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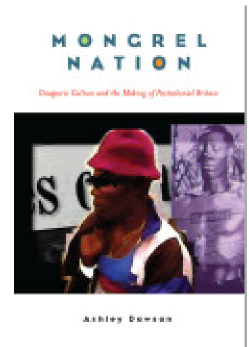

Published by University of Michigan Press

Dawson, Ashley.
Mongrel Nation: Diasporic Culture and the Making of Postcolonial Britain.
University of Michigan Press, 2007.
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Heritage Politics of the Soul

Immigration and Identity in Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*

On 27 March 1989 a large protest of twenty thousand or more Muslims from around Britain and the rest of Europe marched through central London to condemn Salman Rushdie's affront to Islam in his recently published novel *The Satanic Verses* and to call for the book's banning. This demonstration was one of the most important protests in a season of discontent among British Muslims, whose anger at the shortcomings of British multiculturalism had been brewing for most of the decade. Lofting banners calling for "Equal Rights for Muslims," demonstrators congregated outside the Houses of Parliament to burn Salman Rushdie in effigy. Here, a multiracial clutch of activists from the recently formed group Women Against Fundamentalism (WAF) had set up a picket.[1] Their placards called for the repeal rather than the extension of the Blasphemy Law and voiced support for Salman Rushdie's freedom of expression. Arguments quickly flared up over the women's avowed solidarity with Rushdie. Soon, the WAF picket was being attacked by young men from the march as well as by a group of white neofascists, who had accompanied the protest march to express their support for the integrity of Muslim culture. The ensuing melee, in which riot police had to intervene to protect the WAF activists from the enraged crowd, underlined the incendiary quality of conflicts around religion and identity in Britain.

The WAF picket attracted controversy even before the march. Members of the Anti-Fascist League had decided to march alongside the Muslim protesters in order to support the rights of ethnic minorities to resist racism. WAF's picket seemed to fly in the face of this stance of antiracist solidarity. Indeed, by coming out in opposition to what leaders were representing as the common voice of the British Muslim community, WAF was challenging a long-standing tenet of antiracist politics in Britain. Throughout the 1970s and the first half of the 1980s, antiracist politics had pivoted on internal solidarity in the face of the institutional and quotidian manifestations of racism in Britain. It was consequently taboo for Asian and black women to express criticism of gender relations within their communities outside closed community forums.[2] In tandem with such models of defensive solidarity, antiracist leaders lionized the street-fighting prowess of local youth groups, who were seen as defending Asian and black communities from the hostile incursions of neofascist hooligans.[3] Leftist groups such as the Anti-Fascist League echoed this analysis of the militant, largely male youth groups as the authentic voice of Asian and black communities. Yet, by embracing the street-fighting machismo of militant antiracist groups, radical intellectuals had to avert their eyes from the role of many youth groups in colluding with the most conservative elements of communities by policing the conduct of women.[4] In championing black nationalism in such uncritical terms, in other words, theorists of black British social movements reproduced the problematic gender politics of anticolonial nationalism.[5] WAF's picket against the anti-Rushdie demonstration therefore challenged not simply religious fundamentalism but also the essentialism of many progressives in Britain's antiracist movement. For many radical Asian and black women in Britain, holding one's tongue in the name of antiracist solidarity had come by the late 1980s to be analogous to the traditional injunction to preserve community honor or *izzat* by staying silent in the face of gender oppression.[6]

In addition to challenging antiracist models of communal solidarity, however, the WAF picket also flew in the face of dominant media representations of Muslim communities in Britain as homogeneous and extremist. The day after the demonstration, for instance, the *Sunday Times Magazine* ran a major article whose introduction is obviously connected to the events of the preceding day: "For several decades Islamic militancy existed for Britons only as indignantly reported outbreaks in far-off countries of which we knew nothing. The past few

months have shown that it is now a potent, living organism in the body of Britain itself, impossible to wish away or assimilate or suppress."[7] Like much of the rhetoric that circulated in Britain during the Rushdie Affair, the *Times* article tells us more about (non-Muslim) British fears of Muslims than it does about British Muslims themselves. Protests against *The Satanic Verses* suggest to the author that the once hale body of British society has been penetrated by an alien presence, a virus or parasite whose virility explains the alarmed tone of the article's title: "Is Rushdie Just the Beginning?" The article's rhetoric of contamination testifies to a deeply racist conception of the nation as a homogeneous, organic community. Yet it is ironically the presence of the perceived Islamic pathogen that facilitates the retroactive construction of the national body as a sanitary space. The racism inscribed within these metaphors of pollution is one that, in other words, is dependent upon the exaggeration of *cultural* differences, despite the ostensibly somatic rhetoric of disease. As Étienne Balibar argues, this is a racism "whose dominant theme is not biological heredity but the insurmountability of cultural differences, a racism which, at first sight, does not postulate the superiority of certain groups or peoples in relation to others but 'only' the harmfulness of abolishing frontiers, the incompatibility of life-styles and traditions."[8] The image of the nation as diseased site, a once healthy body invaded by a malign cultural virus, legitimates discourses of political prophylaxis designed to reestablish an imaginary healthy state.[9]

As the *Times* article suggests, the Rushdie affair was an opening salvo in what Samuel Huntington, in a much-cited 1993 essay in *Foreign Affairs,* subsequently called a "clash of civilizations" between Islam and the West.[10] Anticipating Huntington's approach, commentators on the Rushdie affair tended to depict Britain as a progressive, secular society whose multicultural, pluralistic values were threatened by bellicose Muslim fundamentalism. This neo-Orientalist binarism is novel to the extent that the Islamic Other is now internal to Europe, rather than, as the *Times* article has it, in far-off countries. Such geographical proximity generates intense anxiety about border crossing and pollution. Indeed, warnings by scholars such as Huntington about the inherently irrational and belligerent character of Islam serve as an *a priori* justification for preemptive measures.[11] These self-fulfilling xenophobic discourses are dependent upon the diminution of both the similarities between "host" and "alien" and the differences within each group. For instance, assertions of British secularism conveniently ignore the fact

that Britain retains a Blasphemy Law whose solely Christian provenance makes explicit both the racial formation and the nonsecularity of the state. Despite the fact that they were habitually described as benighted medievalists, British Muslims calling for the equitable application of the Blasphemy Law were in fact appealing to Enlightenment conceptions of an egalitarian legal system. The similarity between protesters' conceptions of religious offense and those of the establishment in Britain was underlined when Dr. Rubert Runcie, the archbishop of Canterbury, called for the extension of the law against blasphemy to cover religions other than Christianity.[12]

The WAF picket in Whitehall was also established with conflicts around rising fundamentalism in South Asia in mind, and, like those conflicts, suggested that the constitutive contradictions of both multicultural state policy and religious fundamentalism are most evident around questions of gender. Feminists working on the interface between nationalism and gender power have long argued that women play crucial roles, both materially and symbolically, in sustaining communities; characteristically, gender difference is used symbolically to define the bounds of national or communal identity.[13] These observations are even more apt in relation to transnational movements such as religious fundamentalism. Fundamentalist movements of all denominations take this reduction of women to the role of icons of collective integrity to an extreme.[14] As WAF defines them, such movements tend to be organized as vanguardist hierarchies that attempt to take over state power in order to enforce a supposedly divinely mandated morality. This morality typically centers on the control of women's sexuality and behavior as a means to preserve collective identity in the face of various pressures.[15] Women are reduced under such circumstances to vehicles for collective honor and theological orthodoxy.

It is no coincidence that WAF's picket was construed as an assault on community honor during a demonstration against a novel that was itself taken as an affront to *izzat*. As Marina Warner has argued, there is a historical homology between control of the word and control of women in religious movements.[16] Indeed, it was precisely these two aspects of Salman Rushdie's novel that were cited as giving offense and legitimating the subsequent fatwa against the author. Yet Rushdie's depiction of the Koran's fallibility and his defiling of the honor of Muhammad's wives take place within dream sequences experienced by his protagonist Gibreel Farishta. These dreams are a response to the

unstable social conditions Gibreel encounters in India and Britain during the 1980s. Thus, although the novel has often been seen as sparking a Manichaean clash of civilizations, it in fact simply fictionalizes and critiques the unfolding social conflicts in contemporary Britain and India. Moreover, *The Satanic Verses* suggests that forms of symbolic border policing that turn on representations of feminine purity are central to these conflicts. Thus, although Rushdie has often been taken for a doyen of cosmopolitan hybridity, *The Satanic Verses* explores the conditions that generate fundamentalist assertions of identity, suggesting that diasporic experience generates forms of political bifocality that are just as often conflictual as they are hybrid.[17] Rushdie's focus on the homosocial rivalry that develops between his two male protagonists dramatizes the way in which women's identity and rights have frequently been displaced in the internecine struggles of racialized communities within both Britain and India over the course of the last decades.

After the publication of *The Satanic Verses,* Salman Rushdie was attacked not simply by Islamic fundamentalists but also by many progressive intellectuals who saw his work as complicit with Orientalist representations of Islam.[18] Yet, as Rushdie was quick to point out, his novel is just as critical of British racism as it is of Islamism, and in fact sees the two as intertwined in significant ways. While Islamophobia has only escalated in the West since the publication of *The Satanic Verses,* young Muslim men and women have begun forging a European Islam by developing the tradition of *ijtihad,* or independent reasoning.[19] Despite the controversy that it elicited, *The Satanic Verses* needs to be seen as a pioneering attempt to develop this tradition of *ijtihad.* The work of Women Against Fundamentalism marks a similarly early and important initiative whose critical stance in relation to both British multiculturalism and religious fundamentalism breaks down the facile binaries of culture clash theories. By engaging with communal conflict in South Asia and the racialization of diasporic subjects in Britain, Rushdie's novel highlights the extent to which the control of women and their sexuality is a logical outcome of monolithic, exclusionary representations of identity among both dominant and subordinate groups. Through its analysis of this gendered heritage politics, *The Satanic Verses,* like the protests of WAF activists, underlines the reductive character of the culture clash theories that have occupied an increasingly prominent place in the public sphere since the Rushdie affair.

Of Migrations and Metamorphoses

Migration to Britain is an undeniably violent process, a chaotic birth into newness, for Saladin Chamcha and Gibreel Farishta, the twin protagonists of *The Satanic Verses*.[20] Blown out of their plane by a Sikh separatist from Canada, the two fall to earth in a big bang that exposes the fragmented lives of contemporary migrants.[21] For migrants drawn from underdeveloped nations to fill the most menial positions in the labor force of metropolitan countries, international travel involves the fearful negotiation of border controls established precisely in order to regulate the flow of this new industrial reserve army.[22] As Rushdie's narrator suggests, women and children are the primary objects of the inquisitorial gaze of this state bureaucracy. Indeed, this surveillance apparatus penetrates into the most private spaces and, in doing so, makes citizenship rights hinge upon questions of gender. The immigration checks that *The Satanic Verses* itemizes force women to document their marital status through detailed description of their husbands' genitals, underlining the state's recognition of their identity solely as legal appendages to their husbands. In addition, such checks suggest the homosocial bonds and animosities of the nation-state, for, despite the increasing exploitation of immigrant women's labor within the metropolis, it is the absent phallus of the male immigrant that is the ultimate object of the state's attention. The paranoid gaze that seeks out these disseminatory objects is, of course, animated by fear of the growth of Britain's nonwhite population as a result of the reunion and propagation of Asian and black families.[23] Finally, such prying examinations emphasize the assumed alterity and illegality of *all* nonwhite migrants: the "reasonable" facade of the immigration control apparatus obscures the systematic forms of racialization that it effects upon both immigrants and citizens.

Discussing the British Nationality Act of 1981, Louise London and Nira Yuval-Davis argue that the act's implementation of a two-tiered system that distinguishes between "Patrial UK" and "Commonwealth" citizens has underlined the gendered nature of access to the rights of a British subject. The act's increased emphasis on women as reproducers of the national collectivity—women now being transmitters of citizenship to their children—has gone hand in hand with a campaign involving the racialized delimitation of the rights of belonging within that collectivity.[24] The Nationality Act culminates a succession of measures that reframed rights of belonging by limiting citizenship to already estab-

lished resident citizens and to the descendants of white British citizens. As commentators have pointed out, Britain thus aligned itself with the European *gastarbeiter* model, in which the costs of reproducing migrant labor were displaced onto underdeveloped nations through the host country's refusal to grant citizenship rights to the immigrant labor force.[25] Under such conditions, the ethnic and gendered specificity of nationalist ideology becomes ever more apparent.[26]

Having thus shorn itself of its legal responsibilities for its former colonial subjects, Britain had by the Thatcher era become decisively postcolonial. The "debris of the soul"—empty signifiers such as *belonging* and *home*—that plummet down from the shredded fuselage of the *Bostan* jetliner in the opening pages of *The Satanic Verses* are the specific products in the first instance of separatist terrorism. Behind this initial explosion, however, lie the increasingly racist definitions of national belonging codified as Britain's postwar economic boom wound down, emptying words such as *belonging* and *home* of meaning for members of the Asian diaspora in Britain. Fragmentation and double consciousness result, in other words, from the intertwined patterns of globalization and renationalization that Britain has undergone rather than from some vague ontological condition of exile. While this denial of statutory rights does not legally affect the bulk of the postwar immigrant population of Britain, the tendency is for all those who do not *appear* "British" or, worse still, "English," to be treated as possible aliens.

Such state-sanctioned ethnic absolutism brings its institutional power to bear very differently on men and on women. Women, in particular, are frequently represented as the reproducers of threatening forms of internal difference. Indeed, British feminists have expressed fears that, despite the relatively egalitarian postwar state provisioning of reproductive consultation and services, abuses of minority women's reproductive rights may become more widespread given the ongoing moral panic over the pollution of the racial stock of the nation.[27] Contemporary politicians continue to employ the racist rhetoric of national reproduction characteristic of the imperial epoch, despite the exit of Margaret Thatcher and her infamous fear of "swamping."[28]

Notwithstanding the racism Asian and black Britons are likely to encounter within this context, Rushdie's narrator refuses to see migration simply as a condition of deracination. Diaspora in the novel involves not just the discontinuous experience suggested by the *Bostan*'s "debris of the soul," but also processes of mutation that generate "new-

ness." These processes raise the question of whether a notion of essential identity is possible in light of such transformations, and of what attitudes the translated will assume in order to make sense of their disjunctive experience. Rushdie's narrator poses such questions explicitly: "How does newness come into the world? How is it born? Of what fusions, translations, conjoinings is it made?" (8). Rushdie asks here not only what forms of hybridity are generated by diaspora experience, but also, crucially, what sorts of heritage politics and ethnic absolutism such displacements give rise to. Despite the dissemination associated with diaspora, the politics of identity consolidation operate in a tense, dialectical relation to those of hybridization.[29] In the context of the highly fluid conditions of today's global cultural economy, the assertion of transcultural affiliation by diaspora populations has become an important strategy for proclaiming the solidarity of racialized national minorities with transnational communities and their wider horizons and histories of struggle.[30] Such practices do not, however, necessarily lead to an embrace of self-consciously hybrid cultural practices and identities. These changes also antagonize groups intent on consolidating the boundaries between imagined communities using various forms of ethnic absolutism.

Crashing to earth in the middle of the *Bostan*'s welter of exploded hopes, Gibreel and Saladin undergo a metamorphosis that suggests the impact of this new cartography of social space. The pair is initially posed as antithetical through the songs they sing as they drop toward the English Channel. Gibreel croons a *ghazal* of reincarnation that embraces discontinuity and death as well as a ditty from an old Bombay film in celebration of the hybridity of Indian national identity; the assimilated Saladin, by contrast, stolidly replies with the British national anthem. A polyglot Indian actor floats toward an Anglophile NRI ventriloquist through the clouds as two diametrically opposed responses to postcolonial experience and migration meet and mix. Despite his Anglophile resistance to Gibreel's embraces, Saladin finds his identity growing fluid like that of his companion. The mutation that he feels himself undergoing undermines the English identity he has so carefully constructed for himself during his years as an expatriate. Saladin is ushered through this metamorphosis into the double consciousness of the trans-lated, of the migrant whose physical peregrinations establish the possibility of multiple sites of affiliation. Saladin's celestial mutation fuses him, reluctantly, with the self-conscious hybridity of Gibreel, the Bombay cinema star.

This scene draws attention to the particularly gendered form of such postcolonial hybridization by pointing to the strains placed upon homosocial bonds within such a context. For Rushdie's twin protagonists fall toward the English Channel in a position whose homoeroticism dramatizes the fear of *unmanning* associated with cultural translation. If, as Robert Young's work has emphasized, hybridity is a fundamentally heterosexual category marked by trepidations over miscegenation, then this opening scene of the novel highlights the homosocial site of bonding normally left unmarked by discourses of hybridity.[31] Just as the turn-of-the-century equation of sexual "deviancy" with racial degeneration marked the instabilities in colonial technologies of sexuality by multiplying the qualifiers for whiteness, so this moment of metamorphosis in Rushdie's text suggests a crisis in the identity of his two protagonists.[32] This crisis turns upon the ambivalence of the homosocial bond that links them. In this scene, the foundational bond that anchors national identity and communal solidarity tips over into a homoerotic relation, one that offers the two protagonists intertwined in an embrace that is traditionally identified with a threat to rather than a pillar of the homosocial order. The sliding of the mimetic desire that marks the homosocial continuum into same-sex desire marks a dangerous supplement to the thematic of doubling traced in Gibreel and Saladin's descent. This errant form of hybridity is connected to a particular set of phobias associated with globalization and migrancy. The product of a mutability that threatens homosocial community, this *degenerate* hybridity is produced by an experience that disrupts stable frontiers, internal and external, personal and political. Resistance to the disseminatory impact of contemporary cultural flows thus tends to take a peculiarly gendered form, one in which fears of the erosion of male identity bring to light the aggression that undergirds the homosocial continuum.

Religious Communalism and the Rupturing of National Allegory

Gibreel's *ghazal*-chanting during his drop toward the drink may be more charismatic than Saladin's rigid mimicry of British nationalism, but it is no less flawed a response to the traumas of migration. For his celebration of the hybridity of the Indian everyman is predicated on an

increasingly hollow representation of national reality. Indeed, in Gibreel's reaction to the *Bostan* disaster, Rushdie is satirizing one of the most powerful representations available of Indian national identity: the Bollywood hero. The song Gibreel sings is, in fact, lifted from a famous Bollywood film that emphasized the adaptive capacity of Indians. As Sumita Chakravarty's work on Indian popular cinema suggests, the malleable persona of the male film protagonist serves as an allegory of the successful fusion of the multiple forms of difference, from class and caste to region and religion, that characterizes the Indian nation.[33] Consciously exploiting the resources of male masquerade and impersonation, the Bombay film star reconciles national binarisms such as the Hindu-Muslim split by suggesting that such differences are merely superficial, that difference is, after all, only skin deep. Drawing on Bombay cinema's textual practice of male masquerade, Rushdie's work initially intimates that such hybridity may serve as an allegory for the identity of the migrant. Yet while the mutability of the hero's body in Bombay cinema may suggest the potential resolution of the intractable contradictions of national identity, it nonetheless also intimates the fear of the disjunction and dissolution that animates essentialist reassertions of communal identity. As recent cultural theory has emphasized, the performative aspect of masquerade underlines the nonessential character of gendered being.[34] While this constructivist approach might provide a convenient unifying allegory for an increasingly fragmented polity, it also makes explicit the experience of instability that affects culture and identity within a globalized world and often acts as the catalyst to various forms of ethnic and cultural absolutism. If Gibreel's celebration of hybrid identity allegorizes Indian national identity, it is a consciousness that is ultimately *not* marked by the easy reconciliations imagined by the cinematic tradition.[35]

But of course the Bombay film industry has been kind to Gibreel, and so it behooves him to embrace the form of hybridity that it purveys. Born of a poor *dabbawalla* (porter) who wears himself out catering to the bloated bellies of film industry moguls, Gibreel climbs to stardom by impersonating the myriad deities of India (17). Rushdie casts Gibreel in the role of the ultimate reconciler, the chameleon onto whom the incredibly various population of India can project its greatest hopes and most intimate desires. By literally incarnating the various belief systems that animate much of the nation's populace, Gibreel becomes a metaphorical embodiment of national identity. In fact, the "theologi-

cal" genre that Rushdie invents for Gibreel to star in is based on one of the perennial and defining forms of Indian cinematography: the mythological.[36] One of the pioneer genres in early Indian filmmaking, the mythological quickly came to signify the fundamentally *independent* nature of the national imaginary, for it was on this "interior" ground that India's autonomy from the West could be asserted. As the work of the subaltern studies historians has made clear, it was in the religious and cultural spheres that Indian nationalists found alternative principles of autonomy and national integrity to the British-dominated public, administrative sphere.[37] Indeed, the Indian film industry can be said to have played a pivotal role in integrating the popular classes into the project of nation-building through appropriating forms of folk belief and expression in order to suture the former to the anticolonial, nationalist project. In contributing to the representation of the spiritual realm, Indian popular cinema thus asserted its claim as one of the primary representational forms of the imagined community of the nation. In addition, it presented itself as the facilitating form behind the "passive revolution" through which subaltern opinion was mobilized within the anticolonial struggle.

Gibreel's complete identification with the national imaginary turns his misadventures into an allegory of the breakdown of the secular definition of the state, and, ultimately, of the partial, contradictory nature of nationalist ideology. Despite his success at impersonating the various avatars of India's multiple sects, a "Phantom Bug" that has particularly gruesome effects strikes him down at the height of his fame. Adopting the role of amanuensis of national consciousness, Gibreel's body becomes the locus upon which the violent, sectarian disharmony of national reality is written. The symmetry between Gibreel's impersonation of religious figures and popular belief in this incarnation allows Rushdie to analyze the communal violence that tore apart the national fabric during the 1980s. In addition, this symmetry testifies to the intense contradictions always implicit within the project of nation-formation, to the lack of absolute hegemony of the bourgeois, secular class over the other popular elements swept up in the national struggle for self-determination.

The phantom bug that nearly kills Gibreel finds its corollary in the unraveling hegemony of the nationalist project over the various sects and communal groups that together constitute the Indian polity. This crisis became increasingly prominent during the 1980s with the decline

of state commitment to the values that facilitated modernization, among which secularism, equal opportunity, and social welfare figured most prominently. Spurred by its flagging electoral prospects, the Congress Party under the leadership of Rajiv Gandhi attempted to make concessions both to the rising forces of Hindu nationalism and to the more militantly fundamentalist elements within the Muslim community.[38] This strategy of conciliating ethnic absolutism appeared to offer an easy resolution to the crisis of the secular Indian state through allowing these two groups to be played off against one another. However, the Shah Bano controversy of the mid-1980s dramatized the impracticality of such a strategy. The Bano affair highlighted the centrality of the question of gender in conflicts over the secular identity of the state and its guarantees of rights to religious minorities. Bano's case turned upon the Indian Supreme Court's ruling in favor of a destitute Muslim woman who sued her husband for support after he divorced her. Muslim leaders interpreted this ruling as a threat to the autonomy of the Muslim community's so-called Personal Laws, which, since independence, have accorded a separate civil code to the Muslim minority. In mobilizing around the question of minority rights, Muslim leaders chose to sacrifice the right of Muslim women to restitution in the name of preserving communal identity. The Indian government's subsequent validation of this position furthered the resulting reification of the question of minority rights by accepting the hard-line fundamentalism of the ulema as the sole representative voice of the minority community. In response to the government ruling, Hindu rightists seized on the notion of "equality" to attack the Muslim community, challenging what they perceived as the government's appeasement of the Muslim leadership. While there was some truth to Hindu rightists' claims that the Personal Laws abrogate the universalistic reach of the constitution by exempting Muslims from the provisions for marriage and divorce codified in the Hindu Code Bill of 1956, these criticisms were hardly made with the good of Muslim women in mind. Conflict between increasingly rigidly defined communal groups thus intensified a form of identity politics in which the question of women's rights was introduced and debated with no concern for ameliorating the conditions of women. Instead, women functioned as pawns in sectarian struggles between incommensurable patriarchies.

In the context of this crisis of the secular nation-state, the status of religion as a folk form that can be appropriated by hegemonic media

such as the cinema is put into question. Religion becomes, instead, a "phantom bug" capable of destroying the body politic. If Gibreel's internal hemorrhaging may be said to represent the increasingly violent communal conflicts within India during this period, then his subsequent crisis of faith is a product of the political exploitation of religion. Indeed, Gibreel's crisis is predicated on the hollowing out of spirituality as a result of such exploitation. Not only do Gibreel's prayers for mercy during his sickness go unanswered, but he gets better as soon as it becomes evident to him that there will be no response to his supplications. The departure of God from Gibreel's universe is significant in that it introduces him for the first time to the idea of living a life not only without divine sanction, but without the kind of security and clarity that such sanction introduced. This revelation of his loneliness in the world opens Gibreel to a terrifying and exhilarating world of possibilities and complexities. A heady one for Gibreel: he has momentarily seen through the Manichaean divisions of the social body imposed by orthodoxy. This epiphany prompts him to fall in love with a white woman and decamp to Britain. The resulting mutations and nightmares situate the crisis of the national body in a transnational framework. The seamless ideological interpellation between Gibreel, Bollywood cinema, and popular elements of the nation thus allows Rushdie to analyze the double consciousness of diasporic communities.

The Textual Politics of Fundamentalist Discourse

In his well-known discussion of nationalism, Benedict Anderson asserts that a sacred community such as Christianity or Islam depends upon a notion of the nonarbitrariness of the sign, of the uniquely sacred character of a *particular* truth-language, to bind radically different cultures into a whole.[39] While Anderson argues that historical sacral kingdoms were fragmented and territorialized during the formation of the nation-state, the rise of various forms of religious fundamentalism around the world suggests that it is secular nationalism rather than religious dogmatism that is in crisis.[40] In fact, fundamentalist movements often animate antihegemonic nationalisms today. Yet fundamentalist movements are extremely heterogeneous, of course, and are just as often complicit with forms of neocolonialism—as the example of Saudi Arabia makes evident—as they are with anti-imperialism. In addition, fun-

damentalist movements manifest themselves among dominant majorities within states as well as in the form of minority movements seeking to promote their beliefs within specific, often ethnically defined constituencies.[41] Finally, although they always repudiate pluralist systems of thought, fundamentalist movements may draw either on experiential values articulated by a charismatic leadership or on the supposedly incontrovertible authority of a sacred text. Ironically, appeals to sacred texts have been an important resource historically for movements seeking to challenge the authority of orthodox religious authorities.[42] In fundamentalism, however, authority lies not in the sacred text itself, despite frequent protestations by leaders to that effect, but rather in the highly authoritarian and almost exclusively male religious figures who claim the right to interpret the text and do so in a selective manner that legitimates their power.[43]

In exercising such interpretive authority, fundamentalist leaders not only evade community sanction through the notion of a God-given interpretive mandate. In addition, leaders' exegetical authority stems from wrenching sacred texts out of the historical continuum in which they were composed and downplaying the complicated generic and aesthetic characteristics of such texts in the name of simplified moral maxims.[44] This co-optation of the text flies in the face of the long-standing interpretive practices that characterize established religious traditions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In this sense, fundamentalism is *not* a return to tradition, as it is often presented as being, but is instead an abrogation of established bodies of textual knowledge and practice. In addition, fundamentalist reading strategies attempt to arrest the mutability of meaning that characterizes language. As Bakhtin argues, individual consciousness is constituted in language, a social and historical form that is, crucially, an arena of class struggle.[45] Indeed, Bakhtin stressed that the inner dialectical quality of the sign becomes most evident at times of social crisis, when the attempts of socially dominant groups to impart stable interpretations of the sign break down and emergent discourses assert themselves. In other words, the antagonism that prevents any final suturing of the social proliferates during moments of organic crisis in which hegemony is challenged on many levels and in many sites, including through conflicting interpretations of sacred texts.[46]

In the polarized social climate of Salman Rushdie's Ellowen Deeowen (London) during the mid-1980s, hegemonic discourse becomes

subject to slippages and inversions that fully dramatize the Janus-faced quality of the sign. As his transformation of the British capital's name suggests, Rushdie's text is filled with puns, double entendres, and other word games that defamiliarize and undermine the claims of hegemonic language to authenticity and authority.[47] While Rushdie's novel delves deeply into the refashioning of the postcolonial metropolis by diasporic residents, it also concerns itself with the disassociation of sensibility experienced by migrants to the metropolis.[48] For many of these migrants, the fetishized authority of the sacred text compensates for the deracinating experiences of migration.[49] In response to what in many instances can be an oppressive textual orthodoxy, *The Satanic Verses* deconstructs the authority of the sacred text of Islam. In highlighting the ambiguity that inheres in the enunciation of divine revelation, Rushdie's fiction hinges not simply on an awareness of language's disseminatory tendencies, but also on the power plays inherent in claims to textual authority.[50] Indeed, Gibreel is quite literally driven mad by the uncontainable heteroglossia of language.[51] The dreams that begin to wrack him shortly after his repudiation of his faith carry Gibreel back to the genesis of Islam. His awareness of the sectarian animus of religion and of the legitimation crisis of national ideology throws Gibreel into an emotional ferment in which he reenacts the Prophet Muhammad's encounter with the angel Gabriel. In rewriting the history of Islam, thereby introducing the Koran's Satanic Verses as well as the pragmatic considerations that impinge upon divine revelation, Rushdie sets out to excavate the forms of *difference* that inhere within the foundation myths of a sacred community.[52] Implicit in this reworking is a critique of the centripetal, hierarchical social structure that the sacred text authorizes. As he had done previously in relation to the nation-state, that is, Rushdie seeks in *The Satanic Verses* to foreground the plural and fragmentary character of a community conceived of, this time, as a transnational sodality.[53]

The central moment within the founding text of a great religion is that of revelation, when the prophet is given the sacred Word that will orient the faithful. Gibreel's dreams on the highjacked airliner *Bostan,* dreams that reenact this moment, raise profound questions concerning the nature of revelation. Gibreel finds himself transformed from the passive witness of the prophet Mahound's experiences to a participant in the drama of revelation as he becomes the angel Gabriel. Faced with the temptation of acknowledging a triumvirate of matriarchal goddesses in

order to gain recognition for Islam, Mahound ascends Mount Cone to consult the archangel. Gibreel is understandably unnerved to find himself thrust into this role of divine intermediary (108). Despite having to adopt an unusually active role during this reenactment of Islamic history, Gibreel finds himself ultimately subservient to the prophet's fierce will. In addition to forcing Gibreel to reject the prescripted roles he has taken up in Bombay "theologicals," the novel suggests that revelation is animated by the prophet's own hunger for divine illumination. The moment of epiphany is not, then, a passive one in which truth is imparted like writing on stone tablets, but one in which the prophet's voracious desire for illumination plays a vital, shaping part. In Rushdie's version of the mystical experience, human beings take on a high degree of agency. While such an interpretation of the mystical experience might constitute a refreshingly anthropocentric view of human interactions with the divine, it does raise questions concerning the fungibility of revelation, particularly given fundamentalist movements' typical emphasis on the nonnegotiable veracity of the Word.

Such questions are brought to the fore when the prophet, whom Rushdie names Mahound, recants on the acceptance of the city of Jahilia's matriarchal goddesses that his preceding fit of revelation licensed. Having learned of Hind and her goddess's implacable opposition to Allah, Mahound scales Mount Cone again to find out whether his original compromise and the resulting henotheistic doctrine is truly God's will. Gibreel is once again forced to play the role of the archangel, wrestling the prophet to the ground before imparting the truth. Mahound's second revelation succeeds both in coping with the changed political situation revealed by Hind and in retaining the absolute authenticity of the Word. In order to sanction this shift, however, Mahound is led to adopt a Manichaean perspective that attributes the former revelation to satanic insurgency. Yet, as Gibreel states, he was present at both revelations (123). In addition, it was Mahound's desire for revelation that animated the angel's words in both instances. Mahound's clean separation of good and evil is, in other words, a convenient fiction. The active role played by Mahound in both revelations undermines such neat binarisms by suggesting that he himself harbors both good and evil, both the will to compromise and the adamant monotheism that comes to define Islam. The absolute categories of Manichaean thought offer Mahound an escape from the complexity and contingency that Gibreel's version of the revelation insists on.

In his anthropocentric description of the satanic verses, Rushdie casts his lot with those who would interpret and reinterpret divine writ for human ends. Rather than seeing revelation as some final pronouncement of the truth, this approach opts for a theology alive to the implications of the hermeneutic circle of interpretation through which meaning and truth are constituted. Such an approach of course challenges the agents of textual and political orthodoxy within Islam. This conflict is figured nowhere more prominently than in Mahound's disciple Salman, who rewrites the verses of the Koran as they are dictated to him by the prophet. In yet another of Gibreel's dreams, Salman returns to Jahilia and tells the aging poet Baal of his loss of faith. Acting as scribe for the increasingly powerful Mahound, Salman has become suspicious of the businessman-like acumen displayed by the archangel's pronouncements (364). These suspicions are heightened when he finds the sacred text confirming Mahound's policy of dispossessing women of the prerogatives that adhered to them in the matriarchal society of Jahilia (366). Remembering the incident of the satanic verses from years before, Salman decides to submit Islam to a test by selectively rewriting bits of Mahound's dictation. Like the satanic verses, Salman's substitutions challenge the infallible status of the sacred text. Not only, then, does the site of enunciation shape religious revelation; Gibreel's dreams also depict the proliferation of divinely ordained rules whose role as instruments of Mahound's personal ends is covered by the thinnest of veils. Within this context, the doctrine of infallibility—which once guaranteed the purity of Koranic doctrine when Mahound was tempted by compromise—is quickly translated into a mechanism for policing orthodoxy. Salman's subversion of the sacred verses therefore constitutes an example of what Bakhtin called the Rabelaisian chronotope: the purging of a transcendental worldview, of a unitary language of truth, through a parodic inversion that casts light upon the dialogic quality of language.[54] Of course, Rushdie intended this section of the novel to indict the textual fundamentalism of militant Islamist groups, whose claims of scriptural authority further their control of the public sphere.[55]

Although he was much criticized during the Rushdie affair for advancing models of postmodern doubt that held little appeal for oppressed members of diasporic cultures, the necessity of challenging authority claims made by patriarchal community leaders was echoed at the time by groups such as Women Against Fundamentalism.[56] Despite

the elements of misogyny that surface in his previous novels, in *The Satanic Verses* Rushdie foregrounds the homology between control of the Word and control of women that characterizes fundamentalist movements. Rushdie's strategy of parodic inversion therefore culminates in the poet Baal's confrontation with Mahound. Faced with the unstoppable rise of Islam to power, Baal underlines the prophet's hypocrisy by elaborating a profane antithesis to the increasingly deified specifics of Mahound's life. The private life of the prophet is rendered glaringly public when Baal suggests that the whores who have given him sanctuary during Mahound's reign each take on the identity of one of the prophet's wives. The bordello's business booms as a result, the titillation of blasphemous prostitution being all the stronger given the severity of Islamic doctrine (380). The brothel becomes a mirror image of Islam, with Baal taking on the role of the prophet by marrying each of the twelve whores and writing verse inspired by the sensual delights of the resulting life (385). When Mahound eventually discovers Baal's subversive strategy, the tale of this ribald parody breaks the faithful up into uncontrollable laughter. As Baal asserts while conceiving his satirical stratagem, "No imperium is absolute, no victory complete" (378). Baal's inversion of the prophet's life draws attention to the unruly desires that emerge from the popular body to disrupt monolithic definitions of the social.[57] Rushdie thereby suggests that fragmentary, nonsynchronous forms of temporality have been implicit not only within modernity and the nation-state, but also within the sacred empires that preceded them.

The danger inherent in Rushdie's parodic approach lies in the fact that, in underlining the fallibility of Islam's sacred language, the author may not be articulating the specific resistant forms of difference inherent within Islam. Indeed, his work is less a recuperation of subaltern knowledge than a satire of a particular grand narrative, one that foregrounds the agency of the lone creative spirit—embodied in the poet Baal—rather than that of subaltern movements.[58] As a result, the set of binary differences Rushdie establishes in this section of the novel provides a highly schematic contrast between a centralized and monologic form of language and a parodic, deconstructive language that questions all forms of power.[59] In addition, Baal achieves his satirical triumph over Mahound using the bodies of the Curtain's whores. Both men, that is, turn women into relatively passive objects who, as the narrator states, "wished to turn themselves into the oldest male fantasy of all" (384).

The novel's parody of the monologic nature of sacred language thus is achieved through the subordination of women figures, who serve, in stereotypical fashion, as allegories of a form of artifice that undermines stable identity and exacerbates textual indeterminacy.[60] Such forms of instability are a calculated affront to the many religious revival groups that have asserted themselves as secular ideologies have become bankrupt. As one of Rushdie's characters says during a discussion later in the novel: "In India, the development of a corrupt and closed state apparatus had 'excluded the masses of the people from the ethical project.' As a result, they sought ethical satisfactions in the oldest of the grand narratives, that is, religious faith" (537). Contemporary Islamicist movements appeal to the premodern notion of a transnational community unified by a sacred language and text in order to justify the assertion of sub- and supranationalisms of various forms using eminently modern means such as the Internet.[61] Such dissenting movements bring to the fore the contradictions within secular nationalism, the necessarily hegemonizing, comprador nature of its project. As in Rushdie's earlier works of fiction, such movements are represented as attempting to mobilize the subaltern elements that have *resisted* interpellation within the grand narrative of the nation. Despite the polarized positions that emerged during the Rushdie affair, however, it should be evident that few Islamic groups subscribe to the monolithic antirationalism with which they are associated in the Western media. Various movements are engaged in complex struggles for hegemony over definitions of Islam in vastly different Arab-speaking nations. Rushdie's use of the Rabelaisian chronotope simplifies this complexity, presenting a battle for control of the public sphere entirely based on an abstract textual politics.

This ahistorical opposition of two different models of reading fails to connect to the conjunctural political conflicts that are driving the rise of various fundamentalist movements.[62] Within a specifically diasporic context, Rushdie's work is easily construed as a challenge to the ties that bind a heterodox community whose power may derive from the very fragmentation of established forms of the social—foremost among which is the nation—taking place today. Ambiguity inevitably infects the site of enunciation in Rushdie's work. Yet it is just such ambiguity and fragmentation that Islamic movements seek to address. As Aziz Al-Azmeh has stressed, the material grounds of the culturalism that is becoming the dominant mode of discourse of racialized minorities in

metropolitan societies lie in processes of structural and spatial segregation, social involution and ghetto formation. A reaction formation to the European racism that helps animate such processes, "Religion under conditions of migration proffers a fetishism of the collective self."[63] Religion, in other words, takes on the role of a subaltern nationalism in search of a prenational utopia.

(En)gendering Heritage Politics

As Rushdie was quick to remind his antagonists following the publication of *The Satanic Verses,* his novel's deconstruction of Islamic revelation takes place within the dreams of Gibreel, a man who is torn by doubts concerning the nature of good and evil. The parodic subversion of authority that takes place in these dreams may therefore be construed as a reflection of Gibreel's own traumatic *lack* of moral clarity. A product of the culture industry, Gibreel is all too aware of the unsettling effects of traditional culture's hybridization. Indeed, the temporal discontinuity inflicted on Gibreel by his serial dreams aptly dramatizes the ideological crisis of the nation.[64] Sacred past, profane present, and future Armageddon become completely jumbled up, divorcing Gibreel from the normative linear temporality of the nation. In addition, Gibreel's profligate past haunts him throughout the novel in the form of apparitions by Reka Merchant, a former lover and suicide. Reka's ghost, moreover, works her revenge on Gibreel through undermining the fixed moral distinctions characteristic of Islam (323). Faced with this disruption of his moral bearings, Gibreel turns to increasingly Manichaean visions of the world to gain a sense of identity through opposition: "Clarity, clarity, at all costs clarity!—This Shaitan was no fallen angel"(353). Gibreel's frantic moral absolutism is founded on a rejection of complexity, a willful attempt to separate the world into binary terms. Such an attempt to demarcate a firm boundary is predicated on an unsettling awareness of a lack of self-identity and of coherence in the social. For example, Gibreel's attempt to redeem London by turning its weather tropical suggests a form of willful ethnic absolutism on the part of this nomad who is unable to accept the muggy, ambiguous cultural climate of the diaspora.[65] As such, this transformation reflects the tendencies toward polarization along racialized lines that has characterized Britain during the post-Fordist era. Gibreel's meteo-

rological machinations offer a powerful symbol of the embattled reactions often produced by the overlapping, disjunctive global order that migrants must inhabit. Ironically, Gibreel's imposition of Manichaean divisions on the world that surrounds him actively *produces* unsettling forms of hybridity.[66] For instance, his attempts to discern and destroy his satanic antagonist lead him into a struggle that turns upon mimetic desire between him and Saladin for Alleluia Cone. Yet the struggle between these male protagonists over Allie emphasizes their kinship rather than their differences from one another. Both men are engaged in a process of projection that hinges upon Allie's impenetrability. Allie signifies a form of identity for both men that they hope will help them escape from the crises of diasporic double consciousness. This projection of imaginary unity and identity onto an Englishwoman is, as was true of Chamcha's relationship with Pamela Lovelace, based on a misperception of her identity on the part of both protagonists.

The root of this mutual attraction and anger toward Allie lies in her ambiguous position vis-à-vis English identity. As a woman, Allie is both subordinate to the patriarchal social conditions in England, and therefore potentially sympathetic to the antiracist struggles of immigrants, and also in a position of dominance as a result of her race. Indeed, Rushdie goes to great lengths to demonstrate the instabilities and uncertainties that plague Allie Cone. Herself a product of the Jewish diaspora, Allie has been traumatized by the suicide of an older sister victimized by the publicity mill and is, rather like Gibreel, haunted by apparitions connected to her mountain-climbing avocation. The glacial bearing that she projects in order to protect herself from intruding eyes infuriates Gibreel, and is the seed for Saladin's Iago-like envious stratagems. Like Pamela, Allie Cone is an example of the complex and unstable constitution of the putatively hegemonic elements of metropolitan society.[67] Notwithstanding these weaknesses, Allie and Gibreel's relationship represents for Saladin the apogee of cultural identity and distinction that he has always sought. The humiliation that begins with his transformation into a satyr culminates in Chamcha's mistaken perception of Gibreel's welcoming party to Britain. It is here that he perceives Gibreel's "possession" of Allie as the capping example of his antagonist's ability to insinuate himself into the English society from which Chamcha himself has been so devastatingly ejected (428). Ironically, it is at this very party that Gibreel's sense that ambiguity is overtaking him is first publicly expressed in the form of violently uncontrollable jealousy.

Allie, who once seemed to Gibreel to harbor the promise of rebirth into a secular life, becomes the subject of his violent fits of misogynistic jealousy. Saladin's obscene telephone calls, which fan this jealousy, are a product of his attempt to derail this apparently idyllic relationship. If he has been denied the middle-class immigrant's fantasy of perfect assimilation, Chamcha is going to see to it that Gibreel and Allie will not play the allegorical role of multicultural lovers. For both men, self-definition involves the instrumentalization of an imagined femininity whose instability is heightened by the specter of a threatening Other.

As Saladin's treachery bites deeper, Gibreel begins to associate Allie with cunning sexual infidelity. All too quickly, she comes to symbolize the temporal and cultural displacements characteristic of the dreams that dislocate his identity. The solidity of Gibreel's own identity thus depends upon the forceful delimitation of Allie's supposed impurity. Indeed, as he falls ever further into the schizophrenic state in which he imagines himself as the archangel, Gibreel begins to mouth misogynistic pieties in a parodic version of the patriarchial logic that animates political Islam (321). Gibreel's suspicion of Allie reveals a strong anxiety over women's power to define men. This anxiety is connected to the creation of imaginary homelands. In a diasporic situation in which points of both arrival and departure are in constant cultural flux, established traditions are eroded and the desire for continuity is frustrated by global communication and commodification.[68] As Arjun Appadurai—picking up on feminist interventions—has argued, under such conditions, "The honor of women becomes a surrogate for the identity of the embattled communities of males while women, in reality, have to negotiate increasingly harsh conditions of work at home and in the non-domestic workplace."[69] As cultural traits become an ever more important index of group cohesion, increasing pressure is placed upon women to play the role of icons of communal identity. At a time of increasingly prominent forms of disjuncture in traditional, spatially static identities, constraints upon women and female sexuality become increasingly evident. Conflicts between differing definitions of community and of spatial identity on levels ranging from the corporal through the local and the national to the transnational play themselves out through attempts to control the role of women as icons of group identity. Within this context, not only is women's self-expression frequently seen as the passive product of masculine agency, but such expression can become the specific target of forms of regulation.

Moreover, in Britain during the 1980s, the multicultural framework tended to define women's demands for equality as outside a poorly understood "Muslim cultural tradition." Drawing on concepts of communal, religious identity codified during the British Raj in order to further imperial rule, multicultural models of ethnic minority communities were predicated on reified, Orientalist models of identity. As Gita Saghal and Nira Yuval-Davis argue, despite its antiracist orientation when compared to the model of assimilation, multiculturalism ironically conferred authenticity and, perhaps more importantly, state funding on community leaders who best embodied these reified models of collective identity.[70] In the name of pluralism, in other words, intolerant identities were often not only accepted as legitimate, but actively supported through the funding efforts of radical local authorities such as the Greater London Council. As a result of multicultural policies, women's demands for equality were often seen as outside the authentic "traditions" of particular ethnic minority communities. At the same time as the state was subsidizing reactionary segments of the Muslim community, conservative leaders within this community employed canny appeals to culture and religion to attack women's autonomous organizing efforts. Women were seen as the carriers of collective cultural values, and regulation of their behavior, preferably within the boundaries of the patriarchal family, would ensure that conservative values would be reproduced both biologically and symbolically.[71]

Given this symbolic struggle over femininity, it is not entirely surprising that Saladin and Gibreel's visions of Allie are eventually channeled into a form of mimetic desire that brings them into direct conflict. Yet this conflict is one that underlines their mutual interrelation. As Eve Sedgwick has emphasized, the homosocial formation of mimetic desire functions to consolidate the bonds—including antagonistic ones—between men.[72] In *The Satanic Verses,* this bond turns upon the nature of identity within the disruptive conditions characteristic of the diaspora. It is for this reason that Chamcha and Gibreel's competition over Allie ultimately devolves into a battle between two opposite but interwoven senses of the self. The battle between Gibreel and Saladin represents a struggle between two principles: a Manichaean division between good and evil versus an uncertain, fragmentary grip on identity (426). This distinction revolves around the question of the attitude of the self toward change, toward the transformations and hybridizations that accompany migration. Saladin, the man who has chosen Lucretius's

doctrine of the discontinuous self to characterize his metamorphosis of identity, represents precisely the kind of ambiguity against which Gibreel is struggling. It is such a tendency toward conflict that leads Gibreel to characterize Chamcha in terms of Fanon's self-hating native, one of the Janus faces of diaspora experience that Gibreel's burgeoning fundamentalism cannot endure (353). Yet the narrator's characterization of the two as conjoined opposites highlights the impossibility of stressing either pure hybridity or pure identity. The two tendencies exist in a tense opposition to one another that frequently leads toward internecine struggle. Gibreel and Saladin thus constitute a specific version of the dialectical relation between tradition and translation. While he engages direct with the models of hybridity advanced by black British cultural studies during the 1980s, Rushdie suggests that an adequate conception of diasporic identity must make space for the mobile identificatory strategies of nomadic subjects. Such subjects are not solely hybrid, but rather inhabit diverse identities, varying from the traditional to the assimilated, depending on the cultural context.[73] It is Gibreel's attempt to purify himself of this performative fluidity of identity that dooms him to increasing disintegration.

Dropping intertextual references to Ahab and Ishmael, Rushdie stages a fiery conclusion in which the two protagonists meet in a showdown at the Shandaar Cafe. Gibreel, hallucinating himself as the angel of the Recitation, bears down on Chamcha, now veritably dripping with evil, in order to avenge the destruction of his relationship with Allie. Despite this seemingly victory of the forces of Manichaean difference, the narrator poses a series of questions that suggest that the self is a heterogeneous entity whose moral proclivities cannot be foreseen (467). Rushdie's sense of the conflicting selves that inhabit each of us allows him this one final moment of grace, a moment in which the trajectories of both men are momentarily reversed. In saving Chamcha from the fires of purification, Gibreel surrenders his zealotry in recognition of the complexity of Chamcha's character. This moment of grace suggests the ultimate futility of attempting to adjudicate the competing claims of essentialism and pluralism on a purely theoretical level. It is only by witnessing the specific performative claims asserted within any particular historical conjuncture that we can clarify our identities and their modes of constitution. In a world in which accession to power is more than ever accomplished through, rather than being a precondition of, making good on claims to identity, this emphasis on the performative brings

a salutary specificity to bear. Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* documents the pivotal role played by gender in the delimitation of identity in a global cultural economy. The increasing pressure placed upon racialized groups to legitimate their claims to ethnic identity necessarily dictates an increasing focus upon the heritage politics of the household. Within such a context, women face increasing pressure to conform as icons of communal identity.

Conclusion: Conjunctural Analysis and Transnational Feminism

The Satanic Verses initially seemed to have consolidated and polarized communal identities in Britain and elsewhere. For British Muslims in particular, the Rushdie affair was a disaster, as the Ayatollah Khomeini's fatwa against Rushdie led to a dramatic increase in media and popular stereotyping of Muslims following years of struggle for economic and social integration.[74] In addition, *The Satanic Verses* catalyzed the emergence of the racially inflected cultural clash theories that, reanimating the corpse of Orientalism, have led to serious debates concerning the place of Islam in contemporary Europe.[75] Yet the Rushdie affair also ultimately forced British policymakers to reckon with the Muslim presence in Britain more seriously. Galvanized by the bias in British legal statutes such as the Blasphemy Law that became evident in the course of the crisis over Rushdie's novel, British Muslim activists lobbied hard for reform of the legal system. Although the Blasphemy Law has not yet been changed, several significant bills were presented in the wake of the Rushdie affair that would have rectified the anomalous protections against religious discrimination that characterize the British state at present. In addition, the Commission on Racial Equality has called for the extension of laws against racial discrimination to Muslims, whose identity as a religious rather than ethnic group has so far held up implementation of incitement-to-hatred and discrimination laws.[76] These measures and the increasing engagement of British Muslim activists with the public sphere in general betoken their increasing integration and conciliation in formal processes, despite the forms of Islamophobia generated by the Rushdie affair.

The increasing public visibility of Islam in Britain also has a transnational dimension, however, for, from the 1970s on, the oil-rich

states of the Persian Gulf began recycling petrodollars into the Muslim infrastructure in Europe through the financing of mosques and other Muslim organizations.[77] The Rushdie affair itself was notably transnational, with the struggle between Iran and Saudi Arabia within the Islamic world playing a prominent role in the local unfolding of the conflict.[78] As we have seen, in Britain this transnational aspect of Islamic identity was most heavily influenced, however, by diasporic links to South Asia, where the rise of Hindu fundamentalism stoked communal tensions that dated back to the partition. It was, for example, only after an opposition parliamentarian in India, in an attempt to embarrass the ruling Congress Party, called for the banning of Rushdie's novel that the Bradford Council for Mosques began militating for the expansion of Britain's Blasphemy Law. Conflict around the Personal Laws, the separate body of juridical regulations for Muslim domestic affairs, was at the center of rising communal tensions on the subcontinent during the 1980s. In India as in Britain, feminists brought out the contradictions of both dominant state policies toward religious minorities and fundamentalist assertions of communal identity. As Gita Saghal points out, when fundamentalist forces cannot control the machinery of state power, control over women, which helps to cement patriarchal power over land and inheritance, becomes crucial.[79]

Perhaps the most signal outcome of *The Satanic Verses* controversy, therefore, was the assertion of dissenting voices within Muslim and other religious communities in Britain. For all the novel's shortcomings, the project of contesting conservative religious authorities' control over the Word and women was clearly a central aim of Rushdie's work. During the unfolding of the Rushdie affair, it became all too clear that this aspect of his work was quite prescient. As evidenced by groups such as Women Against Fundamentalism, feminist activists played a key role in articulating critiques of conservative definitions of cultural tradition. Challenging the right of traditionalist leadership to interpretive authority, intellectuals such as Elizabeth Schustler Fiorenza and Fatima Mernissi have articulated dissenting, feminist readings of sacred texts such as the Bible and the Koran. Such exegetical practices provide support for the work of feminist activists who seek to carve out autonomous spaces for women. In addition to fostering the traditions of *ijtihad* or critical reasoning that are crucial for the articulation of European Islamic identities, however, groups such as WAF have highlighted the contradictions in the British state. While they recognize the

racial and religious bias of measures such as Britain's Blasphemy Law, WAF activists call not for the extension of such legislation to cover previously marginalized groups, but rather for the creation of a truly secular, nonracial public sphere in Britain. Through their challenges to monolithic construction of both majority and ethnic minority identity, WAF and similar groups are helping blaze the trail toward a truly postcolonial condition in Britain.[80]