of the operation of the 'White fantasy', which works towards maintaining a sense of control over the 'national space' and the 'national imaginary'. Sanctorum's above quoted narrative of 'decline' becomes an expression of the sense of failure in containing and governing 'otherness'.

In contrast to more traditional chauvinistic forms of nationalism this liberal nationalism is not only more difficult to grasp but also to challenge, because it appeals to 'values' and 'norms' widely perceived as universally claimed and shared. Thus the liberal regulation of 'otherness' can not only count on much greater approval, but is in many cases enacted by the 'subjects' of discipline themselves. Because other cultures are no longer challenged for their cultural difference, but for their failure to deliver 'free' and 'emancipated' subjects, the space for diversity has become even smaller than ever before.

The Sikh Diaspora in Britain seems to be haunted by stories of young Sikh women being duped by young Muslim men into converting to Islam. This is the story of 'forced' conversions; it is a cautionary tale that has, through successive retellings become deeply ingrained within the Sikh BrAsian imaginary. It is the story of the 'brave and courageous' Sikhs trying to save 'their girls' from the 'Muslim predator' whose only aim is to 'coercively' convert by means of trickery, lies, deceit and manipulation. The drama of these forced conversions forms the theatre where seemingly intractable hostility between two BrAsian communities—Sikh and Muslim—is played out. Sikh-Muslim conflict finds its most consistent, most sensationalist and most lurid expressions in these tales of forced conversions. There is, however, little if any evidence to support them outside the Sikh community. Furthermore, the centrality of these forced conversion narratives within Sikh circles is not mirrored among Muslims. This makes for an oddly one-sided conflict, yet one that shows little sign of abating.

In the wake of the War on Terror many in the Sikh diaspora have made a conscious effort to distinguish themselves from the Muslim ummah. Although historically this distinction is not novel, the effort to demarcate this difference has, in the context of postcolonial settlement in Britain, been enforced to a much greater extent and become more prominent as the risks incurred in being mistaken for Muslims became correlatively, and occasionally tragically, higher.
THINKING THROUGH ISLAMOPHOBIA

In the attempt to avoid being confused for Muslims, many Sikhs seem to have accepted some of the Islamophobic themes that circulate widely within contemporary Western societies. The idea of a Muslim threat common to most variants of Islamophobia can be found within the current hegemonic constructions of Sikh (BrAsian) identity. This articulation of an antagonistic Muslim other against which a Sikh identity can be formulated, however, also has two major historical antecedents within Sikh discursive horizons: Mughal repression of the nascent Sikh community in the seventeenth century and the trauma of ethnic cleansing that accompanied the partition of British India in 1947.

It could be argued that one of the key motifs within Sikhism is unfettered persecution of the emergent Sikh community by the Mughal padishah. Narratives of the martyrdom of Sikhs at the hands of Muslim authorities are part and parcel of Sikh upbringing, whether through religious institutions or family life. In these narratives the Mughal aim was not merely to discipline a restive population, but to destroy the identity of the Khalsa. In them, the Mughals personify Muslim tyranny rather than political rulers seeking to uphold their position in the face of centrifugal challenges, and the persecutions are seen as nothing short of an ideological campaign to destroy the very way in which Sikhs imagine themselves, their land and their destiny. Different existential anxieties surrounding the identity of the newly formed community concern prospective fears that Sikhism might be reduced to being a spiritual conveyor belt for the transformation of Hindu polytheism into Islamic absolute monotheism via Sikh notions of one God; that Sikhism, in other words, might become a stage in the conversion of Hindus into Muslims, rather than an intrinsic faith with its own authentic way of life. The idea of a Muslim campaign of forced conversion powerfully amalgamates these two existential challenges to the emergent Sikh community; on the one hand, the challenge posed by a powerful overarching imperial structure in the form of the Mughal Empire; on the other hand, the challenge from below, that Sikhs might for a variety of reasons decide to embrace the institutionally privileged monotheism of Islam.

Clearly the image of Islam as a religion spread by the sword and forced conversion is one with both long antecedents and wide resonances in the Western tradition, and this is where some may locate the question of Islamophobia and its Sikh and Western articulations. For others the onus of the question lies in whether or not it is the Muslimness of the Mughals that is the mark of their ‘othering’ within the Sikh narrative. While neither is irrelevant, a more nuanced approach is required. The historical Sikh representation of Mughal persecution takes place within a distinct structural ensemble in which Mughals were the rulers of India and the Sikhs a subaltern community within that imperial structure. In Mughal India Muslims constituted a powerful ruling elite able to institutionalise their privilege and authority. However, in Britain Muslims are but one of the contending ethnicised communities whose capacity to exercise autonomy is extremely limited. It is not whether Mughal persecutions are or are not an example of Islamophobia that is meaningful, but how tropes of Mughal persecution have been mobilised at the expense of other narrative traditions available to Sikhs. The anti-Muslim narratives circulating within the Sikh Diaspora in the UK feeds on and replays foundational fears that Sikhs would/will be subjugated by Muslims, but are not caused by them.

These foundational fears also find more recent confirmation of the Muslim threat in narratives of the suffering of Sikhs at the hands of Muslims during partition. Partition narratives within the Sikh Diaspora present a similar relation with Islamophobic discourse. The rape of women in front of male relatives, and forced conversions, both of which were generalised within the brutal and extreme forms of organised communal violence and persecution waged in the context of the partition of Punjab, doubled the violation of sisters/wives/daughters at the collective level as the violation of community and nation (Purwar and Rughuram, 2003, pp. 160–164). With the honour of the community vested in women many men in Sikh families urged and often forced the women to sacrifice their lives. Hundreds of women in many villages were often made to jump into wells because of fear of abduction, rape and forced religious conversion. Both the atrocities and the sacrifices cut across and were replicated among Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. Partition, like the Mughals, is not the cause of recurring tensions between Sikhs and Muslims, it is rather a language adopted by Sikhs to construct a ‘threat’ and in so doing weave a Sikh identity in the UK.

Today, we see the two narratives of Mughal repression and Partition persecutions being mobilised to add veracity to stories of forced conversions of Sikh girls by Muslim (male) predators. Within this context Sikhness and Sikh identity is doubly structured both on inclusion/racialised exclusion from British society and in antagonism to and demarcation from Muslims: Sikhs represent modernity, ‘Westernness’, independence and equality, Muslims represent backwardness, ‘non-Westernness’, oppression and patriarchy. At the heart of this forced conversion narrative around which anxieties and warnings are articulated, is the figure of the Sikh girl. This too, encodes the same double structuring. Sikh girls are the focus of this particular narrative because of the anxieties their growing agency evokes within the Diaspora. In the UK, Sikh women are...
perceived as possessing too much autonomy, destabilising traditional Sikh male identities and roles, and exposing girls to predatory Muslims whose fiendish figure in turn helps rein in the women and shore up patriarchal power. Through the figure of the Muslim antagonist old fantasies are re-played, and against the backdrop of Britain’s postcolonial ethnoscapes the forced conversion trope re-engages, stabilises and regulates the community. Against the unsettlement of diasporic experience, the Muslim folk devil writ large and Sikh girl conversion stories run rampant reinforce community boundaries and Sikh identities.

The forced conversion narratives display a resemblance to other forms of Islamophobia: the fantasy figure of Muslim puppet-masters secretly financing young Muslim men to seduce Sikh women; confirmatory exposure of coded messages in the Qur’an which all Muslims are programmed to obey; uncovered conspiracies revealing how non-Muslim societies are subverted or threatened by Muslim powers to ease the predatory practices of Muslim men. The figure of the Sikh female body and the predatory Muslim male helps construct a homogeneous Sikh community despite migratory displacements. The antagonistic discourse subscribed to by the Sikh Diaspora re-scripts existential fears in BrAsian contexts through the available and deeply embedded narratives of Mughal persecution and Partition turmoil. These Sikh narratives, in other words, represent both the possibility of a Sikh identity and the failure of that possibility to be fully realised. The failure of Sikhism to fully constitute Sikh subjects in the conditions of the Diaspora is projected onto the figure of the Muslim.

Recent years have seen the development of a Sikh variant of Islamophobia: it shares some of the themes associated with generalised Islamophobic discourse but it also has unique inflections, reflecting the particularities of Sikh history and contemporary postcolonial diasporic circumstances, which make for a ‘Sikh Islamophobia’. That is, an Islamophobia that is thoroughly contemporary but retrospectively projects itself into the Sikh past to erase the traces of its contingent construction and present the Muslim threat as intrinsic and essential. The appearance of t-shirts bearing the legend: ‘Don’t freak I’m a Sikh!’ points to the complexity of Sikh-Muslim relations. This is the case even allowing for the opportunism of the market, for behind the fetishism of small differences by which ethnicised minorities can comfort the great ethnically unmarked, there is a deeper anxiety which points to the fears that if Sikhs can be mistaken for Muslims the claim that Sikhs have transcended their racialised framing may perhaps be more precarious than many hoped.

On 26 August 2007, Middlesbrough Football Club (FC) hosted a football match against local rivals Newcastle United FC. The game finished in an entertaining draw, however the event was particularly noteworthy because a large number of Newcastle United fans had repeatedly chanted that Middlesbrough's new star signing, the Egyptian forward, Ahmed Hossam Hussein Abdelhamid (known as Mido) was a terrorist bomber. Two days later, on 28 August 2007, a Guardian newspaper front-page headline, 'Islamophobia: a new racism in football?', posed an important question. Answering it opens up the discussion of Islamophobia to wider conceptual and policy issues which transcend the Mido affair.

Spectator racism has long been conceived as a problem within football in both the UK and abroad but very little has been said about the issue of Islamophobia in sport (Burdsey, 2007, p. 57). It is well established that football grounds have—at least in the past—provided an arena in which prejudiced values have prospered (see for instance, Back et al., 2001; Garland and Rowe, 2001; Robson 2004; Jarvis, 1991). However, it is uncertain whether such problems emerge in society and are brought into the football stadium or are developed in the highly passionate—though often prejudiced—football environment (Williams, Dunning and Murphy, 1992 [1984]).