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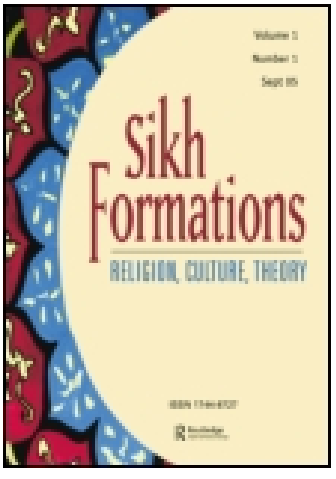

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Beyond Khalistan? Sikh diasporic identity and critical international theory

Giorgio Shani [a]
[a] College of International Relations , Ritsumeikan University , Kyoto, Japan E-mail:
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Giorgio Shani

BEYOND KHALISTAN? SIKH DIASPORIC IDENTITY AND CRITICAL INTERNATIONAL THEORY[1]

This article examines the possibilities opened up by critical international theory for the articulation of a post-nationalist diasporic *Sikh identity which seeks to go beyond* Khalistan. *Critical theories of international relations contest the hegemony of realism within international relations (IR) by examining the origins, development and potential transformation of the bounded territorial state and the Westphalian order of territorialized nation-states. It is argued that realism, based on a positivist methodology, 'naturalizes' the Westphalian order by recognizing the nation-state as the only significant actor in IR. This, consequently, serves to 'territorialize' Sikh identity and stimulates the demand for an independent Sikh homeland,* Khalistan. *However, the twin processes of globalization and fragmentation have made the notion of a bordered, self-contained community that is at the heart of international political theory difficult to sustain in the post-Cold War world. This has created space for the articulation of a* deterritorialized *Sikh identity which challenges the Westphalian order in its rejection of sovereign statehood and its assertion of the sovereignty of the* Khalsa Panth.

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The state building process in the Westphalian era produced territorial concentrations of power. Centralized political institutions established a complex ensemble of monopoly powers over clearly defined territorial frontiers and aimed, with varying levels of success, to create homogenous national units. Territorialized nation-states employed nationalist symbols to bring political and cultural boundaries into close alignment and to accentuate the differences between 'insider' and 'outsider'. Neorealism, the dominant perspective in international political theory, is testimony to the success of the totalizing project in creating the sharp divide between domestic and international politics. Recently, however, increasing globalization and fragmentation in the post-Cold War world has led to the return of culture and identity to international relations theory (Lapid and Kratochwil 1996). Fragmentation has highlighted the disjunction between the boundaries of cultural and political communities in many parts of the world whilst globalization casts doubt on the supposition that the nation-state is the only significant political community. The impact of global social and economic change on the territorialized nation-state now means that the

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notion of a bordered, self-contained community that is at the heart of international political theory has become difficult to sustain. International Relations (IR) is increasingly seen as constituted by thought on issues of 'inside-outside' (Walker 1993) or 'inclusion-exclusion' (Linklater 1998). Whilst neo-realism continues to focus upon the relations between these self-contained 'units' (Waltz 1979, 1986,1990), critical theory looks at the origins, development and potential transformation of the bounded territorial state. This creates space for the articulation of a deterritorialized Sikh diasporic identity which challenges the Westphalian order in its rejection of sovereign statehood and its assertion of the sovereignty of the *Khalsa Panth*. Unlike Khalistani discourses, Sikh diasporic discourses do not place territorial limits on the sovereignty of the *Khalsa Panth*, and thus, may be seen to go beyond Westphalia.

In this paper, three narratives of Sikh identity prevalent in western academic circles will be examined before focusing on the impact of the Westphalian order on Sikh identity and international political theory (IPT). It will be argued that realism,[2] the dominant perspective in IPT, has 'naturalized' the Westphalia order, which in turn has territorialized Sikh identity. The paper will then look at the possibilities which critical theory and globalization open up for the Sikh diaspora through contesting the hegemony of conventional IR theories that seek to legitimize the present international order.

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Sikh identities

In western academic circles, three interrelated 'master narratives' that locate the Sikhs as subjects can be identified. Collectively, these three narratives constitute the Sikh *qaum* or community. The first narrative identifies the Sikhs as followers of a universal world religion, such as Islam or Christianity. The term *Sikh* means 'learner' or 'disciple' and the Sikh *Panth* are followers of ten Gurus beginning with the founder, Guru Nanak Dev (1469–1539) and ending with Guru Gobind Singh (1675–1708). The origins of this narrative may be traced back to the pre-colonial *panthic* tradition of Northern India. A *panth*, consisting of those religious ideas and practices concerned with spiritual experience, may be used to identify the devotees of a specific spiritual leader. The Sikhs were the disciples of Nanak who organized themselves into a 'community of the pure' under Guru Gobind in order to resist forced conversion to Islam. Contemporary Sikhism is seen to consist of a series of doctrines and practices centered around a reading of a holy book, the 'Guru Granth Sahib', written in a sacred script particular to the Sikhs (Gurumukhi), in a Sikh place of worship, *gurdwara*. Anybody can become a Sikh, as long as one is baptized and conforms to the established practice of the *Khalsa Rahit* ('code of conduct'). Baptized (*Amritdhari*) Sikhs following the edicts of the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh, are enjoined to keep their hair, including facial hair, long (*Kes*); to carry a comb (*Kanga*); wear knee-length breeches (*Kachh*); a steel bracelet on the right hand (*Kara*), and to carry a sword or dagger (*Kirpan*). Those who embody these five symbols of Sikh identity, known as *Kes-dhari* Sikhs, constitute the *Khalsa*, or 'community of the pure'. This narrative of Sikhism as a world religion is strongest amongst *Khatris*[3] from West Punjab, 'twice-migrant' *Ramgharias*,[4] and of

course, the tiny minority of *Gora*[5] Sikh converts in advanced capitalist societies. In the imagination of these Sikh communities, the Punjab represents not so much a 'homeland', as it does for *Jat*[6] Sikhs with relatives and perhaps, property, in East Punjab, but a 'holy land'.[7]

The second narrative identifies the Sikhs as a nation (Dusenbery 1999, 127–142). The Sikh community or *qaum*, seen from within this nationalist narrative, corresponds to A. D. Smith's definition of a nation. For Smith, a nation is a politicized *ethnie*:

> A named human population with myths of common ancestry, shared historical memories and one or more elements of a common culture, including an association with a homeland and some degree of solidarity, at least amongst the elites. (Smith 1999, 13)

The Sikh *ethnie* share common ancestry myths dating back to the founding of the *Khalsa* in 1699 and historical memories of martyrdom and persecution under successive Mughal, British and Indian rulers. Furthermore, since the overwhelming majority of Sikhs are Punjabis, Sikhs share a common language (Punjabi), an association with a homeland (the Punjab) and their own political system comprising of a Sikh 'parliament', the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), and a 'Sikh' political party, the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD). The SGPC affords the Sikhs a forum to legislate on all issues concerning the community, and its headquarters in the Akal Takht is the site of all spiritual *and* temporal power within Sikhdom. Central to this nationalist narrative is the territorialization of Sikh sociopolitical identity in the homeland of the Punjab. As early as 1946, the SGPC committed itself to the 'goal of a Sikh state' and therefore, the territorialization of the Sikh *qaum*. The Sikh people needed a state of their own to 'preserve the main Sikh shrines, Sikh social practices, Sikh self-respect and pride, Sikh sovereignty and the future prosperity of the Sikh people' (SGPC, 1946). However, it is only within the last two decades that the Sikh nationalist narrative became hegemonic amongst male *Jat Kes-dhari* Sikhs in the Punjab and the diaspora displacing alternative narratives based upon regional, caste and religious identities. This has coincided with the rise of diasporic organizations operating outside the Sikh political system.

The third narrative identifies overseas Sikh communities, numbering over one million out of a total Sikh population of between 16 million (Tatla 1999, 11) and 17 million (Axel 2001, 9) collectively as a diaspora. Although the overwhelming proportion of this overseas Sikh population had migrated in the post-colonial era, the rise of Sikh mass migration outside South Asia can be traced to the posting of Sikh soldiers to British colonies by the British colonial army in the nineteenth century. Rural *Jat* Sikhs, designated as a 'martial race' by the British colonial authorities (Fox 1985), were stationed in South East Asia (Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia) and East Africa (Kenya and Uganda). From there, Sikh migrants with army connections sought to settle in the West, particularly on the Pacific coast of North America where communities were established before the imposition of anti-immigration legislation in the early twentieth century (Leonard 1990). The partition of the Punjab following the creation of the independent, successor states to the British *raj*, India and Pakistan, in 1947, had the effect of creating a large internally displaced

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Sikh population within India who formed the backbone of post-war Northern Indian migration to the UK. They were joined in the UK by *Ramgharia* Sikhs (Bhachu 1985) following political changes in East Africa in the early 1970s. Today, half of the overseas Sikh population has settled in the UK (400,000–500,000) with Canada (147,440) and the USA (125,000) the preferred destination for the more upwardly mobile (Tatla 1999, 43).

Whilst in earlier times the term 'diaspora' was reserved for the Jewish and Armenian dispersion, it now, according to the editor of the journal *Diaspora,* 'shares meanings with a large semantic domain that includes words like immigrant, expatriate, refugee, guest worker, exile community (and) ethnic community' (Tölölian 1991, 4–5). Clifford has appropriately called it a 'traveling term in changing global conditions' (Clifford 1997, 244). The narrative of diaspora as applied to the Sikhs relies upon what Axel terms 'the place of origin thesis' (Axel 2001, 8–9). The argument is that the place of origin or 'homeland', regardless of birthplace, *constitutes* the diaspora. Sikh claims to being a diaspora are contingent on: (1) the existence of a 'homeland', and (2) 'forced' dispersion from it. Both of these factors are key features of the Sikh nationalist discourse in the diaspora.[8]

The Westphalian international order

The contemporary world order may be described as an 'inter-national' or 'inter-state' order, an order composed of territorialized nation-states. Nation-states claim 'the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory' (Weber 1991, 78) and seek to unite the people subjected to its rule by means of cultural and linguistic homogenization (Guibernau 2001, 242). Bull (1977) defined international order as 'a pattern of human activity that sustains the elementary or primary goals of the society of states, or international society' (8). A society of states exists

> when a group of states, conscious of certain common interests and common values, form a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another, and share in the working of common institutions.
>
> (Bull 1977, 13)

A society of states, or international society, presumes the existence of a system of states 'formed when two or more states have sufficient contact between them, and have sufficient impact on one another's decisions to cause them to behave ... as parts of a whole' (Bull 1977, 9–10). The primary or elementary goals of a society of states are, for Bull, 'the preservation of the system and the society of states itself' (Bull 1977, 16). This is to be achieved through 'maintaining the independence or external sovereignty of individual states' (17). The contemporary international order is conventionally understood to have its origins in the 1648 Peace of Westphalia which gave rise to a European system or society of sovereign states. For Tilly, the Peace of Westphalia divided Europe into distinct and

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sovereign states whose boundaries were defined by international agreements (Tilly 1975). The norms and practices of this European system or society of states were then imposed upon the non-western world by European imperial powers. Anti-colonial movements, by casting their claims to independence in terms of a demand for their own sovereign states, made the 'expansion of international society' based upon an international order of territorialized sovereign states possible (Bull 1984). For Jackson, the rules constitutive of Westphalian international society include: (1) sovereign equality, (2) refraining from the threat or use of force, (3) inviolability of frontiers, (4) nonintervention in internal affairs, (5) respect for human rights, (6) equal rights and self-determination of peoples, (8) co-operation amongst states, and (9) fulfillment in good faith of obligations under international law (Jackson 2000). Jackson refers to state sovereignty as *the* most important norm of international relations.

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Nationalism and the territorialization of identity

Nationalism is constitutive of the contemporary international order. According to the norms underpinning international regimes governing sovereign statehood, sovereignty is seen to reside with the nation. The nation-state continues to be the primary internationally recognized structure of political association. Only nation-states are admitted into the United Nations or other international organizations. Chapter XI, Article 73 of the UN Charter affirms the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples. This was echoed by the General Assembly which declared in its resolution in 1960 (GAR 1514) that 'all peoples have the right to self-determination'. However, this right to self-determination is confined to claims by state elites. After decolonization, the language of self-determination was used to legitimize the post-colonial state although the post-colonial state boundaries did not always coincide with *national* boundaries. For Mayall (1990), the post-war international order institutionalized the principle of national self-determination and, in so doing, 'tamed' it by 'freezing' the political map. In this sense 'the world has been made safe for nationalism' (Mayall 1990, 50).

The nationalist world order is dependent upon the continued existence of the sovereign state system. Nationalism, as Meadwell (1999) has pointed out, 'continues to be about territory, and territorial politics presupposes states in the modern era' (Meadwell 1999, 262). The territorial configuration of the Westphalian world order impacts upon personal identity by privileging one form of collective identity, belonging to a nation, over others, i.e. class, gender and locality. Consequently, in order for the Sikh *qaum* to be recognized internationally, its self-appointed elites are forced to employ discourses of 'nationhood' and 'territoriality', which reinforce traditional conceptions of the international order. As Harjot Oberoi (1987) notes, for much of Sikh history, territory has not played a key role in their self-definition. Oberoi locates the origins of the narrative of territoriality to the 1940s and the Sikh reaction to the Muslim League's demand for Pakistan – the precise moment at which the Westphalian world order impacted on Sikh identity. After the partition of the Punjab into East (India) and West (Pakistan) and the associated 'ethnic cleansing', the movement for the *Punjabi Suba*, a Punjabi-speaking majority state within the

Indian republic by the Akali leadership in the post-independence period further 'cemented' territoriality into Sikh ethnicity (Oberoi 1987, 39). The existence of a territorially defined homeland is now central to the imagination of Sikh diaspora nationalism. Sikh diaspora nationalists, like other nationalists, do not, in the words of A. D. Smith (1999), 'seek to acquire any territory. They want their "homeland", that is, an historic territory which their people can feel is theirs by virtue of a convincing claim of possession and efflorescence sometime in the past' (219). In the imagination of Sikh diaspora nationalists, 'the homeland' is *equated* with the Indian state of Punjab. The 'ancestral homeland' of the Sikh nationalist imagination, however, does *not* correspond to the present day borders of the Indian state of Punjab. Some of the 'great events that formed the nation', to which Smith refers and the place where 'the heroes, saints and sages of the community from which the nation later developed lived and worked and...are buried' (Smith 1996, 383), lies to the West in Pakistan. This includes the birthplace of the founder of the Sikh religious tradition, Guru Nanak. Sikh nationalist organizations in the diaspora do not lay claim to those lands but instead seek to invest those shared memories within the borders of the East (Indian) Punjab.

Dr Gurmit Singh Aulakh, the President of the US-based Council of Khalistan, in his millennium message to the Sikh 'nation', writes of a 'sovereign, independent nation' established by Guru Gobind Singh (Council of Khalistan 1946). Sovereignty, given to the Sikh peoples by Guru Gobind, was 'lost' to the British and then the Hindu *raj* in Delhi. Aulakh urges the Sikhs to reclaim their 'lost sovereignty' through the establishment of an independent Sikh state in the *Indian* state of Punjab (Aulakh 2000a). Surjan Singh, of the *Babbar Khalsa International*, regards the Sikhs and the Punjab to be 'interchangeable elements'. The Sikhs are seen as the 'true sons of the soil', having defended the Punjab from 'the foreign Afghan' and having valiantly resisted the British until 1849 (Singh 1982, 15) – a view shared by Dr Jagjit Singh Chauhan, President of the *Khalistan Council*. For Chauhan, the *Khalsa* Sikhs are the 'vanguard of the Punjabi peoples'.[9] *Khatri* Sikhs originally from West Punjab but resident in Vancouver, *Ramgharia* Sikhs from East Africa and *Jat* Sikhs born and bred in Birmingham, are enjoined to regard East Punjab as the 'homeland' irrespective of *actual* place of origin. Sikh identity in the diaspora is, therefore, *territorialized* by a nationalist narrative that seeks to narrate Sikh identity in Westphalian terms.

Beyond realism: critical international theory

The Westphalian world order has been 'legitimized' or 'naturalized' not only by the United Nations charter, the emergence of a body of inter-state public international law (PIL), and international events such as decolonization, but also by the emergence of first 'realism' and later 'neo-realism' as the dominant perspective in international political theory (IPT) after the Second World War. Realism has been accepted as the dominant theory of world politics since the publication of E. H. Carr's *The twenty years' crisis, 1919–1939* (2001) and, following, first Hans Morgenthau (1967) and subsequently Kenneth Waltz's attempts to ground realist assumptions on positivist foundations, its status as the hegemonic paradigm in IPT was confirmed by the 'inter-paradigm debate' of the 1980s.[10] Although the hegemony of realism has

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recently been eroded by the purported globalization of liberal values and systems of political and economic organization following the collapse of the Soviet Union, most conventional theories of international relations are anchored in the same 'realist' assumptions.

First, conventional theories view the state as both the key actor in international relations and as the legitimate representative of the collective will of a community/nation. International relations are seen as inter-*state* relations and only those communities in possession of a state of their own can lay claim to *sovereignty*. The sovereign state, as Young (1995) points out, has two important features. First, it requires that no other centre of political power may legitimately exist; and secondly, it demands that there be nothing outside the scope of the state and its power. Both realist and liberal conceptions of the international order take the territorial sovereign state to be the basic unit of international political activity. Whilst most realists would agree with Waltz (1986) that, on the international stage, 'states set the scene in which they, along with non-state actors stage their dramas' (89), liberals seem to limit state sovereignty through a network of regimes and institutions designed to promote universal standards of conduct necessary for the creation and maintenance of an international society. These standards include the formalization of the consent of the governed in representative institutions, the maintenance through the rule of law of individual guarantees to life, liberty and property, and the creation of a market economy regulated by the 'invisible hand' of multinational capital, all of which require the disciplinary power of the state. As Agnew (1998) notes, 'the merging of the state with a clearly bounded territory is the geographical essence of the field of international relations' (80).

Second, state leaders' primary responsibility is to ensure the survival of their state in an international system characterized by *anarchy*: defined by Wendt (1996) as 'the absence of authority' (52). In the absence of a world government, states have to rely upon themselves to ensure the survival of their state. The absence of a common power affords international politics a structure which helps explain the persistence, not only of separate territorially bounded units of international political activity, but also conflict between these units. The anarchic structure of an international system composed of territorialized nation-states is seen to make conflict between these units inevitable. For realists, the best method of managing these conflicts is through maintaining a balance of power, whilst liberals believe that co-operation under anarchy is best achieved through the maintenance of international regimes and institutions based on 'universal' liberal principles.

Third, conventional theories of international relations share the neo-realist assumption that a strict separation of domestic (intra-state) and international (inter-state) relations is possible. Neo-realism, according to its main exponent, Kenneth Waltz (1990), 'establishes the autonomy of international politics and thus makes a theory about it possible' by depicting 'an international political system as a whole, with structural and unit levels at once distinct and connected' (27). Whilst, for Waltz, the 'ordering principle' of domestic politics is *hierarchic*, with power and authority exerted upwards through legal and political institutions, in international politics it is *anarchic* given the absence of an overarching authority regulating the behaviour of states ('like-units') towards each other. This structure is seen as 'immutable', having endured since the days of Thucydides, the historian of

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the Peloponnesian War. For realists, the task of IR theory is therefore to *explain* the persistence of the state-system and the features associated with it, namely war, in terms of its anarchic structure.

With its roots in the 'Frankfurt school' of the 1930s, critical international theory challenges the positivist assumptions of neo-realism. Whilst the three contending perspectives comprising 'the inter-paradigm debate' (realism, liberalism and structuralism) were based on a set of positivist assumptions, namely that a denial of the idea that social science theories can use the same methodologies as theories of the natural sciences, that facts and values can be distinguished, that neutral facts can act as arbiters between rival truth claims, and that the social world has regularities which theories can 'discover', critical international theory employs a post-positivist methodology. In particular, critical theory questions the 'objectivity' and 'value-free approach' of neo-realism. For, as Robert Cox (1981), a key exponent of critical international theory, reminds us, knowledge is always for *someone* and for some *purpose*. Cox follows Horkheimer in distinguishing between 'traditional' and 'critical theory'. Whilst the former 'takes the world as it finds it, with the prevailing social and power relationships and the institutions into which they are organized as the given framework for action' (Cox 1981, 128), the latter is concerned with concerned with the possibilities for liberation that are *immanent* within existing political and social relations. Cox sees neo-realism as a form of 'problem-solving theory' employed by 'hegemonic social forces' to maintain the smooth functioning of the system.

Andrew Linklater (1998) has extended Cox's critique of the 'immutability thesis' of neo-realism. The 'immutability thesis' refers to the neo-realist assumption that the main task of IPT is to account for the 'regularities and repetitions' of international relations. For Linklater, neo-realism, by seemingly denying the possibilities of radical change, privileges the interests of those who benefit most from 'system maintenance', and therefore *reproduces* inequalities of power and wealth, which are alterable in principle (Linklater 1998, 21).This reproduction of power and wealth is facilitated by the legitimization of violence against 'anti-hegemonic forces' by conventional IR theories. The task of 'problem-solving theory' here, whether of the realist or liberal variety, is to explain why action is necessary either on grounds of 'national security' or in defence of purportedly 'universal ethical principles', such as human rights or democracy. In the post-September 11 world, this has taken the form of first identifying and then taking action against 'threats to international peace and security', whether from 'rogue-states' such as Taliban Afghanistan or Saddam Hussein's Iraq, or transnational non-state networks such as *Al-Qaeda*. In South Asia, 'problem-solving theories' have played a key role in legitimizing the use of state violence against minority communities favouring self-determination, particularly in Kashmir, the North-East and, of course, the Punjab.[11]

In contrast with other forms of anti-foundationalist thought, critical theory is unashamedly normative. For Linklater, 'whereas neo-realism offers an account of the reproduction of the international states-system, critical perspectives seek to identify prospects for change in global politics' (Linklater 1998, 22). Of particular importance to Linklater is the development of more complex analyses of the prospects for, and character of, new forms of political community. The state is seen as an *exclusionary* political community and its transformation, it is hoped, will facilitate the reconstruction of the international state-system to permit a higher

development of *universality*. Although most critical theorists share the Foucauldian view that 'ethical' universalism, in a 'thick' cosmopolitan liberal sense, does not represent a major advance in moral consciousness but signifies the emergence of new social systems which possess more subtle technologies of control and which rely upon the marginalization of difference, a 'thin conception' of universality, one which respects difference, is defended. For Linklater (1998), this thin conception of universality consists of equal rights to participate in a dialogue to determine the principles of inclusion and exclusion which govern global politics. Linklater's qualified defence of a 'thin' conception of universality differs from thicker forms in its central premise that there is 'no view from nowhere' (Nagel 1986) and that, therefore, there is no alternative than to start where *we* are.

However, Linklater, like Habermas before him, is unable to deal with the 'problem' of relativism. In the absence of a transcultural viewpoint, any agreement on the 'rights' of, and entitlement to, participation is at best problematic. Who decides which communities are entitled to participate and who gets to speak for a particular community? A case could, of course, be made for viewing the Westphalian system as a dialogic community where an entitlement to participation is contingent on the achievement of a territorially defined sovereign statehood. If so, the voice of transnational communities such as the Sikhs will continue to be excluded in the absence of *Khalistan*. Even if transnational communities such as the Sikh were allowed to participate in debates on the principles of inclusion and exclusion to which, as a non-state actor they have hitherto been excluded, who would represent the *qaum*? Although Sikhs in the Punjab may lay claim to having their own indigenous, democratic 'political system' with all religious and temporal power invested in the *Akal Takht*, Sikhs in the Indian and Western diasporas (as well as marginal groups within the *panth/qaum)* would remain unrepresented. The 'right to participate' in a dialogic community is based upon the 'right to narrate' (Bhabha 1990). In contemporary international society, only sovereign states have the right to narrate 'the myths and memories of the nation' (Smith 1999). The narratives of transnational communities, diasporas, refugees, indigenous peoples and, it could be argued, women, are simply not heard unless they employ a discourse of territoriality, state interest and power. The ideal of creating a dialogic post-nationalist community which is sensitive to the needs of the systematically excluded, including Sikh diasporas, within and outside traditional borders, can only, therefore, be realized outside of the Westphalian system in the space opened up for it by the twin processes of globalization and fragmentation.

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Beyond Westphalia: globalization, sovereignty and Sikh identity

At its most basic, globalization may be defined as 'the process of increasing interconnectedness between societies such that events in one part of the world more and more have effects on peoples and societies far away' (Baylis and Smith 1997, 7). A fuller, more specific definition, is provided by Held et al.:

> (Globalization is) a process (or set of processes) which embodies a transformation in the spatial organization of social relations and transactions – assessed

> in terms of their *extensity*,[12] *intensity*,[13] *velocity*[14] and *impact*[15] – generating trans-continental or interregional *flows*[16] and *networks*[17] of activity, interaction and the exercise of power.
>
> (Held et al. 1999, 16)

Viewed in such a light, globalization is hardly a new phenomenon and has its origins in the rise of a world capitalist economy, imperialism, the internationalization of the nation-state and the development of a Westphalian society of states. However, many theorists have identified the post-cold war world in particular as marking a new stage in the history of globalization. Whilst some have located the dynamics of the contemporary intensification of the processes associated with globalization in the emergence of a 'borderless economy' (Ohmae 1993) or the 'impersonal forces of the world market' (Strange 1996), others have pointed to the emergence of new technologies (Giddens 2000; Held *et al.* 1999). For Castells (1997), the deregulation and restructuring of world capitalism combined with the information technology revolution has induced a new form of society: the network society. This society is not only characterized by the demise of the nation-state but also by 'the widespread surge of powerful expressions of collective identity that challenge globalization and cosmopolitanism on behalf of the cultural singularity and people's control over their lives and environment' (Castells 1997, 3). Thus, for Castells, the intensification of economic globalization is accompanied by greater political fragmentation: a view in stark contrast to hyperglobalist orthodoxy. For hyperglobalists, particularly of the liberal variant, the intensification of economic globalization erodes the sovereignty of the nation-state ushering in a new a 'global age' (Albrow 1996, 168). The nation-state, in the words of Kenichi Ohmae, 'has become an unnatural, even dysfunctional, unit for organizing human activity and managing economic endeavor in a borderless world' (Ohmae 1993, 79) whilst for Albrow, the nation-state is a 'timebound form' which no longer contains the aspirations nor monopolizes the attention of those who live on its territory' (Albrow 1996, 170). The universalization of a human rights discourse dating from the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNUDHR 1948) and guaranteeing property rights throughout the world, or at least in the developed North, forms the foundation of a 'global political culture'[18] (Jacobson 2001) or 'global civil society' understood as 'the space of uncoerced human association' (Walzer 1995, 7). However, this 'global civil society', like Fukuyama's post-cold war consensus in favour of secular liberal-democracy constituting the 'the end point of mankind's ideological evolution' (Fukuyama 1992) has yet to emerge from the shadows cast by late-twentieth-century ethno-national conflict. The rise of politicized collective religious identities in the Middle East,[19] North Africa,[20] South[21] and South-East Asia[22] during the 1990s point not only to an absence of a liberal 'global civil society' outside of the UN, and by implication, state-system, but also to the existence of multiple transnational civil societies questioning and challenging the legitimacy of a system or society of territorialized nation-states.

What, then, can be said about the impact of the contemporary phase of globalization on the nation-state and by extension, on the Westphalian international order? In contrast to the claims of sceptics like Steven Krasner (1999) that 'sovereignty is not being transformed fundamentally by globalization' and that to claim so is at best

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'exaggerated and historically myopic' (34), it will be argued that the contemporary phase of globalization has transformed, or, more accurately, is in the process of transforming, the Westphalian conception of territorialized sovereignty. Although the state remains the 'principal actor' within the global political order (Giddens 1990, 71), it is no longer the unique centre of authority and governance. Held et al. (1999) argue that 'a "new sovereignty" regime is displacing traditional conceptions of statehood as an absolute, indivisible, territorially exclusive and zero-sum form of power' (9). Similarly, Sassen (1997) argues that although 'sovereignty remains a feature of the system ... it is now located in a multiplicity of institutional arenas' (29) and that this 'reconfiguration of space may signal a more fundamental transformation in the matter of sovereignty' (14). In its cultural dimension, globalization, driven by a technological revolution which has made communication instantaneous over large distances, breaks down the barriers of territorial identity facilitating the development of new kinds of 'imagined community' (Anderson 1991). The growth of the Internet and linked technologies has facilitated and often enabled the formation of cross-border networks among individuals and groups with shared background or interests which has engendered or strengthened alternative notions of community of membership. In the case of the Sikh communities, the Internet[23] in particular has enabled the articulation of a Sikh 'nationalist' discourse in the diaspora which has instilled a sense of the global unity of all Sikhs through an involvement in 'the politics of homeland'. The Sikh nationalist discourse as articulated by diasporic organizations such as the British-based Khalistan Council, the US-based Council of Khalistan and the various branches of the Babbar Khalsa International, Dal Khalsa and International Sikh Youth Federation,[24] identifies the Sikhs as an ethno-religious community, forced from their homeland of the Punjab by the violence of Partition and the storming of the Golden Temple complex in 1984. The homepages of both burningpunjab.com and Khalistan.com explicitly use the word 'genocide' in conjunction with state repression of Sikhs in India, which (they claim) has claimed a quarter of a million lives in the last two decades (Osan 2000a, 2000b, 2000c; Aulukh 2000a). It is this 'chosen trauma' (Kinvall 2002) that has enabled a global Sikh identity to be imagined.[25]

The global Sikh *qaum* may be seen as such a new kind of 'imagined political community'. Like the nation, the Sikh *qaum* is imagined as both *finite* and *sovereign* (Anderson 1991, 46). Membership of the Sikh *qaum* is finite in that it is limited to either *Kes-dhari* Punjabi-speaking Sikhs' *irrespective of their actual place of origin*. Furthermore, the Sikh *qaum* is 'imagined' as sovereign. According to Hinsley (1986), sovereignty contains both internal and external dimensions. Internally, sovereignty entails the idea that there is a final and absolute political authority in the political community and externally that *no final and absolute authority exists elsewhere*. The Sikh *qaum* is seen as sovereign in that all political and spiritual power is located within the *Khalsa Panth*. Guru Gobind is seen to have conferred sovereignty upon the *Khalsa Panth* through the proclamation of *Raj Karega Khalsa* ('The *Khalsa* shall rule' and, by implication, is sovereign). No territorial limits are placed on the sovereignty of the *Khalsa*.

This global Sikh identity may be compared and contrasted to the Islamic *Umma*. For Muslims, 'the fundamental attachment is not to the *Watan* (homeland) but to the *Umma*, or community of believers, all made equal in their submission to Allah'

(Castells 1997, 15). The idea of the *Umma* rejects the *exclusionary* universalism of the nation-state. For Sayyid (2000), the *Umma* is an anti-national phenomenon: the existence of Muslims, owing their primary allegiance to the *Umma*, in almost every nation-state in the world interrupts the closure of the nation-state. In this sense, the *Umma* is seen as a *diaspora*. Whilst for Sayyid the nation suggests 'home', in that it acts as a fixed, territorial arena for everyday practices, diaspora suggests 'homelessness', the possibility of not belonging, of not feeling completely at home in a fixed, territorial arena. Sayyid points to both the Jewish and Black experiences as illustrating the anti-national character of diasporas, in particular to Arendt's privileging of a 'Jewish homelessness' which allows the Jews to escape the limits of a single nation and Gilroy's evocation of the 'Black Atlantic' as countering the cultural absolutism of black nationalism and the closure of the western project. Members of the Jewish and Black diasporas have a paradoxical relationship to the nation. On the one hand, they demonstrate the possibility of the nation in their attempt to maintain a sense of nationhood in the context of territorial dispersal. On the other hand, they point to the impossibility of the nation providing a common 'home' for all its inhabitants; to erase difference.

Like the *Umma*, the Sikh *qaum* challenges the Westphalian international order based on the existence of a system or society of territorialized sovereign states in its assertion of the sovereignty of the *Khalsa Panth* over the state. However, as we have seen, in the case of the Sikh *qaum*, no clear distinction between 'nation' and 'diaspora' or *Watan* and *Umma* is possible. Sikh identity comprises three interrelated narratives of religious community, nation and diaspora. In comparison with the Muslim *Umma*, the Sikh *qaum* has a strong attachment to a territorially defined ancestral homeland in the context of territorial dispersal. It is difficult, therefore, to separate the Sikh *Umma* from the *Watan*. It may be possible for Sikhs to go beyond *Khalistan*, in the sense that the *Khalsa Panth* does not require statehood in order to be sovereign, but not beyond the Punjab, the ancestral homeland.

Concluding remarks: beyond Khalistan?

> Diaspora does not refer to those scattered tribes whose identity can only be secured in relation to some sacred homeland to which they must at all costs return ... This is the old, the imperializing, the hegemonizing form of 'ethnicity' ... The diaspora experience as I intend it here is defined not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity, by a conception of identity which lives with and through, not despite, difference.
> (Hall 1990, 235)

Applying Hall's categories to the study of the Sikh diaspora, we can distinguish between the 'old, hegemonizing form of "ethnicity"' and newer more fluid identities. The 'old, hegemonizing form of "ethnicity"' is represented by the *Khalistan* movement in the diaspora. Sikh diaspora nationalism may be seen in Castells' terms as *resistance identity* in that 'it constructs forms of resistance against otherwise unbearable oppression (in the case of the Sikhs, Indian state repression in the Punjab between 1984–1992) on the basis of clearly defined identities making it easier to

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essentialize the boundaries of resistance' (Castells 1997, 9). This involves the building of a defensive, masculinized, exclusionary *Kesdhari* which serves to reinforce, or indeed reinvent, the boundaries between Sikhs and other South Asian communities. It seeks, at all costs, a sovereign territorially defined state in the ancestral homeland of the Punjab. This brings the self-appointed overseas representatives of the Sikh *qaum* in conflict with the Indian state, which claims a monopoly of the legitimate use of force within the Union State of the Punjab. It has been argued elsewhere that this constitutes only a partial challenge to the Westphalian international order since it reproduces its central feature: the territorially demarcated sovereign state (Shani 2000).

However, it may also be possible to speak of a 'new' counter-hegemonic *diasporic* Sikh identity: an identity made possible by the nationalist project but opposed to its territorializing, reifying imperatives. 'Diasporic' here refers to a form of community consciousness and solidarity that maintains identifications outside of the nation-state 'in order to live inside, with a difference' (Clifford 1997, 287). This *diasporic* identity is not merely *multicultural*. Ballard (1994) uses the adjective 'multicultural' to refer to individuals who have acquired the competence to 'behave appropriately in a number of different arenas, and to switch codes as appropriate' (31). A diasporic identity implies a *rejection* of the assimilationist project of the nation-state. Rather it approximates to what Castells terms a *project* identity. For Castells (1997), a project identity occurs when social actors, on the basis of whichever materials are available to them, build a new identity that redefines their positions in society and, by doing so, seek the transformation of overall social structure. Ballard's multicultural Sikhs may challenge racialized notions of Britishness but they do not transform an international society based on the sovereignty of nation-states. A Sikh project identity could do so by constructing diasporic Sikh *subjects*: collective social actors through which individuals reach holistic meaning (Castells 1997) in their experience of being Sikhs living in the diaspora rather than as immigrants or citizens of some imagined homeland. Globalization has brought a reconfiguration of ethnic identities within advanced capitalist societies, enabling diasporas to feel 'at home' in their places of settlement without abandoning their attachment to their communal identities or, in the case of the Sikhs, their *qaum*. For the new generation of Anglo-Sikhs, Sikh Canadians, Sikh Singaporeans or Sikh Americans, the 'critical event' (Tatla 1999) or 'chosen trauma' (Kinvall 2002) of 1984 is but a distant memory which can resurface at any given time. An independent homeland for the Sikhs may not be necessary, if Sikhs can feel at 'home' in Birmingham, Vancouver, Singapore, Southall or New York.

'Diasporic' political projects, as opposed to diaspora nationalism, have taken the form of a 'politics of recognition'[26] aimed at facilitating Sikh integration into host societies whilst maintaining the external symbols of the faith: turbans and the five Ks. As Clifford (1997) notes, the term 'diaspora' is a signifier, not simply of transnationality and movement, but of political struggles to define the local, as distinctive community, in historical contexts of displacement. However, the links between these local 'politics of recognition' or 'political struggles to define the local' are now globalized (see Gayer 2000) and this has enabled Sikh organizations to articulate a *transnational* Sikh identity. Recently, the Sikh Human Rights Group (SHRG) based in Ealing, West London, succeeded in getting the World Conference on Racism,

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Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and related intolerance at Durban, South Africa (31 August to 7 September 2001) to adopt a paragraph (paragraph 73) to specifically include the Sikhs. The need for a paragraph to include the Sikhs was expressed in the SHRG Plenary Statement.

> Existing national legislation and policies fall short of protecting the intertwined racial/cultural/ethnic/religious identity of the Sikhs. Very few groups fall into this sort of category . . . The category of religion does *not* adequately protect the Sikhs. *We call ourselves a 'Qaum' that has no translation in English.*
>
> (Sikh Human Rights Group 2001, emphasis added)

The SHRG's success in not only participating in international conferences but also redefining categories of collective identities in order to include Sikhs offers a glimpse into the ways in which a Sikh *diasporic* identity can go beyond *Khalistan* and actively challenge the Westphalian order by using the tools of globalization. For Sikh diasporic communities to actively challenge the narratives of territoriality upon which the Westphalian order is based, however, an engagement with critical theory is necessary.

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Notes

1 Paper presented to the Sikhism and Critical Theory Conference, Hofstra University, New York, 13 September 2002.The author would like to thank Dr Arvind-Pal S. Mandair for the invitation to participate and Professor Gurharpal Singh and Dr Brian Keith Axel and for their insightful comments.

2 The terms 'realism' and 'neo-realism' are used interchangeably to describe the dominant perspective in international political theory. 'Neo-realism', a term coined by Kenneth Waltz, may be seen as an attempt to ground realist assumptions on more 'scientific' (i.e. positivist) grounds.

3 Although 'caste' barriers are not recognized in the *Khalsa Panth*, caste groupings remain a feature of Punjabi life in India and the diaspora. *Khatris* are a minority, urban merchant 'caste' grouping.

4 See Bhachu (1985) for an account of the experiences of the *Ramgharia* caste, 'twice migrants' from India and East Africa.

5 White (Caucasian).

6 Majority agricultural caste.

7 This distinction was suggested to me by Gurharpal Singh. See Singh (1999, 303).

8 See Shani (2002) for a description of the Sikh nationalist discourse in the diaspora.

9 Dr Jagjit Singh Chauhan was in conversation with the author 17 February 2000.

10 Liberalism or Pluralism and Structuralism also contested the 'inter-paradigm debate'.

11 See Human Rights Watch/Asian Physicians for Human Rights (1994) for a detailed account of state repression in the Punjab.

12 *Extensity* here refers to the stretching of social, political and economic activities across frontiers.

13 *Intensity*: growing magnitude of interconnectedness.

14 *Velocity*: speeding up of global interactions and processes.

15 *Impact*: local developments assume global significance
16 *Flows*: movements of people, symbols, tokens and information across time and space.
17 *Networks*: regularized or patterned interactions between independent agents.
18 Jacobson claims that 'what we are witnessing is the development of a global (if still limited to the northern hemisphere) political culture based on human rights – which is demarcated (in principle) in non-territorial terms and, in its domain, is distinct from territorial states (the local political authorities)'. However, he acknowledges that 'it is through theses states that human rights are being institutionalized, both domestically and internationally' (Jacobson 2001, 177).
19 After the Oslo Accords, HAMAS replaced the PLO as the voice of the *Intifada*.
20 The Front Islamique du Salut (FIS) won the Algerian election in 1991 only for the army to step in.
21 The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) replaced the Indian National Congress (INC) as the hegemonic force in Indian politics after the 1996 elections.
22 Abdurrahman Wahid, leader of the *Nahdatul Ulama* (Renaissance of Religious Scholars), the biggest Islamic organization in the world, became Indonesia's first directly elected President in October 1999.
23 See Gunawardena (2000) for an analysis of the Sikh nationalist discourse in cyberspace.
24 Tatla provides brief histories of these organizations in North America (Tatla 1999, 116–122) and the UK (Tatla 1999, 138–143).
25 The term 'chosen trauma' describes the 'mental recollection of a calamity that once befell a group's ancestors, and includes information, fantasized expectations, intense feelings and defences against unacceptable thought' (Kinvall 2002, 86). See Kinvall (2002) for a comparative examination of Sikh and Hindu 'chosen traumas'.
26 See Shani (2000a) for a discussion of the application of the Charles Taylor's (1994) concept of the 'politics of recognition' to Sikh diasporic activity.

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Giorgio Shani. *Address:* College of International Relations, Ritsumeikan University, Kyoto, Japan. [email: gshani@ir.ritsumei.ac.jp]

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