umma, and it is this location which gives it its diasporic form. The diasporic nature of this Muslim identity interrupts the closure of nation-states and points to the provin-

cialization of Europe and as such Islamophobia is a response to both the assertion of a distinct Muslim political agency and the anxieties produced by these de-centrings.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ahmed, S. (2008) "Chicken Tikka Masala" in Ali, N., Kalra, V. and Sayyid S. (eds). *A Postcolonial People: South Asians in Britain*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Asad, T. (1993) *Genealogies of Religion*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press
- Anderson, B. (1983). *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso.
- Arendt, H (1973) *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: Harcourt Brace.
- Armstrong, J (1983) *Nations before Nationalism*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Anthias, F. (1998) "Evaluating 'Diaspora': Beyond Ethnicity?" *Sociology*. Vol. 32 557-580.
- Bernal, M. (1987). *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*. London: Free Association Books.
- Barber; B. R. (1996) *Jihad vs. McWorld*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Castells, M., (1997) *The Rise of the Network Society*. Oxford: Blackwell Press.
- Cohen, R. (1997) *Global Diaspora: An Introduction*. London: UCL Press.
- Geyer, M. and Bright, C. (1995) "World History in a Global Age." *American Historical Review*. Volume 100, Number 4. October pp. 1034-1060.
- Gilroy, P. (1993). *The Black Atlantic*. London: Verso.
- Hall, S. (1992) "The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power" in Hall, S. and B. Gieben (eds). *The Formation of Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Huntington, S. P. (1996) *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York: Simon and Shuster.
- Ouis, P. 2001, "McDonald's or Mecca? An Existential Choice of Qibla for Muslims in a Globalised World?" *Encounters* 7:2, pp. 161-188.
- Parekh, B. 1995. "Ethnocentricity of the nationalist discourse," *Nations and Nationalism*. Vol. 1 Part 1 March.
- Rattansi, A. and Westwood, S. (eds) *Racism, Modernity and Identity: On the Western Front*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Said, E. W. (1985) *Orientalism*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Sayyid, S. (1997) *A Fundamental fear: Eurocentrism and Emergence of Islamism*. London: Zed.
- Sayyid, S. (2010) "Thinking Through Islamophobia" in Sayyid, S and Vakil, A.K (eds) (2010) *Thinking Through Islamophobia*. London: Hurst.
- Sayyid, S and Vakil, A.K (eds) (2010) *Thinking Through Islamophobia*. London: Hurst.
- Schmitt, C. (1996/1932) *The Concept of the Political*. Trans. George Schwab. Chicago: The University of Chicago.
- Sheffer, G. 1986. *Modern Diasporas in International Politics*. London: Croom Helm.
- Smith, A (1995) *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*. Oxford: Blackwell Press.
- Tyner, James A and Robert J Kruse II (2004) "The Geopolitics of Malcolm X, *Antipode*, 36 (Jan): 24-42.
- X, Malcolm, 1965, *Malcolm X Speaks: Selected Speeches and Statements*. G Breitman (ed). New York: Grove Weidenfeld.
- Zizek, S. (1990) "Eastern Europe's Republics of Gilead," *New Left Review* No. 183 (September-October): 50-62.