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Writing Religion in British Asian Diasporas

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2013

# **Writing Religion in British Asian Diasporas**

**Seán McLoughlin and John Zavos**

In this paper we examine the highly differentiated locations of religion in scholarly writing about British Asian diasporas. We argue that since the late 1990s scholars of religion have become more interested in multi- and inter-disciplinary theories of culture, power and representation, which are defining concerns of postcolonial and postmodern influences on diaspora studies. However, we also suggest that, as yet, important efforts to relate such work to agendas in the empirical study of religion and diasporas have not been much explored. Taking a cue from the spatial analysis of Knott (2005) and others, we advance a new schema which maps four key scales at which the locations of religion in British Asian diasporas can be examined: i) the formation of congregations and places of worship in particular neighbourhoods; ii) the arena of public institutions and the state, from local to national levels; iii) the multi-local networks of transnational religious organizations; and iv) the informal, everyday lived hybridity of individual, domestic and other non-institutional spaces. Overall, we argue that the study of religion in British Asian diasporas has paid most attention to dominant institutional discourses around religion in locations i) to iii) and not enough attention to the more demotic location of iv) (cf. Baumann 1999). We suggest that the interrogation of the former with a discussion of the latter also challenges powerful and pervasive definitions of what counts as religion and non-religion.

Keywords: religion, Britain, South Asian diasporas, spatial scales.

## Introduction

With vignettes from our five community-based workshops as starting points, the aim of this chapter is to better map and theorize the changing roles of religion and its cognates such as race, faith, culture, spirituality and the secular in the writing of British Asian diasporas. In particular, we are interested in the location and evident mobility of the category of religion in terms of the social relations and spatial scales that configure the relevant cityscapes. At the Peepul Centre in Leicester, for instance, the public visibility of neighbourhood institutions and places of worship came to the fore amidst discussion of the struggles to remake

home abroad. Exchanges at Bradford's Mumtaz restaurant, by extension, demonstrated the impact of high profile arguments about the public recognition of religious belief and practice by the local state, with the Manchester event at the Indus 5 restaurant also underlining the growing national importance of a discourse of faith in education and the governance of community relations. At the Nishkam Civic Centre in Birmingham there was a reminder that transnational networks of religious activists imagine connections and unities beyond both locality and the nation, while like exchanges at the Kobi Nazrul Centre in London's East End, it also drew attention to sacred spaces of popular culture and individual spirituality that are often considered non-religious. Thus, while research has routinely focused upon religion in diaspora as a public and organized phenomenon, the argument here is that more demotic arenas must be given attention too (cf. G. Baumann 1996).

Interestingly, this mobility of religion in spaces associated with British Asian diasporas has suffered a rather surprising elision in the scholarly literature. From the 1960s until the 1980s, accounts of migration from South Asia to Britain were dominated by sociologists, anthropologists and others working largely within paradigms of race and ethnicity. As noted in the Introduction, each of these approaches had their own respective (and often antagonistic) emphases on the significance of social structure and cultural agency, the political economy of immigration and urban ethnicity (for example, Rex and Moore 1967; Watson 1977). With the conceptual turn towards the study of diaspora and hybridity in

cultural studies (Hall 1992; Gilroy 1993; Bhabha 2004; Clifford 1997; Brah 1996), the last two decades has witnessed new accounts of South Asian popular and youth cultures especially (Sharma et al. 1996; Alexander 2000; 2008). However, for all the continuing world-wide significance of diasporic appeals to 'tradition' in the face of cultural 'translation', on the whole, neither the race/ethnicity nor the more recent diaspora/hybridity literature has viewed religion as an object worthy of sophisticated theorization. Indeed, this appears to be the case even where religion bears forcefully upon the studies in question, as in so much of the most recent writing on Islam and Muslims (for example Abbas 2005). Constructions of religion are very much present in this literature but the conceptual framing of the category is insufficiently problematized, an issue we seek to address here.

If scholars of migration and diaspora have not had much time for thinking deeply about religion, scholars of religion have had only a marginal interest in contemporary diasporas (M. Baumann 2000; McLoughlin 2005b). Surveys of the literature routinely trace the first contemporary discussion of religion and diaspora to the late Ninian Smart, once the doyen of Religious Studies (M. Baumann 2000; Vertovec 2000, 2004; Hinnells 2005). Smart (1987) emphasized that, self-conscious of their difference in interactions with 'others', religious traditions generally exhibit universalizing, rationalizing and homogenizing tendencies in a globalizing world. However, his observations remained fairly generalized and made little distinction between diaspora and globalization (cf. McLoughlin

2005b). Indeed, it was the Community Religions Project (CRP), founded in 1976 at the University of Leeds, which pioneered the writing of post-war migrant religion in Britain.<sup>1</sup> Its first wave of publications included detailed ethnographic descriptions of how the empirical content of Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism was changing in the context of urban localities (Knott 1986a; Barton 1986; Bowen 1988; Kalsi 1992). However, given a tendency to emphasize objective description over critical explanation in Religious Studies at the time, the CRP's original theoretical discussions now look comparatively limited.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, it is only in the last decade or so that scholars in Religious Studies and Anthropology have earnestly sought to deconstruct the idea of 'religion' as a cross-cultural and trans-historical phenomenon. Influenced by the same postmodernist and postcolonial concerns with power and cultural representation apparent in theorizations of diaspora/hybridity, Asad (1993) and others have all urged vigilance in analyzing just how, by whom and for what purposes the authority of religion is deployed. Yet, while Fitzgerald (2001) questions the very viability of the category as a modern, Western construct that has been exported world-wide, Flood argues that 'religion' can still be employed cross-culturally in a taxonomic sense, although its analysis should be grounded in 'utterance in the social world' (1999: 233; cf. Hall 1997: 33). However, it has been for others to

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<sup>1</sup> See Knott (2009) on the CRP. Other early studies of South Asian religions in Britain include James (1974), Burghardt (1987) and Rex (1988).

<sup>2</sup> In many ways it shared a problem in common with the urban ethnicity paradigm in functionalist anthropology (Watson 1977; Ballard 1994), which for too long remained isolated from developments in neo-Marxist theory (Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies 1982; Eade 1996a).

tease out the implications of a more theoretically informed approach to qualitative empirical research on religion in context. Sutcliffe (2004), for instance, supports a grounded, critical realist and ‘worldly’ model of religion which does not already assume its data, and moves back and forth from the particular to the general, deconstructing any idealized norms associated with the idea of ‘World Religions’.<sup>3</sup>

Interestingly, scholars of religion working out of the empirical study of diasporas and transnational migration have been at the forefront of taking such an agenda forward, illuminating particularly the importance of spatial-temporal locations and practices for the study of religions in context and on the move (Vásquez and Marquardt 2003; Tweed 2006; Vásquez 2011). Indeed, Knott’s (2005) more recent work has drawn upon spatial theorists such as Lefebvre, De Certeau, Massey and Foucault. She argues that the study of religion must always begin inductively with particular locations (be they physical, social, textual, or virtual). An interpretative analysis rather than a systematic model, Knott’s spatial analysis of religion underlines that distinctive yet dynamically interconnected dimensions of space can be discerned – the physical (i.e. material and embodied), mental (i.e. symbolic and imagined), and social (i.e. relational). Space also possesses certain properties: distinctive localized configurations; simultaneous production by multi, trans- and supra-local forces elsewhere; extension back and forth beyond a single moment in time; and reproduction and contest of uneven and unstable power

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<sup>3</sup> This paradigm ‘conceptualizes religious ideas and practice as being configured by a series of major religious systems that can be clearly identified as having discrete characteristics... [and] their own historical agency’ (Suthren-Hirst and Zavos 2005: 5)

relations (cf. Lefebvre 1991; Massey 1993). Thus locating religion in these terms represents a:

movement away from the modernist regime of collecting, classifying, comparing, and typologising data on religion towards seeing religion as a dynamic and engaged part of a complex social environment or habitat, which is itself criss-crossed with wider communications and power relations. (Knott 2005: 119)

However, these new directions in the study of religion have not yet been engaged seriously with the study of South Asian diasporas. Seeing a new opportunity, then, for theoretical reflection on at least three decades of writing about British Asian cities, this chapter pursues the idea that the dimensions and properties of space are frequently configured in such a way that they re-inscribe dominant institutional and organizational formations of religion. Recalling our remarks at the outset of this chapter, a spatial approach also allows for the recognition of demotic discourse and practice or what Knott calls ‘new geographies of religion ... which look beyond the officially religious, and are sensitive to differences in context, aesthetics, scale, constituency, dialectics and morality’ (2005: 122). Thus, in this chapter we aim to reveal more clearly the particular sorts of work that the category of religion and its cognates do among differently positioned constituencies in British Asian cities, as well as assessing its potential to analyse changing patterns of diasporic consciousness and practice. Moving between vignettes from the five city events and reflections based on selected texts, we propose a new schema for the location of British Asian ‘religioning’ (Nye 2000) in terms of four distinctive, if interrelated, spatial scales and their related processes: i) the formation of neighbourhood congregations and ‘communities’ in

the context of urban resettlement; ii) regulation and recognition by public institutions and the local/national state in multicultural politics and policy-making; iii) the networking and activism of transnational organizations which sustain both multi-, trans- and indeed supra-local circuits of religious connection and imagination; and iv) the informal and negotiated utterances and performativity of individuals and non-institutionalized collectives, which resist and sometimes critique the aforementioned dominant constructions of religion.

#### Urban Settlement, Social Divisions and Re-Traditionalizing Religious Community

At the Bradford event a participant spoke about an oral history project based at Howard Street mosque, the first in Bradford (1959). Opened in a terraced house, the mosque was attended by both East and West Pakistanis from different biradaris (patri-lineal kinship groups), regions and sectarian traditions. However, in 1968, Pathans and Panjabis from Chhachh took control of the mosque and installed a Deobandi as their first full-time imam, a development which catalysed the foundation of several alternative Muslim institutions in the city.<sup>4</sup>

At the Leicester event a participant spoke about how, in contrast to the Hindu temples of cities such as Leeds and Coventry, those in Leicester – the home of Britain’s first mandir (1969)<sup>5</sup> - have been much larger, supporting more elaborate ritual activities. At Navratri (‘nine nights’ of worship) large public venues host Garba (a devotional dance) in the Vaishnavite tradition but young people increasingly weave in their own Bollywood-inspired improvisations. Nevertheless, such events are also often jati (caste) exclusive affairs. Another participant reported that in Uganda going to Hindu festivals was the norm for him as a Muslim, a convivial practice lost in the English East Midlands.

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<sup>4</sup> Deobandism is a Sunni ‘*ulama*’ led reform movement of British India which emphasizes the importance of a self-disciplined responsibility for moral purification and ritual practice (Lewis 1994a).

<sup>5</sup> These claims are always contested. Vertovec (2000: 97) cites Tambs-Lyche (1975) suggesting that the first Hindu temple was established in Coventry by Kenyan Asians in 1967.

The increasingly elaborate domes and minarets of mosques, mandirs and gurdwaras remain amongst the most tangible symbols of the physical presence of South Asians in postcolonial Britain (Peach and Gale 2003). Alongside restaurants, grocers, cloth houses and movie rental stores, they form part of the ‘institutional completeness’ (Dahya 1974) so often described as characteristic of the UK inner-city neighbourhoods successively colonized and transformed for centuries by different waves of immigrants. Whereas in the early years of settlement Victorian terraces were appropriated for the remaking of sacred space, some institutions are now purpose-built and cathedral-like. While such institutions conspicuously re-map the landscapes (and sometimes the soundscapes) of UK cities, their iconic signage and scripts only hint at the complex reconfigurations and struggles involved in the public remaking of religious dwelling places that so often make diasporas feel at home abroad.

The Bradford vignette hints at why the idea of a congregation has become more significant for all traditions in diaspora, with public meetings for worship imagining trans-temporal continuity with home (Vásquez 2011), as well as providing access to ‘safe’ multi-functional spaces that serve a wide range of social needs. Amongst the highest centres of communal value, huge voluntary investments have been made both in terms of financial and human capital. Such investments were often accelerated by the desire to transmit homeland traditions to young people born and schooled in what earlier generations often regarded as the permissive culture of Britain (Nesbitt 2000). However, as the Leicester

vignette suggests, ritual practices labelled ‘traditional’ have also inevitably been elaborated in novel ways, for example, in terms of dance practices (David 2010). Events in both cities raised important questions, too, about how religious discourse is deployed for the purposes of inclusion/ exclusion by more or less dominant constituencies. The vignettes from Bradford and Leicester illuminate the dynamic shift from religio-ethnic fusion to fission (Bowen 1987) which has shaped residential patterns and community formation amongst South Asian settlers regardless of their migration histories and cultural capital. Indeed, where configurations of local populations allowed, the initial suspension (or negotiation) of regional, caste and sectarian differences soon gave way to struggles between different factions. This making and remaking of the boundaries of ‘community’ often invoked religiously sanctified hierarchies and relations of power, ultimately leading to the formation of multiple, new institutions.<sup>6</sup>

As suggested in the introduction to this chapter, the most detailed and sustained documentation of the early stages of such processes in Britain is contained in the first monographs published as part of the CRP at the University of Leeds. Such was the secularity of thinking in the academy per se and, moreover, the predominance of disciplinary agendas in terms of race and ethnicity, that sociologists, and even anthropologists, writing on South Asian migrants in Britain were not much interested in religion. At the same time UK sociologists of religion had little interest in migration and ethnicity. Following fieldwork from the mid to

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<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, as we shall see in the next section, fusion was reasserted as local and national coalitions sought to present a common public front to the state and wider society.

late 1970s into the 1980s, four CRP accounts were published documenting the migration and settlement of Gujaratis, Panjabis, Bengalis and East Africans settled in Leeds and Bradford (Knott 1986a; Barton 1986; Bowen 1988; Kalsi 1992). Working explicitly within modernist paradigms of phenomenology and the history of religions, yet built upon long periods of participation and observation, insider accounts of newly transplanted religious formations were recorded and described in great detail. Some studies also began to problematize the relationship between religion, ethnicity and identity, while Knott proposed a much cited and elaborated framework (cf. Vertovec 2000: 21-3; Hinnells 2005) mapping the various factors contributing to ‘new patterns and forms’ (1986b: 10) of transplanted religion.<sup>7</sup>

Drawing attention to the significance of locality for institutionalization, Knott’s (1986a) *Hinduism in Leeds* describes the compromise and fusion that takes place in diaspora when that space is shared with ethnic ‘Others’ from the same broad tradition. As in anthropological and some sociological accounts of the time, ethnic affiliation is clearly the determining frame in all the CRP monographs studies, suggesting the importance of religion in reinforcing the construction of ethnic boundaries. Hindus in Leeds were divided in terms of the general attitudes to religiosity amongst Panjabis and East African Gujaratis respectively. The former saw themselves - and were seen by others - as ‘less religious’, for example, in terms of attitudes to drinking, smoking and generally ‘having fun’. Cross-cutting religious community, Panjabi Hindus were also happy to marry Panjabi Sikhs.

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<sup>7</sup> This can be summarized thus: i) home traditions; ii) host traditions; iii) nature of migration process; iv) nature of migrant group; v) nature of host response.

However, while the Hindu temple that they shared became an important expression of, and vehicle for, competing ethnicities, local circumstances in Leeds forced the two groupings to compromise in producing a temple ritual that was subject to a process of selective 'standardisation' (1986a: 231; cf. Smart 1987).

While such standardization was partly an attempt to accommodate particular regional traditions, it was also a simple adaptation to the restrictions and compartmentalization imposed in terms of new concepts of time and space, climate and calendar, work and leisure, in the Leeds environment. Overall, Knott demonstrates that standardization meant more of an emphasis on high caste practices and universal tropes of sanatandharma (eternal religion). Hindu nationalist organizations are mentioned as playing a role in these processes but this is not explored in special depth. However, Knott does explore diverse Hindu trends, citing activities associated with local vernacular traditions outside the temple. Moreover, she concludes that developments at the institution were driven by a new self-consciousness of minority status and the need to present a united front to the outside world: 'temple religion in Leeds, or sanatandharma, is a form of retraditionalization in which common religious beliefs and practices rather than ethnic elements are employed in the process of group presentation' (1986a: 237).

Highlighting how, in closely related but differently configured locations, institutional religion can also become a vehicle for ethnic fission and exclusion as well as resistance to such processes, Kalsi's (1992) *The Evolution of a Sikh*

Community in Britain provides an account of the Chamars of Bradford, who like significant numbers of Panjabi ‘Sikhs’ and ‘Hindus’ in Britain are a Dalit caste. While the Chamars raised funds for the original Sikh gurdwara (established 1964), by 1968 an argument had broken out with the dominant Jat caste grouping. The Chamars were discouraged from preparing food in the langar (communal kitchen) and eventually told to remove their pans. Visiting Chamar speakers were also refused the right to address the congregation. This prompted the formation of a Chamar caste association in Bradford, the Ravidas Sabha, and eventually, the establishment of a Ravidasi bhawan (religious institution), emulating the first Ravidasi gurdwara in Britain, founded in Wolverhampton in 1968.<sup>8</sup>

As Leslie (2003: 64) argues in *Authority and Meaning in Indian Religions*, a study of a ‘religious’ furore which began with a caste-based slight in Birmingham,<sup>9</sup> the categories ‘Sikh’ and ‘Hindu’ are routinely associated with higher castes in Panjab while Dalits’ membership of such groups is qualified by others as ‘Mazhabi’ (‘converted’ Sikhs) or ‘Achut’ (‘untouchable’ Hindus). Thus caste based solidarities routinely supersede those of religion although Dalits’ public identification as such remains a sensitive matter and tends to be avoided (Leslie 2003: 72-3). Indeed, against this context of prejudice and marginalization, caste labels have generally been replaced by religious labels such as ‘Ravidasi’ or ‘Valmiki’. Dalits rarely describe themselves as part of the established traditions

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<sup>8</sup> (Guru) Ravi Das was a fourteenth-fifteenth century sant (saint) from a Chamar family in Uttar Pradesh. Critical of caste, his compositions are included in the Guru Granth Sahib.

<sup>9</sup> During February 2000, on Birmingham-based Radio XL, a presenter referred to Valmiki, author of the Sanskrit epic poem, the Ramayana, as a ‘dacoit’. This caused a furore amongst the Chuhras who worship Valmiki as God.

but have long since employed syncretic religious beliefs and practices to resist exclusion (cf. Jurgensmeyer 1982; Nesbitt 1994; Searle-Chatterjee 2008). While rupturing the bounded systems suggested by the idea of ‘World Religions’, across the generations religion has remained perhaps their most powerful mythic, ritual and symbolic resource to narrate and imagine alternative moral orders. However, it is unclear whether the Ravidasis and Valmikis will eventually decide - or feel compelled - to opt for the more universalized labels of ‘Sikh’ and ‘Hindu’ which ‘make sense’ to the British state and wider society,<sup>10</sup> as well as to a growing number of the British-born and educated in their own constituencies.

As noted in the introduction, theoretical discussions were comparatively limited in early CRP publications. Highlighting a consonance between religion as a reified scholarly construct and its articulation in right-wing religious nationalism, Searle-Chatterjee (2000) subsequently went so far as to argue that ethnography in both Anthropology and Religious Studies uncritically reproduced religious traditions as essentialized categories, isolating them from wider social and political forces.

However, a close reading of the CRP texts suggests that while raising a number of important issues, Searle-Chatterjee’s critique does not always do justice to the fact that the political reach of the religious right was much less in the 1980s than in the 1990s, not least in diaspora contexts where the coherence achieved in the subcontinent was rarely replicated (cf. McLoughlin 2005a; Zavos 2010).

Moreover, while they do not reflect a postcolonial analysis, CRP texts do begin to

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<sup>10</sup> Kalsi (1992: 137-8) reports a council officer asking why, if the community he was visiting was ‘Sikh’, did they have ‘Hindu’ names and why did their organization have a caste basis when ‘Sikhs’ do not believe in caste.

provide important evidence as to why universalizing constructions of religion have become so salient in contexts of migration, as well as considering conflict and division in terms of region, caste and sect, and the fact of shared practices. Certainly, the CRP began to take Religious Studies beyond the dominant World Religions paradigm, arguing that the shape of Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism in Britain could not simply be deduced from normative histories (Barton 1986). Moreover, as Baumann (1996; 1999) suggests in his study of Asian Southall, *Contesting Culture: Discourses of identity in multi-ethnic London*, it is problematic simply to dismiss essentializing dominant discourses, as Searle-Chatterjee seems to, because, along with more demotic discourses, they form part of people's multiple discursive competencies.

#### The State, Multiculturalism and Public Recognition of Religious Identities

A speaker at Birmingham provided an architectural reading of the city's mosques in which a narrative emerged about Islam and Muslims moving from the margins to the centre of civic life, as large, purpose-built mosques had become part of the multicultural façade of public space.

Various contributors in Bradford identified a shift in the ethnic politics of the city: from the black radicalism of the mid to late 1970s and early 1980s, as characterized by the Asian Youth Movement (AYM), to the predominance of religious organizations and issues from the early 1980s and into the 1990s, as characterized by the formation of the Bradford Council for Mosques (1981) and similar organizations amongst Hindus and Sikhs (1984/5). The role of the local state in this shift was emphasized as a significant factor.

A session at Manchester on the way in which religious communities had been 'written' in the city through the work of the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) and the development of the Religious Education (RE) syllabus provided the context for a presentation by a representative of the Local Education Authority. The role of 'faith' in the development of community relations was strongly emphasized. This

theme was supported by the presentation of a former member of the SACRE, also a member of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), in which the contribution of Hinduism as a tolerant and all-encompassing tradition was developed.<sup>11</sup>

Set against the maturation of multi-generational British Asian communities during the 1980s, the vignettes above tell a story of the growing public significance of ‘religion’ and ‘faith’ in terms of local and national debates about the politics of multiculturalism. Across the five workshops this idea was expressed so ubiquitously that we might see the discursive move from ‘race to religion’ as a definite trend, a key narrative in the construction of British Asian city spaces. Historically, it is clear from Lewis’s (1994a), CRP-related, account that with Muslim calls for halal (ritually slaughtered) meat in schools, religion began to gain greater prominence in the community relations of cities like Bradford during the 1980s, while at the same time Sikhs in Birmingham were fighting a turban campaign (Mandla versus Dowell Lee, 1983; one of a number since the 1960s) on the grounds of ethnic (not religious) discrimination (Singh and Tatla 2006: 132-3). While the Bradford vignette also calls attention to the formation of localized Muslim, Hindu and Sikh umbrella organizations, more recently organizations such as the Muslim Council of Britain, the Hindu Council UK and the Network of Sikh Organizations have been established on the national level (McLoughlin 2005c; Zavos 2008, 2009; Singh and Tatla 2006). Indeed, into the early 2000s, a ‘faith relations industry’ emerged under New Labour, extending a discourse on ‘faith’ hitherto confined mainly to interfaith dialogue and RE. As Nye (2001) and

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<sup>11</sup> On VHP networks in the UK and beyond, see Zavos (2010).

Mandair (2006) suggest of postcolonial Britain just as much as colonial India, then, a key force in constructions of religion as the main site for legitimate identity is the state.<sup>12</sup>

Even in the early 1980s, the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (1982) was critical of the ways in which ethnography was insufficiently attentive to the role of the state in shaping the realities of race and ethnic relations. While Werbner and Anwar's (1991) *Black and Ethnic Leaderships* represents an important response to such critiques in Anthropology, nothing similar exists in the CRP tradition of Religious Studies (hence Searle-Chatterjee's 2000 critique). Indeed, it was only the Rushdie Affair and the subsequent challenges of a Muslim identity politics in 1990s Britain that revealed the complex relationship between a largely secular nation-state and civil society, the established church and ethnic minorities organizing primarily in terms of religion. In *Multicultural Politics* (2005), a follow up to *Not Easy Being British* (1992), Tariq Modood, a key commentator on such matters for two decades, argues that attempts to reconcile a discourse of racial equality with the emergence of a politics of cultural difference, created a 'double demand' for both equality and difference in Britain (2005: 29-30). However, his body of work has highlighted the significance of religion as a marker in the struggle to authenticate South Asian identifications distinct from the silences of political blackness. Underlining the problematic status of the category

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<sup>12</sup> In invoking the state, we refer not just to a particular set of governmental institutions or practices, but a more open field of power relations bound up with complex processes of regulation, recognition and legitimation, being located in multiple sites and at various levels that overlap with civil society and everyday life (Trouillot 2001).

of religion in the sociology of race and ethnicity, as well as its lack of engagement with the sociology of religion, this has made Modood's work unpopular in some scholarly/ political circles. Elsewhere, he also reports that representatives of South Asian religious traditions in the UK have tended to support the continuing establishment of the Church of England, if only as a relatively safe means of maintaining an official space for religion in public life (Modood 1997). However, with the Race Relations Act of 1976 offering legal protection from racial and ethnic but not religious discrimination (a situation remedied by new if rather weak legislation in 2006/7), Modood shows that whereas religion may primarily be a question of individual choice for the (post)Christian, white majority, this is not true for most British Asians, for whom it is still most often an aspect of group descent. This exposes the limits of liberal claims about the neutrality of secularism; the perceived shift from race to faith must be qualified by an acknowledgement that some constructions of religion are a proxy for race/ ethnicity and suggest the 'racialization of religion' (cf. Anthias and Yuval Davis 1993).

One way in which British Asian diasporas have long encountered the state is in terms of planning, a set of processes which have inscribed religious institutions in the archives of local government. As a session on urban aesthetics at Birmingham demonstrated, the apparent public recognition of British Asian religion in urban localities is also a story of bitter objections to planning applications (Eade 1996b; Gale 2005). Objections have either been overtly expressed in racist terms, or more

subliminally in terms of 'fit' with cultural heritage or through mundane concerns such as traffic congestion (Nye 2001; Gale and Naylor 2002). As Nye's (2001) account of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness's mobilization concerning Bhaktivedanta Manor in a Hertfordshire country house illustrates, such objections have been increasingly met with a sophisticated and sometimes highly co-ordinated response from religious organizations. Moreover, for at least a couple of decades, religious buildings have also been incorporated into the local state's own (exoticized) marketing of urban space as 'multicultural' (Gale and Naylor 2002: 405). However, Gale's work on recent planning applications in Birmingham (2008) demonstrates a significant twist here. Applications for grand, purpose-built places of worship which promote the 'multicultural' city image are now received more sympathetically than those which continue to seek 'change of use' for smaller, neighbourhood buildings such as terraces or de-consecrated churches. In effect, this mitigates against highly localized provision, particularly for Muslims who might visit a place of worship close by their home a number of times in a day.

More generally, Baumann's (1998) work on 'encorporation' demonstrates how the local state in Britain provides opportunities for culturally-defined organizations to compete with each other for resources in order to deliver micro-services such as advice centres and child-care provision. Indeed, social and educational services and Community Relations Councils have produced a range of policy documents which effectively incorporate South Asian heritage

communities as ‘religious communities’. Baumann argues that the local state has consistently supported religious groups, both as a conservative and domesticated bulwark against radical movements such as the AYM, and on the basis of a colonially inspired emphasis on South Asian culture as fundamentally religious (cf. Knott 1986a: 53). Whereas Baumann draws on his aforementioned ethnography of Southall (1996), the Bradford vignette is indicative of a similar process there. As in other cities such as Leicester (Vertovec 1994bX), the local authority was not only an active agent in the formation of the BCM, but materially supported this organization and its powerful community leaders, pushing the more youthful and secular AYM to the margins (Samad 1997: 247-8; cf. Lewis 1994a).

Critiques of the state’s incorporation of religion take many forms. In the wake of the Rushdie Affair, the Women Against Fundamentalism collective’s Refusing Holy Orders challenged the way in which multiculturalism sanctified the versions of religion advanced by patriarchal leaders and movements, so reinforcing power relations within ethnicized communities (Sahgal and Yuval-Davis 1992a).<sup>13</sup> A decade later, as New Labour’s attack on multiculturalism gathered pace in the wake of the ‘Northern’ riots and ‘9/11’, Ouseley’s (2001) report, *Community Pride not Prejudice*, suggests that ‘self-segregation’ and low levels of integration are also, in part, an outcome of such processes: ‘Political leadership has been weak in kowtowing to community leadership and operating within a ‘doing deals’ culture to avoid ‘disturbances’ and to ‘keep the peace’ (2001: 10). Minority [that

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<sup>13</sup> See <http://www.womenagainstofundamentalism.org.uk/> (30 May 2010).

is, Muslim] religious leaders are targeted obliquely, too, as being ‘responsible’ for perpetuating: ‘the belief that it [self-segregation] is the only way to promote, retain and protect faith and cultural identity and affiliation’ (2001: 10).

Despite Pakistani Muslim communities seemingly exhibiting the ‘wrong’ sorts of ‘bonding’ capital in northern towns like Bradford, Oldham and Burnley, and even while Preventing Violent Extremism initiatives focused on ‘radical’ Islam after ‘7/7’ (Birt 2009), under New Labour especially British social and political life was marked by a new and sustained interest in the ‘bridging’ and ‘linking’ capital of ‘faith’ (cf. Putnam 2000). Driven by elements within both national government and the civic-minded Anglican Church since the late 1980s (Taylor 2002), and in addition to a new religion question in the national Census since 2001, there has been a steady stream of documentation emphasizing that ‘relations between faith communities – and in turn between faith communities and local government – can make a significant contribution to promoting community cohesion’ (Local Government Association 2002: Foreword). Here faith is perceived by the secular state as a resource for developing converging values and shared civility in the service of the nation, values said to be enshrined in the ‘core teaching’ of the major religions of the UK: Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Sikhism and Hinduism. It is this regularized idea of religion, rooted in a World Religions discourse and ‘established’ models of church-state relations, which is especially well institutionalized in Leicester, which has its own Council of Faiths and Faith Leaders Forum (Open Society Institute 2010), and was expressed very strongly,

too, in the VHP's contribution to the Manchester session on RE. The latter points us towards another key force in the writing of religion in British Asian localities: transnational religious organizations.

### Resisting Globalized Modernity? Transnational Religious Organizations and Imaginaries

The Birmingham workshop took place at the imposing Nishkam Civic Association on Soho Road, the UK headquarters of the Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha (GNNSJ). A representative of the GNNSJ hosted the event, speaking eloquently about the role of the Centre in providing a local resource for holistic physical and spiritual regeneration in the tradition of Sikh spirituality and service. He also emphasized connections between the Soho Road Centre and those in other parts of Britain, as well as the Panjab, East Africa and North America.

In a panel on politics 'in and beyond the local state', also at Birmingham, one contributor described his involvement in neighbourhood gangs resisting racial assaults in the 1970s and early 1980s. From this position of local 'big man', the contributor described how an Islamic consciousness inspired during the Bosnian conflict of the 1990s saw him become committed to actively resisting the persecution of Muslim brothers and sisters worldwide.

In the late modern age of accelerated globalization, where time and space are increasingly compressed by communications technology, British Asian cities represent key nodes in the construction of a wide range of networks and religioscapes which extend beyond, and arguably sometimes transcend, the spatial scales of both the local and the national (cf. Appadurai 1996). New consciousness of the world as 'a single place' has increasingly enabled religious organizations to operate transnationally amongst dispersed co-ethnics and co-religionists (Levitt and Jaworsky 2007). While for many decades religious teachers in all traditions have toured Britain, preaching to followers, gathering funds and initiating

projects, and while UK based devotees made pilgrimages overseas during the same period (James 1974; McLoughlin 2009b), since the 1980s especially the more or less instant magnification of distant events by the global media has also seen diasporic religious constituencies mobilize in support of causes in the homeland and beyond. From the storming of the Golden Temple at Amritsar in 1984 (Tatla 1999; Singh and Tatla 2006), through the destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in 1992 (Kundu 1994; Burlet and Reid 1998; Bhatt 1997), to the more recent wars in Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003 (Abbas 2005), what Anderson (1992) describes as 'long distance nationalism' has taken a number of (often highly factionalized) forms including fundraising and charitable giving, lobbying governments and international human rights organizations, exploiting the media (new and old), as well as more directly militant activities. In this section, then, we are interested in how complex exchanges and multi-directional flows, set against uneven global relations of power, constitute what we see as distinctive multi-local, trans-local and supra-local circuits and imaginaries (cf. Vertovec 2000, 2004; Tweed 2006; Vásquez 2011), thus revealing the 'writing' of religion in quite contradictory ways.

The first vignette reflects upon the Nishkam Centre and the global religious sant or saint-led organization behind it, the GNNSJ, first formed in Leeds during the 1970s by Baba Puran Singh from Kericho in Kenya (Kalsi 1992: 79-81; Singh and Tatla 2006: 75). Articulating a particular kind of spiritual resistance to contemporary problems, the Centre representative explained that whereas in the 1970s and 1980s

British Asians confronted a ‘clear enemy’ in the form of overt and institutional racism, he saw current threats in terms of the alienating impact on identity of permissive global capitalist culture. The Nishkam Centre consequently focuses on making Sikh tradition accessible as a resource for spiritual regeneration, with the associated gurdwaras of the GNNSJ having a reputation as ‘models of good practice’ in this regard (cf. Singh and Tatla 2006: 92). Articulated in the familiar register of World Religions - ‘Eastern religions’ being particularly identified with spirituality - and directed against a non-specific ‘enemy’, this kind of resistance resonates with some dominant discourses of the UK nation-state. As with the VHP’s projection of tolerant universal religion at the Manchester workshop (see also Zavos 2010; Zavos et al. 2012), the emphasis of the GNNSJ on global spirituality can quite readily accommodate itself to the project of community cohesion, multiculturalism and good faith relations including the hosting of interfaith events.<sup>14</sup>

The multi-local dimensions of such agendas for spiritual resistance were dramatically expressed at the Nishkam Centre through its connectedness to GNNSJ centres worldwide. Video-conference facilities in Birmingham and localities in Kenya, India and beyond enable real-time meetings of the organization that simultaneously embed its members in different locations (cf. Levit and Jaworsky 2007). There is also an online TV channel ([www.gnnsj.tv/](http://www.gnnsj.tv/)). The heart of this network was represented as a large and technologically sophisticated building in the Sikh homeland of Amritsar. In and through this network, then, a vision of the Sikh

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<sup>14</sup> Organizations that are not dominant in terms of numbers can target and gain access to legitimation and power via multi- and inter-faith spaces (cf. Bhatt 1997).

community is imagined which is at once a part of, and yet providing a dissenting alternative to, the trajectories of contemporary globalization. Notably, however, this vision maps very clearly onto the diasporic networks created by migration from Panjab and settlement in places like Kericho and Birmingham. It suggests a particular kind of transnational religious imaginary, configured through the resonant certainties of known multi-local spaces and embodied practices: networks of language, place and kin, the visibility of familiar cultural signs and symbols, and a distinctive historical consciousness (cf. Cohen 1997/2008).

While these certainties, interwoven with the ideas of global spirituality and moral resistance noted above, sit comfortably with the concerns of the state, other forms of religious resistance to globalized modernity are far less readily accommodated. These tend to transgress some of the certainties of both multiculturalism and the discourse of religion or faith as a cohesive and integrative force. Like the Rushdie Affair, Gulf War<sup>15</sup> and the more recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the second vignette suggests how the Bosnian war catalyzed a new consciousness of global Islamic identity for one participant who had previously been preoccupied with ethno-national horizons. The former Guantanamo Bay detainee, Moazzam Begg (2006), who was raised in Birmingham of Pakistani parentage, has told a very similar story in his autobiography, *Enemy Combatant*. In this regard, McLoughlin notes that ‘the power of a localized politics that speaks in the name of the ummah [community of Islam] is precisely in its construction of a community that goes

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<sup>15</sup> Werbner (1994, 2002) has described how Manchester Pakistanis supported Saddam Hussain in what seemed like an ‘anti-local’ sentiment during the 1990-1 Gulf War.

beyond the local and the national to the global...’ providing a source of authority to ‘say something about the world today from a position that is not centred on the West’ (1996: 223).

This self-positioning of certain British Asian subjectivities as avowedly ‘Muslim’ is explored in McLoughlin’s (1996) ethnography of a charity dinner in Bradford during 1994. Intended to raise funds for Muslim communities suffering the effects of the conflict in Kashmir as well as Bosnia, the dinner was arranged by a committee of local businessmen, frustrated by the West’s seeming lack of interest in these crises. While the businessmen simply appealed to self-help as a religious duty, most of the speeches at the dinner – delivered by representatives of various internationally-networked Islamist organizations based in the UK<sup>16</sup> - were marked by a more radicalizing agenda. The ummah was consistently invoked as the principle arena of responsibility for all Muslims everywhere, a site of necessary and active resistance both to particular, explicit persecution and a more generalized sense of victimization of, and conspiracy against, Islam. McLoughlin interprets the appeal of such radicalizing rhetoric as grounded in resistance to localized forms of exclusion: ‘the continued disenfranchisement of Muslims [in Britain] can be seen as contributing to their desire to invite speakers who could “turn the world inside out” (Gilsenan: 1982) by imagining an empowering alternative ... to that of Muslims’ excluders’ (1996: 221). In this representation of Muslim identity in Bradford, then, the idea of an alternative, utopian, as well as

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<sup>16</sup> For instance, there were two speakers from the so-called ‘Muslim Parliament’. For a revealing account of the Muslim Institute – the UK-based organization behind the Parliament – and its international backers, see Sardar’s (2004) autobiography, *Desperately Seeking Paradise*.

potentially millenarian and apocalyptic, moral space exceeding the limits of their diasporic location and minority status is articulated. Familiar multi-local diasporic circuits were partly visible in the emphasis on Kashmir, but greatly overlaid, extended and transcended by the trans-local focus on Bosnia, an unfamiliar land- and ethno-scape for most South Asian Muslims. However, the dinner also temporarily and rhetorically wrote Bradford Muslims as part of a supra-local, amorphous, extra-territorial imagined community (cf. McLoughlin 2010). Moreover, the limits of religion as 'faith' were also transgressed, with constructions of a self-sufficient and activist Islamic identity cutting across the idea of religion as a site of passive compassion or underlying spiritual values.

#### Between Religion and non-Religion: Demotic Traditions and Utterances

In Tower Hamlets, an elderly male participant spoke in Bangla (with translation) about his passion for Baul singing and composing. Inspired by the Sufi Muslim-Vaishnavite Hindu popular religious culture of the wandering fakirs of rural Bengal, he emphasized the pleasure he still gains from its moving mystical and humanistic poetry – 'Singing is the best prayer to God [and] serving humanity is the best sort of spirituality'. However, he also complained that in Tower Hamlets there was no recognition of - or investment in supporting - this tradition, although others added that the music and song of the Bauls was at the root of many new forms of urban music that have become popular in diaspora.

At Birmingham a representative of the Nishkam centre explained why it was not appropriate to perform Bhangra in a space with a spiritual foundation. As discussion continued, he contrasted the 'questionable' morality of Bhangra with the devotional tradition of singing Kirtan (hymns). Nevertheless, the relationship between Bhangra's folk origins and more overtly religious / spiritual musical and dance forms in Panjab was an important part of the discussion. A participant spoke about the way in which Bhangra had created semi-autonomous spaces for Asian youth, both men and women, to express themselves as individuals away from the gaze of disapproving elders and organizations. He himself perceived Bhangra in part as a form of spiritual release cross-cutting different traditions.

Rooted in the criss-crossing regional traditions of Bengal and Panjab, both these accounts call attention to the embodied practice and affective qualities of religiosities and spiritualities in shared popular cultural forms. The vignettes also suggest how, when viewed through the lens of late modernity, the ‘religious’ dimensions of music and dance, as well as poetry and folk cosmologies, often struggle to come into representation. Recalling our introductory remarks, this section, then, brings us finally to what Mandair calls ‘religion-without-religion’ (2006: 106), that is the possibility of an account of religion which does not collude with the colonial-cum-multicultural framing of ‘Sikh’, ‘Muslim’ and ‘Hindu’ religiosity in terms of distinctive traditions and identities. Thus we emphasize the way that both hybrid cultural forms and subjectivities resist their marginalization and disciplining by secular nation-states, neo-orthodox movements and consumer capitalism. In contrast to the ‘in-between’ religious traditions of the Ravidasis and Valmikis who, as discussed earlier, eventually established their own institutions in response to exclusion and fission, consideration is given here to some of the less formally organized and readily institutionalized or standardized guises of religion in everyday practice. If the Baul tradition represents a more established syncretic tradition, we are also interested in more fleeting, fragmented and individualized acts of agential ‘utterance’ (cf. Hall 1997: 33) and performance (Butler 1997; Mahmood 2005) which defy easy categorization.

The two vignettes provide momentary insight into this demotic British Asian mosaic of ‘religioning’ (Nye 2000), that is, the embedded cultural practice of ‘doing’ religion in particular locations. In Tower Hamlets, Bengalis opposed to institutional ‘fundamentalism’ (which they associated with the East London Mosque) nostalgically valorized a syncretic, socially and spiritually radical tradition as the heart of spirituality in rural Bengal.<sup>17</sup> However, the Baul singer’s complaints about a lack of public recognition and resources suggested a stark contrast between this valorization of the spiritual and the present-day experience of this traditional exponent of the art form. The singing of Bauls, in this sense, had a double location, constructed both as an iconic and yet now marginalized religious formation – caught, as it were, in the act of transmission. In Birmingham, while trying to defend against any suspicion of fundamentalism, a representative of the GNNSJ drew the religion/non-religion boundary very clearly between the devotions of Kirtan and what he and some others saw as the decadence of contemporary MTV-style ‘gangsta’ Bhangra. Enquiring whether the two were inevitably in tension, others at the event sought – again, somewhat nostalgically - to excavate a common Panjabi folk origin which drew less of a distinction between religion and non-religion. At the same time, the assertion of a Bhangra-based spirituality of the self by some participants was evidence of new and highly individualized translations of this tradition in the very ‘fabric of the secular’ (cf. Knott 2005), something unrecognizable in the institutional context of the Nishkam Centre.

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<sup>17</sup> See Gardner (1995) on Islam in Sylhet. N.B. Kobi Nazrul (d.1976) was also a twentieth century poet in this ‘rebel’ mould.

Elaborating the ‘TranslAsian’ (Kaur and Kalra 1996: 233) journeys of the musical forms identified in such ‘utterances’ and performances, Ashwani Sharma describes a music shop not far from the Nishkam Centre along Birmingham’s Soho Road. There he describes ‘Apache Indian being drowned out by the frenzied poetry of the great Qawwal Aziz Mian’ (1996: 15). Sharma highlights the processes of erasure intrinsic to the packaging and marketing of the world music scene, through which the Sufi roots of Qawwali are lost in hybridizing and commoditizing processes which ‘reduce the music to an aesthetic form’ (1996: 24). At the same time, he sees ‘potential subversion’ in Aziz Mian’s collaborative performance alongside post-punk, post-Bhangra, rappers Fun-Da-Mental (1996: 29). This entangled intersection of ‘ecstatic poetics ... with ... militant rhetorics ... disrupts any easy exegesis’ (1996: 30), while at the same time finding an activist convergence between the subversive socio-critical spirituality of Panjab’s Sufi-Sant tradition (McLoughlin and Khan 2006) and Aki Nawaz’s Islamist-influenced lyrics.

Sharma’s identification is a rare indication of the kind of utterance and performance that needs to be analysed in the context of re-thinking British Asian religioning. Elsewhere Ballard (2006) documents the presence of popular Islamic traditions in Britain, explaining that the more spiritual and occult dimensions of Panjabi popular belief and practice have been translocated alongside more formal aspects of religiosity associated with the mosque. While it was often the poetry

and music of the Sufi-Sant tradition that provided psychological and spiritual succour to early migrants (2006: 176), most settlers who find themselves facing intractable personal difficulties – in particular women - continue to turn to folk practices grounded in vernacular cosmologies for support. ‘Slowly but surely’, Ballard notes, ‘the whole panoply of popular practice in rural Panjab is steadily being recreated in Britain’ (2006: 180). In the same way, Knott’s CRP account of Hinduism in Leeds flags ‘unorganised religion’ in the private / domestic space especially (1986a: 157f, 168).<sup>18</sup> Such demotic, embodied practices are also described, for example, in Nadeem Aslam’s (2004) novel, *Maps for Lost Lovers*, set in the unidentifiable English town assigned the dolefully diasporic pseudonym of *Dasht-e-Tanhai* (the Desert of Solitude). Amongst his characters is the indefatigable *Kaukab* whose religiosity is bound up with regional oral traditions, vernacular rituals and vows seeking relief from *kismet* (matters concerning fate).

Academic work, however, tends to focus on what Ballard (2006: 180) describes as the ‘recreation’ of Panjabi religiosity in Britain – the overwhelming emphasis on trans-temporal continuity in the face of change amongst first generation migrants. Against such a context, second and third generation British Asians are generally portrayed as resisting such processes. The present chapter, however, begins to point the way towards the everyday negotiation and improvisation of British Asian religioning in spaces not normally associated with the discourse of ‘religion’. In terms of music and performance, the ubiquitous multicultural mela

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<sup>18</sup> See also Nesbitt (1991) on children’s constructions of their syncretic Ravidasi identities, as well as her CRP monograph on British Sikh children (2000) and reflections on ethnographic approaches to RE (2004).

(fair) is also of interest. Although this space has been documented and analyzed from the point of view of its projection as ‘heritage multiculturalism’ (Bhattacharyya 1998; cf. Qureshi 2010), it can also be viewed as a multi-layered ‘fun’ space in which a variety of dominant and demotic discourses and practices intersect, become entangled and sometimes clash, as unpublished field-notes from Bradford suggest:

The Aissawa Sufi brotherhood from Morocco were performing on stage and producing a rather different version of Islam than the radical Islamist representatives of Hizb ut-Tahrir, who had set up a small public address system and were lecturing Muslims on ‘not dancing to the Sikh Bhangra music’ of XLNC. As with the Qawwalis that weekend, the Moroccans entertained and were appreciated by an audience that was both Muslim and non-Muslim. Elderly Sikhs waddled forward and offered £5 and £10 notes as the dhikr (remembrance, repetition of the name of God) bellowed out ‘Allah, Allah’. As some people danced at the front, encouraged by the musicians on stage, a young black-African Muslim woman dressed in hijab became entranced by the dancers. After a moment’s hesitation, she was moved to join them. (McLoughlin 1995)

Werbner (2004) contrasts hybrid ‘fun’ spaces, based on a shared South Asian popular culture of music, dance, film, celebrity, fashion and food, with the focus on purity in spaces of institutionalized religion. Giving expression to the agency and autonomy of young people in particular, the former can be deeply critical of the parochialism and conservatism of male leaderships associated with the latter. While Werbner’s analysis does not seem to imagine the possibility of a non-institutionalized guise for religion, our focus on demotic traditions, utterances and performances here suggests that there may be ways of analyzing more ludic vehicles for religiosity in British Asian cities.

## Conclusions: Rethinking Religion in the British Asian City

This chapter began by noting the comparative lack of theorization on religion in diaspora studies. Our intention has therefore been both to reflect on this lacuna and to explore new ways of harnessing the potential of recent theoretical advances in the study of religion to better comprehend 30 years of writing about South Asians in Britain. In particular we have highlighted the significance of spatial location and scale, pointing to the work of Knott (2005) and others in this regard. Thus, we have examined the way in which the category of religion is located in terms of four distinctive, if interrelated, spatial scales and their related processes: i) the formation of neighbourhood congregations and ‘communities’ in the context of urban resettlement; ii) regulation and recognition by public institutions and the local/national state in multicultural politics and policy-making; iii) the networking and activism of transnational organizations which sustain multi-, trans- and indeed supra-local circuits of religious connection and imagination; iv) the everyday utterances and performances of individuals and other non-institutionalized collectives. By way of conclusion, then, we underline how particular dimensions of space (physical, imagined and social), as well as its’ various properties (local configuration, multi-local simultaneity, trans-temporal extension, power relations), all begin to converge in different ways at each scale (Knott 2005; cf. Lefebvre 1991; Massey 1993).

CRP research in the 1970s and 1980s took as its focus the most tangible physical sign of South Asian ‘religioning’ (Nye 2000) in British Asian cities, that is, places

of worship and their congregations living in the immediate neighbourhood and beyond. This work illuminated the crucial trans-temporal function of religion as a ritual and symbolic resource, which enables migrants both to re-imagine and perform a sense of continuity with homeland beliefs and practices (Vásquez 2011). That such religioneering continues to be produced simultaneously by multi-local forces is underlined, for instance, by a continuing preference to ‘import’ religious functionaries from home. However, the highly selective and self-conscious re-invention of tradition in contexts of migration was also shown to be intrinsically responsive to local configuration (Knott 1986a). Moreover, processes of institutionalization in diaspora have necessitated temporary, contextual co-operation (fusion) across deeply felt social divisions (Bowen 1987, 1988), especially when presenting a comprehensible public face to outsiders. However, as centres of high material and political value, and as populations have grown, they have also been a location for fissive (and sometimes violent) factional struggles over status and power relations, as well as instruments of ‘sanctified’ social exclusion (Kalsi 1992). Underlining the capacity of religion to contextually reinforce as well as transcend ethnicity and caste, the CRP archive demonstrates that the formation of religious communities and congregations both affirms and challenges the World Religions paradigm.

Such dynamism is evident, too, in the power relations at work in the processes whereby the largely secularized imaginary of the UK state and its public institutions shape the ‘writing’ and representation of religion. While reflecting

trans-temporal traces of colonial governance (Mandair 2006), ‘multicultural’ approaches to the recognition and regulation of British Asian diasporas are differently configured locally and nationally. From the 1960s until a change in the 2000s, the UK offered protection in law against racial and ethnic but not religious discrimination. However, to manage social relations more locally during the 1980s, councils in areas of high South Asian settlement found it politically expedient to ‘incorporate’ (Baumann 1999) religious leaders, accommodating claims which have often concerned physical practices, such as turban-wearing or eating halal meat. Thus, as well as reinforcing the power of male elders over ‘communities’, religion was racialized as a matter of descent. However, with the nation-state perceived to be exposed to simultaneous global and local insecurities after ‘9/11’ and ‘7/7’, as well as the riots in northern England during 2001, this discourse has remained both in tension and entangled with the idea of religion as ‘faith’. Appropriated by the New Labour government (1997-2010) for the communitarian project of community cohesion, and with an established church often acting as gatekeeper, while racialized Muslim communities in particular are criticized for a ‘self-segregating’ excess of bonding capital, faith is projected as ‘bridging’ capital – a common denominator of the universal signifiers of respect for difference and spirituality. This tension is aptly represented in a statement by the Department of Environment’s Inner Cities Religious Council: ‘religions are divisive, but faith and ideals unite, by sharing values’ (Taylor 2002: 268).

As ‘the original globaliser’ travel has long since been the very means by which religion flourishes. Though they may have more or less centralized or devolved authority structures (Levitt 2003), transnational religious organizations such as the GNNSJ inevitably develop locally configured vernacular forms. However, as we have seen, they also appropriate the technologies of globalized modernity to transcend their immediate physical emplacement, sustaining social relations which simultaneously anchor them in homelands old and new. The GNNSJ’s revivalist imagining of a return to traditional spirituality, so as to resist the present ‘threat’ of globalized consumer capitalism, chimes with aspects of the UK faith industry. However, in contrast, the idea of the Islamic ummah was invoked in Birmingham out of the frustrating experience of being Muslim in diaspora (cf. McLoughlin 1996, 2010). Trans-temporally produced by the sufferings and injustices of colonial and postcolonial power relations from the Middle East to the Balkans, it is a powerful motivation to trans-local action overseas for some. However, for many more it is a resource with which to momentarily imagine utopian or millennial spaces, a supra-local moral and political order to rival the universal claims of the West (cf. Sayyid 1997; Tweed 2006; Vásquez 2011).

By seeking to transcend place through appeals to religious universals, de-territorializing revivalist rhetoric can create significant tensions vis-à-vis everyday religious lives. For example, while imagining their own supra-local cosmologies incorporating the supernatural and fate, and remaining central to the provision of succour outside authorized religious spaces in diaspora (Ballard 2006), trans-

temporal folk traditions such as those associated with devotional Baul singing and mystical poetry have often been re-categorized (and dismissed) as ‘local custom’ by neo-orthodox movements. While attention to such traditions thus reveals uneven power relations between social groups, it is also a reminder that popular culture can become a vehicle for social criticism. Moreover, it highlights, too, the realities of locally configured and vernacular improvisations of religioning at the physical scale of the embodied individual, the domestic sphere and in other less institutionalized spaces. So, while the traditional Panjabi dance and music of Bhangra is now produced simultaneously by a consumer capitalism clearly marked as non-religious, challenging ‘religion-culture’ and ‘religion-secular’ dichotomies (cf. Knott 2005) enables a re-thinking of its potential to be contextually re-appropriated for a novel spirituality of the self.

Our examination of religion in different spaces and at different scales of British Asian cities emphasizes that religion is ‘a location for understanding a regime of knowledge-power’ (Carrette in Knott 2005: 83) and that religious identifications are ‘situational, based on syncretic and hybrid processes of construction and innovation’ (Nye 2001: 277; cf. Stewart and Shaw 1994). Our focus on locality and location has also been fruitful in developing a critical perspective on ‘those approaches which take ‘World Religions’ and generic religious categories and dimensions as their objects of study’ (Knott 2005: 123). Of course, the idea of World Religions and invocations of generic religious categories are plainly evident in the dominant institutional and organizational spaces we have examined,

from communities and congregations, to the state and public services, to transnational religious organizations. However, we have also explored what Mandair (2006) identifies as the more ‘unrecognizable’ aspects of religion disallowed by modern constructions of the category. So, in the same way that reflecting critically upon the label ‘British Asian’ produces ‘a confusion of the possibility of both terms’ (Sayyid 2006: 7), critical reflection on religion in relation to some of its cognates, including race, faith, culture, spirituality and the secular, has provided us with an opportunity to ‘confuse’ the categories of ‘religion’ and ‘non-religion’. In particular, attention to demotic arenas of religioning recognizes the vitality of diverse utterances and performances which, in one way or another, often exceed the limits of what is usually ‘written’ as religion in postcolonial Britain.

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