

THE GLOBALIZATION OF IDENTITY POLITICS : THE SIKH EXPERIENCE¹

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England has always been a breeding ground for our revolutionists (...) What would Pandit Nehru have been without Harrow ? Or Ghandiji without his formative experiences here ? Even the Pakistan idea was dreamt up by young radicals at college in what we then were asked to think of as the Mother Country. Now that England's status has declined, I suppose it is logical that the quality of the revolutionists she breeds has likewise fallen. The Kashmiris ! Not a hope in hell. And as for these Khalistan types, let them not think that their evil deed has brought their dream a day closer.

Salman Rushdie, "Chekov and Zulu", in *East, West*³.

¹ This paper is the result of a field work of two weeks in the UK (Southall and London) and one month in Canada (Toronto, Ottawa and Vancouver), during which I interviewed extensively thirty individuals. The two thirds of my interlocutors were political activists involved in the Khalistan Council, the Khalistan Commando Force (KCF), the Dal Khalsa, the World Sikh Organization (WSO) and the International Sikh Youth Federation (ISYF). My other interviewees were involved in anti-racist groups (Southall Monitoring Group), community newspapers (*Desh Pardesh* in Southall, *Punjabi Times* in Surrey, B.C.), religious organizations (the Khalsa Diwan Society, managing the prestigious Ross Street *gurdwara* in Vancouver; the Sikh Missionary Society and the Trust in charge of the Sri Guru Singh Sabha *Gurdwara*, in Southall) and youth groups (Ontario Sikh Students Association, in Mississauga, Ontario). I also interviewed the most popular Sikh lawyer of Canada (Palbinder Kaur Shergill) and three young Sikh students who had just taken part in a charity bike ride from Birmingham to London.

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³ Salman RUSHDIE, *East, West*, Lodon : Vintage, 1995, p. 164.

Since the end of the eighties, International Relations theory has been affected by major changes. The dominant paradigms of the discipline, Realism, Liberalism and Marxism have been challenged by new perspectives, emphasizing the transformation of social, spatial and temporal dimensions of world politics. It is in this context that the issue of identities in the international society has begun to be acknowledged by IR scholars⁴. So far, the place of identity and so-called « ethnic groups » in world politics had been widely neglected. The Marxists feared to address the issue because, at least theoretically, ethnicity⁵ was thought to be antithetical to communism. Realism, for its part, focused on state-centric power politics, neglecting social issues. Liberalism, at last, asserted the following syllogism: western modernity tends to become universal ; western modernity lies on the nation-state, state-oriented loyalties and bordered territories ; hence, the western model of the nation-state tends to become the universal answer to the old quest for *thymos*, or social recognition (this is the « End of History » predicted by Francis Fukuyama⁶). In this perspective, the nation-state was then perceived as the only viable mode of governance of the people, and the hegemonic receptacle of their loyalties, contained by well-defined borders.

The economic, social and political changes associated with the recent acceleration of the globalization process and the erosion, if not the disappearance, of the westphalian system of world politics, make the dominant paradigms of IR theory obsolete⁷. *Globalization*, in the words of Roland Robertson, can be defined as “*the concrete structuration of the world as a whole*”⁸ due to the emergence of a “global” social space, where borderless interactions and interdependencies develop between persons. Due to the acceleration of this process but also to the dynamics of fragmentation *seemingly*⁹ opposing it, the nation-state is presently

⁴ Cf. Michael BROWN *et al.* (eds.), *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict*, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1997 ; Ted R. GURR and Barbara HALL, *Ethnic Conflict in World Politics*, Boulder : Westview Press, 1994, DONALD HOROWITZ, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, University of California Press, 1985 ; Jill KRAUSE & Neil RENWICK (ed.), *Identities in International relations*, Londres/New York : MacMillan/St Martin's Press, 1996 ; Manus I. MIDLARSKY, *The Internationalisation of Ethnic Strife*, Londres : Routledge, 1992 ; Stephen RYAN, *Ethnic Conflict and International Relations*, Aldershot : Dartmouth, 1995.

⁵ Let us precise that the term “ethnicity” will not be taken here as a biological, cultural or historical given, but as a deeply social process linked to the politics of assertion and recognition of the Self and the Other. This dynamic conception of ethnicity is based on the assumption that “a group or an individual has no one identity, but a variety (a potentially very large variety) of possibilities, that only incompletely or partially overlap in social time and social space”. Cf. Elizabeth TONKIN, Maryon MCDONALD and Malcolm CHAPMAN, *History and Ethnicity*, London : Routledge, 1989, p. 17.

⁶ Francis FUKUYAMA, *The End of History and the Last Man*, New York : Avon, 1992.

⁷ On this issue, cf. Bertrand BADIE, *Un monde sans souveraineté*, Paris : Fayard, 1999; Mathew HORSMAN and Andrew MARSHALL, *After the Nation-State*, Londres : Harper Collins, 1995; Gene LYONS and Michael MASTANDUNO, *Beyond Westphalia*, Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995; Susan STRANGE, *The Retreat of the State*, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1996.

⁸ Roland ROBERTSON, « Mapping the Global Condition : Globalization as the Central Concept », in Mike FEATHERSTONE (ed.), *Global Culture. Nationalism, globalization and modernity*, London/Newbury Park/New Delhi : Sage Publications, 1990, p. 20.

⁹ As Roland Robertson points out, “In numerous contemporary accounts (...), the globalizing trends are regarded in tension with “local” assertions of identity and culture”. This approach is clearly exemplified by the tribal “Jihad” world of Benjamin Barber. In an opposite perspective, Robertson suggests that although dynamics of homogenisation and heterogenisation are *seemingly* opposed, they are *actually* complementary and interpenetrative : “what is called local is in large degree constructed on a trans- or super-local basis” and “much of the promotion of locality is in fact the local expressed in terms of generalized recipes of locality”. Cf. Roland Laurent Gayer – The Globalization Of Identity Politics : The Sikh Experience – Mai 2002

assaulted from all sides : at the subnational level by the multiplication and transfers of the citizens' loyalties ; at the transnational level by global financial, cultural and migratory flows and finally, at the supranational level by the progression of post-national modes of governance. The State is in turmoil. Borders do not contain identities any longer, which rather overlap or undermine them. Identities are changing, swinging between the prenational (as the neo-medievalists suggest) and the post-national (this is James Rosenau's and the post-modernists' hypothesis).

It is in this context that the place of ethnicity in world politics –and especially diasporic ethnicity- is now being recognized, the modern equation between identity and statehood as well as the old distinction between “local” and “global” categories being increasingly challenged. The new politics of space and identity of diasporic communities, both influenced by the globalization process and influencing it in return, fascinate especially the post-modernists, who present the diasporic modes of localization and socialization as the embodiment of the post-modern condition¹⁰. Yet, this increasing attention given to diasporic identities and their relation to the globalization process should not obscure its limits. So far, very few works have detailed through case studies the global-local nexus at work in “new ethnicities”¹¹, in which diasporas play a decisive role, according to : (1) the nature of the cultural, economic and political bondage linking home societies and diasporic communities ; (2) the configuration of the relationships between diasporas, home states and host states and, more theoretically, the diasporas' relation to the notions of nationhood and statehood; (3) the ability of diasporas to organize themselves as coherent actors in the international public sphere (mobilizing ability at the multilateral and supranational level)¹².

ROBERTSON, “Glocalization : Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity”, in Mike FEATHERSTONE, Scott LASH and Roland ROBERTSON (eds.), *Global Modernities*, New Delhi/Londres : Sage Publications, 1995, p. 33 and 26 and Benjamin BARBER, *Jihad vs. Mcworld*, New York : Andrea Schulz, 1996.

¹⁰ Cf. Arjun APPADURAI, *Modernity at Large. Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 1996 ; Elazar BARKAN and Marie-Denise SHELTON (eds.), *Borders, Exiles, Diasporas*, Stanford : SUP, 1998 ; Chetan BHATT, *Liberation and Purity. Race, new religious movements and the ethics of post-modernity*, London/Bristol : UCL Press, 1997; Avtar BRAH, *Cartographies of Diaspora. Contesting Identities*, London/New York : Routledge, 1996; Rey CHOW, *Writing Diaspora. Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies*, Bloomington and Indianapolis : Indiana University Press, 1993 ; Sean McLOUGHLIN and Virinder S. KALRA, « Wish you Were(n't) Here ? Discrepant Representations of Mirpur in Narratives of Migration, Diaspora and Tourism », in Raminder KAUR and John HUTNYK, *Travel Worlds. Journeys in Contemporary Cultural Politics*, London and New York : Zed Books, 1999.

¹¹ I am referring here to Stuart Hall's work. According to him, in Western multicultural states, old identities built on nation, race and class are fading away, while “new cultural politics” emerge, engaging rather than suppressing difference. This new “politics of ethnicity predicated on difference and diversity” is directly related to the diasporic experience and “the consequences which this carries for the process of unsettling, recombination, hybridization and “cut-and-mix” –in short the process of diaspora-ization (...) which it implies”. Cf. Stuart HALL, “The new ethnicities”, in James DONALD and Ali RATTANSI (eds.), *Race, Culture and Difference*, London: Sage, 1992, p. 256-258. Cf. also Stuart HALL, “Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities”, in Anthony D. KING (ed.), *Culture, Globalization and the World-System. Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity*, Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

¹² On the place of diasporas in international relations, cf. Aline ANGOUSTURES and Valérie PASCAL, « Diasporas et financement des conflits », in François JEAN & Jean-Christophe RUFIN, *Economie des guerres civiles*, Paris : Payot, 1996 ; Milton J. ESMAN, « Diasporas and International relations », in Gabriel SHEFFER, Laurent Gayer – *The Globalization Of Identity Politics : The Sikh Experience* – Mai 2002

The first dimension of diasporic politics is focused on its manifestation at the transnational level; the second underlines the relations between diasporas and the world of state-centric ideas and bilateral relations; the last questions the potential for diasporic microactivities to produce macropolitical outcomes at the global level (i.e. through their mobilization of international public opinion and their irruption in multilateral and supranational institutions). One could also put it this way : diasporic politics is related to *the place of diasporas in the transnational space of the Liberal theory, in the state-centric world of the Realist theory and, finally, in the postnational polity of the Idealists*. This perspective is rather different from post-modern analysis of globalization, generally evaluating its process at the transnational or subnational level and underestimating its expression at the state-centric level, although the nation and the State are said not to have vanished yet. Hence, in my perspective, the place of states in the globalization process should be addressed more thoroughly and the definition I propose of “the globalization of identity politics” is : *the process through which groups modify their sense of belonging under the influence of transnational relations, ideas or events, the reshaping of their ethnicity affecting in turn world politics, at the national, international and supranational level*. More simply, it is characterized by two intertwined dynamics: the irruption of global flows in the formerly¹³ territorialized space of identities and, retroactively, the incidence of these newly “glocalized”¹⁴ identities on the international and global level. Hence, in the globalized world, as Jan Aart Scholte suggests, “The local co-exists with, is not wholly subordinate to and indeed shapes the global at the same time that its is shaped by the supraterritorial realm”¹⁵. In this perspective, it is clear that identities or “ethnicities” are not given but socially constructed. This is the meaning of “politics of identity»: identities are “*en route* rather than rooted”¹⁶ and on their way, they are now bound to be increasingly influenced by the global changes of the world-system and by the answers of groups and individuals to these macro evolutions¹⁷.

Modern Diasporas in International Politics, Londres et Sydney : Croom Helm, 1986 ; Myron WEINER (dir.), *International Migration and Security*, Boulder : Westview Press, 1993.

¹³ Since 1648 at least. The question of identities in pre-modern times is not my topic here and then, I won't enter the debate on « neo-medievalism », dealing with the following question : is the increasing disjunction between ethnicity, statehood and nationhood the sign of a return of mankind to medieval times, to a « nouveau Moyen âge sans Pape et sans Empereur » as Pierre Hassner suggests ? Cf. Pierre HASSNER, « Par-delà le national et l'international : la dérision et l'espoir », in Pierre HASSNER, *La violence et la paix. De la bombe atomique au nettoyage ethnique*, Paris : Editions Esprit, 1995, p. 339.

¹⁴ The ugly term « glocalization » was coined from the Japanese word *dochakuka*, originally defining the local adaptation of foreign agricultural techniques. It became popular among Japanese businessmen in the 1980s, then referring to their global outlook adapted to local conditions. For Roland Robertson, the term conveys the actual nature of the globalization process, which has involved « the simulatenity and the interpenetration of what are conventionally called the global and the local (...) ». Cf. Roland ROBERTSON, « Glocalization... », *op cit*, p. 30.

¹⁵ Jan Aart SCHOLTE, « Globalisation and Collective Identities », in Jill KRAUSE & Neil RENWICK (ed.), *Identities in International relations*, Londres/New York : MacMillan/St Martin's Press, 1996, p. 50.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 69.

In the case of India, the global dimensions of identity politics (whether at the national, regional or “communal” level) cannot be limited to the intervention of overseas expatriates in the national polity¹⁷. Yet, since the end of the nineteenth century, this phenomenon has become an ever more decisive factor in Indian politics of identity, as suggested by the epigraphic dialogue taken from Salman’s Rushdie short story *Chekov and Zulu*. However, unlike Rushdie’s character, Chekov, an Indian diplomat committed to crushing Sikh separatist groups abroad, my purpose here will not be to assert whether the quality of overseas Indian revolutionists is on the low, but more to emphasize how one community of Indian emigrants, the Sikhs, has been committed to a complex dialogue with its home society and to a violent confrontation with its home state. The globalization of Sikh identity politics will then be analyzed as a two-fold process: (1) it is characterized by the increasingly complex interaction between the Sikh diaspora’s *politics of the homeland* and the Punjabi *homeland politics*; (2) secondly, now discussed at a transnational level *between* Sikhs all over the world, Sikh ethnicity is now also being mobilized *by* Sikhs in the international public sphere, where their main target are public opinions and states. Against all odds, as we will see, the virtual disappearance of borders between Sikhs of the Punjab and their diaspora has not signed the erosion of social and political frontiers between them. Sikh diasporic politics of the homeland and homeland politics are *seemingly* more interconnected than ever; yet, they have not merged together and sharp differences remain between them, which have increased rather than decreased in recent time. The irruption of Sikh ethnicity in the international public sphere is then the result of the increasing autonomy of Sikh diasporic politics of the homeland rather than the outcome of its convergence with Punjabi homeland politics.

¹⁷ On the new place of the individual in IR theory, cf. James ROSENAU, *Turbulence in World Politics*, Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1990 and Michel GIRARD (dir.), *Les individus dans la politique internationale*, Paris : Economica, 1994.

¹⁸ Other factors could be : the global structure of the world-system, both economically and politically (at the three levels); the access of local ethnic entrepreneurs to transnational tools of communication and to the multilateral arena (idem); ; the level of penetration of transnational corporations in the country and the degree of politicization of the issue (which can affect national or regional ethnicities) ; the economic dependence of the country towards international financial institutions (affecting national ethnicity); global or local evolutions affecting the *Umma* (decisive for Muslim communal ethnicity), etc.

**THE SIKH DIASPORA AND ITS HOME SOCIETY :
FROM ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTION
TO POLITICAL DOMINATION ?**

The presence of Sikhs outside India is probably as old as the Sikh faith itself, which was shaped by ten *Gurus* between the fifteenth and seventeenth century. Indeed, Sikh *Khatri* traders developed small colonies in Afghanistan, Persia and Sri Lanka. Yet, the rise of Sikh mass migration outside South Asia did not take place before the enlistment of Sikhs in the British colonial army, after the annexation of Punjab (in 1849) and the Mutiny of the Cipoys (1857-1858). The Sikhs were then declared a “martial race” by the new colonial power and many Sikh soldiers were subsequently posted to places in British-held South-East Asia (mostly Singapore and Hong Kong). From there, early pioneers ventured to further lands: *Telia* (Australia, where the Sikhs began to settle in the 1880s) and *Milkan* (America, where they arrived 10 years later, especially in California and British Columbia). The first decade of the twentieth century saw the rise of Sikh communities on the western coast of North America, but Canada started controlling the migratory flows in 1908 and in the US, South Asian immigrants were denied entry by the Immigration Act of 1924. At the same time, the Sikhs also settled in East-Africa, taking part in the building of the East African Railway between 1896 and 1901. However, the Sikhs who settled in East Africa belonged to a different caste than the majority of Sikhs settled in the rest of the world. This was to play a major role in their ethnicity during their stay in Africa and later, when they would be expelled from Uganda, Kenya or Malawi in the 1970s and 1980s. At that time, East African *ramgharia* Sikhs (belonging to the craftsmen group) would then resettle massively in Britain, where they would have to face the hegemony of the *Jats* (land owners, of a higher social rank) arrived in *Vilayat* in the 1950s and 1960s. After the Second World War, Sikhs also started moving in large groups to North America, where a change of immigration policy was implemented in 1962 (in Canada) and in 1965 (in the US). By that time, the migrants entering North America were generally more qualified than the ones who had arrived there fifty years earlier, and they generally preferred to settle on the East Coast (Ontario in Canada; New York and Washington DC in the US). The new immigrants were also more skilled than those who arrived at the same time in the UK were. After the attack of the Indian Army on the Golden Temple in 1984, the massive repression of separatist guerillas and the slaughter of Sikh civilians following the murder of Indira Gandhi, a flow of Sikh refugees also started arriving in Western Europe and North America: around 10 000 in Germany, 8000 in the US, 6000 in Canada and the UK, 5 000 in Belgium and 4000 in France.

Today, the global Sikh diaspora numbers one million individuals (13 million Sikhs still living in India). Three-quarters of this group are established in the UK (between 400 000 and 500 000 individual), Canada (147 440) and the US (125 000)¹⁹.

The interactions between overseas Sikhs and Sikhs of the Punjab have taken several forms since the nineteenth century. The most obvious is economic, induced by the emigrants' economic remittances to their home society, which have both contributed to its prosperity and to its social turmoil. The second is religious, the diaspora importing religious staff from the Punjab and remaining under its spiritual guidance although becoming increasingly autonomous in its religious affairs. Lastly, the Sikh diaspora and its home society have developed complex political relationships through the century, their respective positions on the political destiny of the Sikh community now becoming increasingly polarized, if not antagonistic.

Sikh transnational economy

As cited by trading patterns discussed above, the Sikh transnational economy is almost as old as the Sikh faith itself, due to the geographical position of Punjab at the crossroads of historic trade routes to Central Asia, Persia and the Middle East, which culminated in highly developed trade links with these regions. However, it is only with the rise of British colonial power in the Punjab that the "overseas factor" started playing a role in the Punjabi economy. The colonization of Punjab sustained its integration into the modern international economy: while agrarian changes encouraged by the British led to Sikh internal migration from East to West Punjab, recruitment in the colonial army led to overseas emigration. From the 1860s onwards, an increasing number of Sikhs, especially *Jats*, swarmed the docks of Calcutta to board ships sailing to Hong Kong, where they would settle down or transit through on their way to other countries of the Far East and later to Australia and North America. These early emigrants remitted a great part of their incomes to their relatives in the Punjab. Through these remittances²⁰, they intended to promote the *izzat* - or prestige – of their extended families and since they planned to return to their homeland, they

¹⁹ The figures given are for 1990. Cf. Darshan Singh TATLA, *The Sikh Diaspora, the Search for Statehood*, Londres : UCL Press, 1999, p. 43.

²⁰ On the issue of emigrants' remittances and their socio-political impact in South Asia, cf. *The effects of migration and remittances on inequality in rural Pakistan*, *Pakistan Development Review*, Winter 1992 ; Richard H. ADAMS, « Remittances investment and rural asset accumulation in Pakistan », *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, vol. 47, n°1, 1998 ; Deepak NAYYAR, *Migration, remittances and capital flows : the Indian experience*, New Delhi : OUP, 1994.

also expected these contributions to ensure them a “comfortable family life”²¹. Most of the emigrants’ remittances then went to buying land and expanding farms, accordingly to the *ethos* of *Jat* Sikhs, who favor land as a source of social prestige and social security. It is on the same pattern, although not on the same scale, that the Sikh diaspora became involved in the Green Revolution of the 1960s. According to Darshan Singh Tatla, “Though little documented, the “green revolution” strategy in the Punjab was partly financed by emigrants’ remittances. The financial clout provided by relatives abroad helped many Punjabi peasants to take risks with the newly introduced hybrid varieties of wheat in the 1960s. In parts of Jalandhar and especially Horshiapur, where waterlogging formed a major hindrance to farm productivity, overseas funds provided for many preventive measures. Similarly, investments in new agricultural machinery, seeds, harvesters and tube wells were undertaken from overseas funds”²². Hence, the Sikh diaspora played a decisive role in the modernization of Punjab economy and, in the 1980s, emigrants’ remittances were estimated to be between 200 000 and 500 000 US dollars a year (with a peak of 1.8 billion dollars in 1983-1984)²³. However, capital inflows also had their negative features: they brought inflation – the price of land rising drastically in the districts of emigration-, inequalities of development (between the areas with overseas connections and others) and social tensions due to the challenging of traditional leadership by the “emigrant group”, i.e. families with relatives abroad. Hence, as noted by Arthur Helweg, “The middle class element began to decline – the rich became richer and the poor became poorer”²⁴. Helweg goes even further, suggesting that “Punjab as a state developed (...) an “external economy” – that is, the economic survival of the community is dependent on the influx of outside capital”²⁵. In this perspective, emigrants remittances would have reshaped economic and social patterns of power in Punjab, by giving a dominant position to emigrants’ relatives and by leaving landless and unemployed a growing number of people, many of whom were getting better educated due to the opening of new schools with... emigrants’ money.

The first explanation of the Khalistan²⁶ Movement could then be the following : under the guidance of the diaspora, the emigrant group embraced the cause of Punjabi independence because it saw in it an opportunity to strengthen its rising hegemony and to mobilize the underprivileged of the new external economy of Punjab. A growing elite, shaped

²¹ D.S. TATLA, *op cit*, p. 64.

²² *Ibid*, p. 65.

²³ Arthur W. HELWEG, « Sikh Politics in India. The Emigrant Factor », in N. Gerald BARRIER & Verne A. DUSENBERY (eds), *The Sikh Diaspora, Migration and the Experience Beyond Punjab*, Delhi : Chanakya, 1989, p. 308.

²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 309.

²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 310.

²⁶ *Khalistan*, « the Land of the Pure » or « the State of the Khalsa », is the name of the sovereign nation-state that Sikh separatists have been asking for since the 1970s. The term seems to have been created by a former Oxford student and member of the Indian Civil Service (ICS) settled in Britain, Kapur Singh, born in 1909. However, it is

by global economic and ideological flows would then have embraced nationalism for the sake of its hegemony. Such instrumentalist demonstrations, exemplified by Abner Cohen²⁷ and more recently by Paul Brass²⁸, are now common. But they underestimate several factors : does economic power always equate to socio-political leadership? How do ideas travel, from one place to another? For example, how did the Khalistani project evolve between the diaspora and the Punjab and vice-versa? Which resources did the Movement find inside the Indian political system and how did it resonate in Sikh history and culture ? Finally, what was the role of the “critical event” (operations Bluestar²⁹ and Woodrose³⁰) in the mutation of a demand for greater autonomy into a war of liberation ? I do not pretend here to answer all these questions, some of which have already been well addressed³¹. However, I would like to get beyond a purely instrumentalist point of view on Sikh separatism and look more precisely at the positions of emigrants on non-economic arenas of social life in the Punjab.

The religious marginalization of the Sikh diaspora

If the Punjabi economy has become more and more dependent on emigrants' remittances in the last decades (just as India as a whole was becoming increasingly dependent on Punjabi wheat), this process has not affected the social status of the diaspora

Dr. Jagjit Singh Chauhan and his organization based in Britain, the Khalistan Council, who made it popular from the 1970s onwards.

²⁷ Cf. Abner COHEN, *Custom and Politics in Urban Africa : A Study of Hausa Migrants in Yoruba Towns*, Berkeley : University of California Press, 1969.

²⁸ Cf. Paul BRASS, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, New Delhi/Newbury Park, Londres : Sage, 1991.

²⁹ Operation Bluestar took place on June 24 and 25, 1984. Although seventy thousand soldiers had started laying siege to the Golden Temple Complex (including the Golden Temple itself, the *Akhal Takht*, the Sikh Reference Library, a communal kitchen and hostels for pilgrims) and to thirty-seven other *gurdwaras* suspected to shelter Sikh militants from the month of May onwards, the attack was unpredicted. The rationality of this brutal attack (which destroyed the *Akal Takht* and the Sikh Reference Library and killed at least a thousand people) can be questioned since it reminded the Sikhs with the massacre and the subsequent destruction of the Golden Temple by Ahmed Shah Abdali in 1762, an event remembered as the *ghallughara* (Great holocaust). Moreover, the fact that the operation took place on the martyrdom day of Guru Arjun “not only meant that thousands of pilgrims would be worshipping at the shrine at the moment of the attack, but also invited a comparison between this first Sikh martyr and the modern-day martyrs defending the Golden Temple”. Cf. Cynthia MAHMOOD-KEPPLEY, *Fighting for Faith and Nation. Dialogues with Sikh Militants*, Philadelphia : University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996, p. 97. One the place of martyrdom in Sikhism, cf. also Joyce PETTIGREW, “Martyrdom and Guerilla Organization in Punjab”, *The Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, vol 30, n° 3, November 1992.

³⁰ Following the attack on Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and his armed militants sheltered in the *Akal Takht* since 1983, the Indian army stormed the rural areas of the Punjab, looking for young Sikh militants. Arbitrary house-searches and detentions, as well as rape, torture and extra-judicial killings became the routine of Punjabi life from then on.

³¹ On the role of the Congress (I) in the rise of Sikh militancy in the 1980s, cf. Anne VAUGIER-CHATTERJEE, « Le rôle de l'Etat-Congrès et des acteurs extérieurs dans la montée du séparatisme sikh », *Cultures & Conflits*, n° 15-16, Fall-Winter 1994 ; on the impact of operations Bluestar and Woodrose on Sikh ethnicity, cf. Dipankar GUPTA, *The Context of Ethnicity*, OUP, 1996 ; Cynthia MAHMOOD-KEPPLEY, *Fighting for Faith and Nation. Dialogues with Sikh Militants*, op cit; Joyce PETTIGREW, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, op cit; on the origins of the “Sikh homeland” issue, cf. Gopal SINGH, *Politics of Sikh Homeland (1940-1990)* ; Ram Narayan KUMAR, *The Sikh Unrest and the Indian State : Politics, Personalities and Historical Retrospective*, New Delhi: Ajanta, 1997.

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as dramatically as some suggest. Indeed, on religious and regional political arenas, central to Sikh identity politics, the diaspora largely remained a marginal factor, at least until recently.

The Sikh community was founded in April 1699 by Guru Gobind Singh³². It took the name of *Khalsa Panth* (path of the pure), whose members have to take an initiation (*amrit sanskar*) and respect a precise dress code (the 5 Ks), as well as a list of commands (the *Rahit Maryada*). Until the twentieth century, the *Khalsa* only recognized one ultimate authority, the *Guru Granth Sahib*³³. The highest institution of Sikhism, the *Akal Takht*, built in 1606 by the sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind, did not command all the Sikhs and many of them rejected its temporal authority³⁴. Hence, the Gurdwara Reform Movement of the early 1920s reshaped the *Panth* : the Sikh Gurdwara Act of 1925, which was its main outcome, transferred the ownership of “historic” Sikh shrines to a newly elected³⁵ institution, the Shiromani Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), which became the supreme temporal authority of Sikhism, “subject only to the overriding supremacy of the *Guru Granth Sahib*”³⁶. Although the SGPC would quickly become a very contested institution, biased by its electoral process and limited in its authority to Sikhs of the Punjab (as the *Akal Takht*), it is doubtless an important arena for Sikh politics of identity. Both of the institutions have the power to give their opinion on matters of faith and social conduct, whether in India or abroad, and they are very often consulted by Sikhs from all over the world³⁷, although they do not seem ready yet

³² However, the Sikh faith started being shaped by Guru Nanak (1469-1539) and eight other *Gurus* before Guru Gobind Singh. Bu the tenth and last master declared that, after him, there would be no more personal *Guru* and that the Sikhs should only find their way in the sacred scriptures (*Guru Granth*) and the Sikh community (*Guru Panth*) : « I abolish from now on the succession of persons through hereditary or selection. The God’s Word as enshrined in the *Adi Granth* (Original Book) will be the eternal and the spiritual *Guru*, and the secular *Guru* will be the *Panth*, or the whole community of the *Khalsa* ». Quoted in Gopal SINGH, *The religion of the Sikh people, op cit*, p. 27.

³³ The holiest Sikh scripture, including devotional poems of the first *gurus*, earlier medieval texts as well as Sufi hymns, gathered and printed by the fifth *guru*, Guru Arjun. In 1604, the book was placed in the Golden Temple but the sixth guru, Guru Hargobind, removed it from the shrine and kept it in his own house. The last *guru*, Guru Gobind Singh, reprinted it, relying upon his memory.

³⁴ Since Guru Hargobind (1595-1644), Sikhs recognize two manifestations of divine power : *miri* (or temporal power) and *piri* (or spiritual authority). The *Akal Takht*, as well as four other *Takhts* (two in the Punjab, one in Bihar and one in Maharashtra) stand for the first and the Golden Temple for the latter. The last Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, went further, merging the divinity and the sword and developing the notion of righteous war (*dharma-yuddha*). Since then, Sikhs have been divided on the interpretation of the *miri-piri* duality, some historians such as Gopal Singh pointing out that the two sovereignties were intended by the *Gurus* to remain distinct, while the fundamentalists emphasize the inseparability of religion and politics that the sixth and tenth personal *Gurus* would have encouraged. On this issue of temporal and spiritual authority in Sikhism, cf. Gopal SINGH, *History of the Sikh People*, New Delhi : World Book Center, 1988, p. 830; T.N. MADAN, “The Double-edged Sword : Fundamentalism and the Sikh Religious Tradition”, in Martin E. MARTY and R. Scott APPLEBY (eds.), *Fundamentalisms Observed*, Chicago/London : The University of Chicago Press, 1991.

³⁵ Only the « proper » (baptized and keeping unshorn hair) Sikhs are allowed to take part in its election.

³⁶ Hew MC LEOD, *Sikhism*, London : Penguin Books, 1997, p. 265.

³⁷ The *Hukamnammas* (or orders) of the *Jathedar* of the *Akal Takht*, although theoretically binding Sikhs of the Punjab only, are generally taken very seriously by Sikhs of the diaspora. Recently, the *hukamnama* requiring Sikhs to ban tables and chairs in the *langars* (or community kitchen of *gurdwaras*, where Sikhs are supposed to take their *langar* on the floor, to signify their equality) initiated a great debate among overseas Sikhs. The order, issued in 1998, was supposed to settle down the conflict on tables and chairs in overseas *gurdwaras*, especially in British Columbia, where the conflict between « moderates » and « fundamentalists » on this issue has already cost several lives since the beginning of the 1990s. On May 20, GS Aulakh, President of the Council of Khalistan, wrote to Ranjit Singh to “request that the decision on the manner of seating of Sangat during the distribution of Guru Ka Langar should be left to local Sangats with a general directive that the concept of equality must be

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to answer any kind of diasporic request³⁸. Hence, the spiritual and temporal institutions of Sikhism are based in the Punjab and Sikhs of the diaspora still rely on them for religious advice, even as they are being marginalised in their decision-making process³⁹. Under the guidance – if not the authority- of Punjabi temporal and spiritual institutions, Sikh emigrants are not “non-resident gods”⁴⁰ whose intervention in the Punjabi polity would have led to war. Although the Sikh diaspora illustrated itself by financing the construction of many gurdwaras in Punjab and by producing many a good researchers on Sikhism⁴¹, it is still marginal in major Sikh institutions and very often suspected of having traded the Sikh faith for “westernization.” Moreover, it still relies on *sants* (holy men), *gyanis* (preachers) and *granthis* (*gurdwara* employees) of the Punjab for the conduct of its religious activities⁴². This spiritual reliance of overseas Sikhs on the Punjab was attested during my fieldwork by the President of WSO Canada, who told me :

“Lots of people here they want to marry their children still back home. Not all the time but sometimes they prefer. So by doing that, they always have the fresh generation from Punjab, the children who have been brought up in Punjab and has been taught in the Punjabi Universities, when they come here, they have more basic values in their blood than the children who have grown up here”⁴³.

Hence, the Sikh diaspora cannot be seen as the hegemon of modern Sikh ethnicity, which was more shaped by endogenous evolutions of Sikhism (the Singh Sabha Movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century⁴⁴, the Gurdwara Movement of the 1920s⁴⁵,

maintained”, in order to “preserve the unity of the Sangat at this crucial time of crisis of the Sikh Nation”. Cf. “An appeal to Akal Takht Jathedar”, <http://khalistan.com>. Beyond issuing *hukamnammas* affecting overseas Sikhs, *Jathedars* of the Akal Takht also tour the diaspora regularly.

³⁸ Last year, the Canadian branch of the World Sikh Organization (WSO) wrote to the *Jathedar* of the Akal Takht to enquire about the position of Sikhism toward homosexuality. No answer ever came.

³⁹ After the World Sikh Convention held in Amritsar in 1995, the SGPC founded a World Sikh Council to settle socio-religious issues concerning the Sikhs worldwide. However, this institution is yet to designate its diasporic members.

⁴⁰ Cf. *India Today*, September 1983.

⁴¹ Such as Harjot Oberoi and Gurinder Singh Mann in Canada or Nikki Gunninder Kaur Singh in Britain. Moreover, some diasporic individuals committed themselves to creative religious works, such as the translation of the *Guru Granth Sahib* in English and French, or the production of an encyclopedia of Sikhism on CD-Rom (which was the work of Raghbir Singh Bains, living in Surrey, British Columbia).

⁴² *Sants* of the Punjab started visiting the diaspora from 1908 onwards, although these visits have become common since the 1970s only . Most of these visiting *sants* were heads of religious centers based in Jullunder and Ludhiana. Some of them settled abroad and opened *gurdwaras*, such as Mihan Singh in Vancouver, Gurdev Singh in the English Midlands and Toronto and Amar Singh in Britain, Singapore and Canada.

⁴³ Interview, Brampton (Ontario), 12/08/99.

⁴⁴ For an analysis of the impact of the Singh Sabha Movement on modern Sikh ethnicity, cf. Harjot OBEROI, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries. Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition*, Delhi : OUP, 1997, where the author shows that this movement which took place from 1873 to 1902, greatly contributed to « Sikhizing the Sikhs » by emphasizing their distinct religious identity. Indeed, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the religious boundaries between Sikhs and Hindus were not as clear as they are now.

⁴⁵ The Gurdwara Movement (1920-1925) started with a controversy over the right of Sikh untouchables to enter the Golden Temple, which led to a mass movement committed to withdraw the control of Sikh shrines from Laurent Gayer – *The Globalization Of Identity Politics : The Sikh Experience* – Mai 2002

the 1962 split in the Akali Dal⁴⁶, the Punjabi Subha Movement⁴⁷) or by patterns of the Indian political system than by the influence of overseas Sikhs. The growing economic power of emigrants and their families did not impose their leadership on Sikh ethnic discourse, which is more polycentric than ever (being at the crossroads of secular nationalism and religious fundamentalism, as articulated from several centers: Amritsar and Anandapur in Punjab, London and Birmingham in England, Toronto and Vancouver in Canada, New York, Washington and Yuba City (CA) in the US). Hence, the mobilization of the diaspora in favor of Khalistan does not mean that all elements of the diaspora have endorsed it, nor that those who did, had common motivations. Neither can it be assumed that the home society has simply imported and adopted these ideas through the emigrant group. The relative marginalization of the diaspora in modern institutions of Sikh ethnicity limits its ideological influence in Punjab and the militancy years of 1984-1992 were more probably activated by the endogenous evolutions of the Punjabi polity than with the importation of a diasporic strategy of state-building.

The political involvement of overseas Sikhs in the Punjab : an endless failure?

If the hegemonic position of the Sikh diaspora in the Punjab fades away after careful analysis, a clear appreciation of its political involvement in its home society still requires systematic investigation. Indeed, it is these links, rather than the religious and economic ones, that have furnished the ideological (if not the historical and cultural) background of the Khalistan Movement. Much of the Khalistani rhetoric has been imported from Britain, Canada and the US. Yet, it is only because it found fertile ground in the Punjab that it could take root there, at least for a few years. These local opportunities were two-fold: (1) Sikh history furnished past examples of Sikh “sovereignty”⁴⁸ and the Sikh “naturalization” of nationalism has been on the way since the end of colonial period at least⁴⁹; (2) mistakes of the Center in handling federalism in general and Sikh regionalism in particular led to massive dissatisfaction with it; after Operation Bluestar, the fury of Indian repression also inflamed the cause of separatism.

corrupt priests (the *Mahants*). Its main outcome were the foundation of the SGPC (in November 1920), the creation of the Akali Dal (in January 1921), which would become the main Sikh political party in Punjab, and the transfer of the control over Sikh shrines to the SGPC (in 1925).

⁴⁶ Which marginalised the historical Tara Singh faction of the Akali Dal and opened the era of *Jat* hegemony over the Punjabi political scene, confirmed in 1965 by the election of Sant Fateh Singh at the head of the Akali Dal.

⁴⁷ From 1948 to 1966, the Akali Dal, led by Master Tara Singh and, from 1965 onwards by Sant Fateh Singh, organized a campaign for the creation of a Punjabi-speaking state. In 1966, the present state of Punjab emerged but the question of Chandigarh remained unsolved.

⁴⁸ The Sikhs ruled over Punjab from 1709 to 1716, from 1762 to 1790 and finally from 1801 to 1849. The greatest period of Sikh sovereignty over the Punjab was under Maharaja Ranjit Singh, from 1801 to 1839.

⁴⁹ Cf. Harjot OBEROI, « From Punjab to ‘Khalistan’ : Territoriality and Metacommentary », *Pacific Affairs*, Spring 1987, where the author shows that the « undeniable nexus between the Punjab and Sikh consciousness » has

Initially, the political mobilization of the Sikh diaspora was inspired by organizations or political parties of the Punjab. The Chief Khalsa Diwan of Amritsar, founded in 1902, in the aftermath of the Singh Sabha Movement, constituted the main reference of early diasporic organizations, such as the Khalsa Diwan Society, founded in 1907 in Vancouver and later developed in California. Singh Sabhas were also set up in South East Asia and they provided funding and advertising to Punjabi causes. The Gurdwara Reforms Movement launched by the Akalis also received support from the diaspora, although it was merely symbolic⁵⁰.

Hence, in the early decades of the XXth century, the Sikh diaspora was more mobilized by political activists of the Punjab than it mobilized them. Patterns of political organization and issues of mobilization were derived from the Punjab and diasporic politics did not yet have a life of its own. This was to change with the Ghadr Movement. Initiated by the racist policies of Canada and the US, this revolutionary movement started developing on the West coast of North America from 1912 onwards. It was led by two intellectuals : Lala Hardayal, who mobilized California's Sikh students, and Taraknath Das, addressing Vancouver Sikhs. Around Hardayal, a Hindi Sabha was formed in 1913, which soon published the weekly *Ghadr* (Revolutionary), clearly advocating the liberation of India through armed struggle. In August 1914, Hardayal tried to convince his militants to return to India and embrace the fight for independence. 3 200 Indians, mostly Sikhs, answered his call and tried to start up an uprising in the Punjab, sadly unaware of the Punjabi peasants' loyalty to the *Raj*. The attempt was soon crashed in 1915 and revolutionaries were tried in 12 special tribunals, where they received particularly harsh sentences meant to serve as an example to others contemplating civil disobedience. Although the movement was short lived, it had important outcomes : it "inspired a spirit of freedom, secular and socialist ideology, and helped in the establishment of the Communist Party and the rise of leftist thought among the Punjabi peasantry"⁵¹. Moreover, it was the sign that the Sikh diaspora was entering its modern political age, not only influenced by political actors and issues of the Punjab but developing politics of its own. Finally, the failure of the Ghadr movement suggests that political interventions of the diaspora in the Punjab must be closely monitored if they are to succeed. Indeed, the main teaching of the Ghadr was that no diasporic intervention in the Punjab can succeed without the support of local political groups and public opinion. Diasporic revolutionaries cannot operate in a vacuum and hope to be effective : they must root their action in their homeland politics or experience quick failure. As we will see, seventy years

only been established since Partition, through the Punjabi Subh a movement, the Green Revolution and the recent Khalistan Movement.

⁵⁰ For instance, one Canadian Sikh delegation took part in the *Jaito Morcha* of 1923-1925. The *Jatha* from Canada started from Vancouver on July 13, 1924 and reached Jaitho, in Punjab, on February 1925. Several Sikhs from Shanghai, Hong Kong, Singapore and Penang joined the Canadian *Jatha* on its way.

⁵¹ TATLA, p. 90.

later, this command was not taken seriously enough by overseas Khalistanis, whose movement faced major setbacks in the Punjab due to their failure to recognize this reality .

Thus, from 1915 onwards, political links between the Punjab and the diaspora developed in two directions : political actors and issues of the Punjab mobilized the diaspora, benefiting from its funding and advertising ; retroactively, the diaspora started developing politics of its own, sometimes influencing the Punjabi polity in return.

In the first instance, the Congress (I) developed an Indian Overseas Congress (IOC) in Britain and Canada in the 1970s. The Akali Dal, for its part, opened a branch in Britain in 1968 and in the US in 1977. This transnationalisation of mainstream parties active in Punjab was not inspired by electoral politics : overseas Indians, recently labeled “Non Resident Indians” (NRIs) or “Persons of Indian Origin” (PIOs), do not have the right to vote in their homeland. Hence, their mobilization can only serve to enlarge the financial wherewithal and enhance the external world’s perception of the political activists based in the Punjab.

In the second instance, a section of the diaspora “autonomously” committed itself to the cause of independence of “Khalistan”, although it is not very clear yet whether the Khalistan Movement was initiated in the diaspora or in the Punjab. The first major actor of the Movement, Dr. Jagjit Singh Chauhan, was a medical practitioner and a one-time finance minister of Punjab, belonging to the Akali Dal (Tara Singh faction). In 1971, he sought a British passport and went to Pakistan to develop an entity for the management of Sikh shrines, similar to the SGPC. Some also say that he took this opportunity to approach Pakistani intelligence agencies and set up a “Rebel Sikh Government at Nankana Sahib”⁵², although this was denied to me by Chauhan himself. From then on, Chauhan became the principal thinker and organizer of what would come to be known as the Khalistan Movement. In September 1971, he held a press conference in London where he denounced the oppression of the Sikhs in India. On October 13, 1971, he arranged for publication of a one-page advertisement of Khalistan in *The New York Times*. In 1977, he went back to India and led a small group of activists in Jullunder for three years. In April 1980, one of his men, Balbir Singh Sandhu, announced in Amritsar the creation of an eleven member Council of Khalistan committed to strive for a sovereign Sikh state. In June, Chauhan also supported the first radio broadcasting program from the Golden Temple and, later, he encouraged the diffusion in Punjab of Khalistan passports, bank notes and stamps designed in Canada, now archived in London, where “The Doctor” has been living for the last ten years. Hence, the political career of Chauhan presents many characteristics of the “diasporization” of a politician formed in mainstream Punjabi politics. Prevented from returning to India since 1980, he has taken roots in the diaspora, although it took him a long time to do so. Interestingly, it is the same

man who would become the main advocate of Khalistan abroad that took part in the economic mobilization of the diaspora at the time of the Green Revolution. Herein then lies – in all probability - the essential unity of his political life : Chauhan has always perceived the diaspora as the main resource for the transformation of Punjab, whether economically or politically. Disappointed with his fellow men in his homeland he then turned to the “*richer and more politicized*”⁵³ Sikhs of the diaspora, and finally became sufficiently within it to promote his views and have them heard. Yet, Chauhan was not the only early promoter of Khalistan. Gangha Singh Dhillon, an American naturalized Sikh, also has committed himself to the promotion of Khalistan since the beginning of the 1980s. In March 1981, he visited India and was elected president of the Sikh Educational Conference organized in Chandigarh by the Chief Khalsa Diwan. The main outcome of this conference was the adoption of a resolution which authorized pursuit of associate membership in the United Nations for the Sikhs.

Although the idea of Khalistan was advocated early on by some individuals in the diaspora, two things should be made very clear here. First, although discussed and designed in the UK, the US and Canada since the 1970s, the idea of Khalistan did not receive much popular support either in the diaspora or in the Punjab before the Sikh homeland became enmeshed in a vicious circle of agitation-repression, begun in 1978, culminating in the 1984 attack on the Golden Temple and followed by almost ten years of terror. Secondly, it must be made clear that the Sikhs’ questioning of their collective status is already ancient. Successive Sikh reformative movements have not ceased, since the end of the nineteenth century, to confront the identity of the Sikh *Panth* to Western theories of ethnicity. At the time of Partition, the idea of a sovereign Sikh state, “Sikhistan”, received support from both the Sikh elites and the public at large. In 1946, for instance, in a synthesis of secular nationalism and religious communalism, the Akali Dal asked for the recognition of political sovereignty of the “Sikh nation” over Punjab, “the Sikhs being attached to the Punjab by intimate bonds of holy shrines, property, language, traditions, and history” and claiming it “as their homeland and holy land which the British took over as a “trust” from the last Sikh ruler”⁵⁴. Indeed, the Sikhs did rule an Empire before the two Anglo-Sikh wars of 1845-1846 and 1848-1849. They were later colonized, but colonization brought integration in the international economy of goods, persons and ideas. Modern theories of nationalism were imported into the Punjab in the process and Sikh history began to be reinterpreted through this new paradigm, one which Hindus and Muslims would also learn to use so effectively. Hence, when the Sikhs resigned to join India in 1947, some of them expected that, within a few years, the Congress leadership would grant the Punjab either independence or a satisfactory degree of autonomy. With their growing prosperity in independent India, the cry for independence

⁵² Cf. Arthur HELWEG, *op cit*, p. 314.

⁵³ Interview with Dr. Jagjit Singh CHAUHAN, Southall, 16/07/99.

quickly led way to a demand for greater autonomy, the main outcome of which was the 1966 creation of the present state of Punjab. But Sikh regionalism did not remain a mainstream movement for long. In 1973, the Akali Dal reanimated the debate on the “Sikh nation” in its controversial Anandapur Resolution. At the same time, the dangerous games of Indira Gandhi, secretly supporting the very militant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale against the more moderate Akalis, contributed to the rebirth of Sikh nationalism. The entry of Punjab into the cycle of agitation, from 1978 onwards, the “critical event” of 1984 and the subsequent mobilization of the diaspora, would do the rest; that is, cause the mutation of a peaceful demand for greater autonomy within India, into a war of liberation in the name of both nation *and* religion.

The reasoning developed above should made clear that, although the contribution of some diasporic individuals to the project of Khalistan was clear from 1971 onwards, these activities should be appreciated cautiously. Sikh nationalism takes roots in the colonial encounter, although it was only formulated from the 1940s onwards, and finds many resources in both Sikh history and Sikh culture. It is not a creation of the diaspora, although it seems to have perpetuated itself longer overseas than in the Punjab, where the cause of Khalistan was only endorsed for a few years, from 1984 to 1992, broadly.

In conclusion to this first part, let me summarize my main arguments as follows :

(1) The Sikh diaspora is not the “non-resident god” of the Punjab’s economy nor of its politics; rather, the diaspora has long been marginal on the religious field and was never instrumental in shaping Punjabi political thought, except as an adjunct to, and with the support of, local political activists ;

(2) The Sikh diaspora did play its role in the conceptualization and, as we will now see, in the global promotion of a sovereign Sikh state; however, the diasporic endorsement of Khalistan was slow and cannot be understood outside its Punjabi contextual history; Sikh nationalism takes roots in the pre-colonial and colonial period and was only reactivated in the 1970s, then exacerbated in the 1980s, due to the radicalization of the various protagonists of Punjabi politics ;

(3) Consequently, it appears that Sikh ethnicity has been affected by the *interaction* of local politics and global flows, rather than by the irruption of overseas politics on the Punjabi political scene. In other words, *Sikh diasporic politics of the homeland interfere with and are influenced by Punjabi homeland politics yet neither is entirely subordinate to the other*: these

⁵⁴ Quoted by DS TATLA, *op cit*, p. 19.

two dynamics, both at the core of modern Sikh ethnicity, can only become congruent in exceptional circumstances (as in the aftermath of operations Bluestar and Woodrose);

(4) Hence, from the Sikh experience, it is apparent that actors and ideas shaped in the global realm must imbue themselves with a local identity if they are to succeed. Global actors and flows must become integrated in the socio-political environment(s) where they operate if they are to prosper, just like micro-actors and micro-grievances need to be understandable and mobilizing at the global level if they are to be recognized. This is probably nothing new. Colonial encounters throughout the globe exemplified this early. Yet, with the recent acceleration of the globalization process and the virtual disappearance of geographical if not social borders, the global-local nexus has acquired a new complexity and an ever increasing influence on politics of identity throughout the world.

In the Sikh case, we have seen that this process – one that we have called the “globalization of identity politics” - operates primarily at the transnational level with the complex economic, religious and political interaction of a diaspora with its home society. We must now analyze the result of this process, i.e. the Sikh identity come to fruition in the global realm, due to the lobbying activities of the Sikh diaspora. As I suggested in the introduction, these are the two facets of Sikh global politics of identity : (1) due to the revolution of communication, transports and finance, Sikh emigrants’ contacts with their home society tend to get more intense, Sikh identity being discussed transnationally between Sikhs all over the world; (2) beyond being discussed transnationally *between* the Sikhs, the irruption of the diaspora in Sikh politics of identity leads to it being promoted *by* the Sikhs in the global world of states, multilateral organizations and international public opinion. In the first stage (that of the diasporic irruption on the local political scene of its home society), the diaspora tends to be marginalized but in the second one (that of the irruption of Sikh ethnicity in the global realm), it is definitely the emigrants who have the lead.

THE IRRUPTION OF SIKH ETHNICITY IN THE INTERNATIONAL ARENA

As I tried to explain in the first part of my discussion, the idea of an independent Sikh state did not receive much support in the diaspora or in the Punjab before the Indian attack in June 1984 on the Golden Temple. In 1946-1947, a group of Sikh ethnic entrepreneurs asked for a Sikh homeland but between Partition and Operation Bluestar, Sikh ethnicity largely turned into mainstream regionalism, oblivious of its more militant past. In the 1970s, seeds of discontent were planted by the perverse effects of the Green revolution and the inept governance of New Delhi. The Akalis' Anandapur Sahib Resolution of 1973 then revitalized the call for greater autonomy but, with the exception of Dr. Chauhan who flew to England in 1971, very few overseas Sikhs adopted the secessionist rhetoric before the three major crisis of 1978⁵⁵, 1982⁵⁶ and, most of all, 1984. Bhindranwale himself, who took shelter inside the Golden Temple with his comrades in arms at the end of 1983, was not a Khalistani⁵⁷. He remained convinced until his brutal death that the Sikhs' future remained in India, despite their "oppression" in the hands of the Hindu leadership at the Center. Hence, most of the analysts of Punjabi politics and of the Sikh diaspora agree with the idea that, to a large extent, it was the military crackdown on Bhindranwale, the resulting desecration of the Sikh's holiest shrine and its resultant, brutal repression, that radically altered the Sikhs' attitude towards India, although, as Joyce Pettigrew suggests, it was probably "during the 1970s that the bonds of the Sikhs with the state began to loosen"⁵⁸. It is not my purpose here to explain what led to the Indian army operations and how a local insurgent movement was activated by the violence of state repression. The role of this "critical event" in the reshuffling of Sikh ethnicity has already been well studied⁵⁹ and, unfortunately, I do not have the time here to present the details of these earlier works. Moreover, my point is not so much to reiterate the endogenous origins of "Khalistanism" in the Punjab as to elucidate

⁵⁵ On April 13, 1978, Sikh fundamentalists of the *Damdami Taksal* (the religious seminary led by Bhindranwale) and the *Arkhand Kirtni Jatha* clashed with the heterodox *Sant Nirankari* sect, who was believed by the former to be supported by the Indian government. Thirteen orthodox Sikhs and two Nirankaris lost their lives during the firing. This episode played a great role in the mobilisation of Bhindranwale's supporters and led to the foundation of two militant organizations of "orthodox" Sikhs : the Dal Khalsa and the Babbar Khalsa, which would later prosper in the diaspora.

⁵⁶ In 1982, Sant Harchand Singh Longowale, "moderate" leader of the Akali Dal, called for a *Dharam Yudh Morcha* (War for righteousness), soon joined by Bhindranwale and his supporters. This movement of civil disobedience lasted until 1985. The Rajiv Gandhi-Longowale Accord which put an end to it was never implemented.

⁵⁷ Cf. Mark JUERGENSMEYER, « The Logic of Religious Violence », in T.N. MADAN, *Religion in India*, Delhi : OUP, 1991, p. 383-384.

⁵⁸ Joyce PETTIGREW, *The Sikhs of the Punjab, Unheard Voices of State and Guerilla Violence*, London/New York : Zed Books, 1995, p. 7.

⁵⁹ Cf. *supra*, note 27.

the concept and significance of its endorsement by the diaspora, which led to the irruption of Sikh identity politics in the international public sphere. But let me clarify one point before presenting the nature of and the rationale for the Sikh diaspora's "private diplomacy". Initially, although some individuals settled abroad asked for Khalistan and tried to export secessionism to the Punjab from the 1970s onwards, the rise of the Khalistan Movement, from 1984 to 1992, found its origin in Punjabi homeland politics rather than in diasporic politics of the homeland. In other words, whether in India or abroad, the support for Khalistan was initiated by the evolution of the Punjabi and Indian political scenes rather than by an improbable diasporic interference within them. Hence, Sikh nationalism was more exported from India to the diaspora than the opposite, unlike what some authors suggest⁶⁰. However, as is explained below, once endorsed by a large section of Canadian, British and American-based Sikhs, the Khalistan Movement gained world attention and, by controlling access to foreign authorities and media, overseas Khalistani militants quickly acquired the leadership of a Movement which would soon lose the support of Sikhs in the Punjab, even while it was becoming a crucial and permanent element of Sikh diasporic politics.

From emotional shock to international lobbying : the origins of the Sikh diaspora's private diplomacy

Operation Bluestar and its aftermath in the diaspora

Almost all the Khalistani activists that I met during my fieldwork in Britain and Canada related the same story when asked about the dynamics that led to their involvement in the separatist movement: prior to the Golden Temple attack, they were *mona* (clean-shaven) or *sahajdhari* (latitudinarian) Sikhs and easily inclined toward frequenting pubs and bars (alcohol and tobacco consumption being against the *rahit*), without internal conflict regarding their religious or national identity. Until the 80s, for overseas Sikhs established in Canada, Britain and the US, the issue was social and economic integration and the daily efforts in this direction did not leave much room for politics of identity⁶¹, although Sikh

⁶⁰ Cf. Arthur W. HELWEG, "Sikh politics in India", *op cit*; Aline ANGOUSTURES & Valérie PASCAL, "Diasporas et financement des conflits", *op cit*, where the two authors suggest that overseas Sikhs belong to a "matrix diaspora", at the origin and at the lead of a conflict tearing apart its homeland.

⁶¹ This does not mean that there were no Sikh overseas organizations before the 1980s, but rather that there were no organization emphasizing Sikh ethnicity in the host states public sphere ; indeed, until the advent of the Khalistan Movement, congruent with the advent of multicultural policies in Britain, Canada and the US, there were three types of organizations active in the Sikh diaspora : 1) religious organizations, generally in charge of the Laurent Gayer – The Globalization Of Identity Politics : The Sikh Experience – Mai 2002 19
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mobilisation in favor of the recognition of the turban as an efficient protection and an indispensable article of Sikh faith started as early as the 1960s in Britain⁶².

In this context, in which some will recognize the process of “acculturation” and others, the dynamics of “integration”, the irruption of Indian soldiers in the Darbar Sahib complex, on June, the 6th, 1984, produced a shock-wave among overseas Sikhs. For instance, the President of the World Sikh Organization (WSO) Canada told me :

“I used to cut my hair before 1984. When the Golden Temple attack occurred, not only me, lots of other Sikhs in Canada, in England, in America, they came back to their faith... But very strongly came back because their faith was hurt, their faith was attacked by the government of India”⁶³.

Most of the people I interviewed who were old enough to recall the events told me that, in the days preceding Operation Bluestar, they had been closely following the evolutions of the “Bhindranwale affair”, on TV or on the radio. On June the 6th, as the Punjab was cut off from the rest of the world, they learned from BBC that, against all odds, the Indian *jawans* –amongst whom were several Sikhs- had finally resolved to invade the holiest Sikh shrine, thereby laying siege against the Sikhs’ holiest religious and highest temporal authority. Upon hearing the news, crowds of weeping and shaking Sikh men, women and children immediately rushed to the closest *gurdwara* they could find, where they all gathered to pray and share their trauma - one often recalled by physical metaphors. For instance, the President of WSO Canada related the impact of the attack like this: “*It really hurt me. Like somebody really shook me and somebody physically attacked me though I was seating here 10 000 miles away (...) It was really a physical attack on me*”. However, the “critical event” not only produced grief, but anger too. For instance, on the 6th of June, one Khalistani cadre that I met in London, on the hearing of the news, ran to the Indian high commission, attacked

gurdwaras (such as the KDS in Canada) ; 2) communist workers’ associations (such as the Indian Workers Association, active in Britain) ; 3) foreign branches of mainstream political parties based in the Punjab (such as the Indian Overseas Congress and overseas branches of the Akali Dal, operating in every major country of Sikh immigration). Hence, the Sikh diaspora has a long tradition of economic and political mobilization on a community basis and John Rex suggests that « The development of class-based industrial and political organizations is not something new to the Sikhs and they are quite capable of exploiting the opportunities available to them within the politics of the nation-state of settlement. Part of the culture of the community is concerned precisely with ensuring that its members have maximum rights in their country of settlement ». Cf. John REX, *Ethnic minorities in the Modern Nation State, Working Papers in the Theory of Multiculturalism and Political Integration*, MacMillan/St Martin’s Press, 1996, p. 106.

⁶² From 1959 to 1968, Manchester and Wolverhampton Sikhs successfully campaigned for the right of Sikh bus drivers to wear a turban on duty, and the case of T.S. Sandhu even affected Indo-British relations. Later, between 1973 and 1976, British Sikhs campaigned against a 1972 law requiring every motor-cyclist to wear a crash-helmet and denying Sikhs the right to wear a turban instead. In 1976, the law was amended and allowed Sikhs to wear turbans instead of crash-helmets, since the turban was recognized to be as protective as a proper helmet. The main protagonists of this case were the Sikh Missionary Society (UK) and M.P. Sydney Bidwell (elected from Ealing-Southall). Yet, beyond these early successes, in Britain, Canada and the US, lobbying in favor of Sikh religious rights only rose in the 1980s, and even more in the 1990s.

it and started setting it on fire. As a result, he was sentenced to two years of prison in Britain but was also elected President of one major diasporic organization backing the militant outfits which would soon rise in the plains of the Punjab.

Hence, as my fieldwork and that of some authors' attest, Operation Bluestar appears to have been a "critical event" which led many Sikhs abroad to look back towards their homeland and religious traditions. The events that followed (the military crackdown on the Punjab's rural areas, Indira Gandhi's assassination, anti-Sikh riots in Delhi and Haryana), all fuelled this collective movement that would inappropriately be described as "revivalist", since there was precious little in the way of identity politics to even *be* revived in the Sikh diaspora, prior 1984.

However, one cannot stop here, attributing all blame for the realm of terror unleashed in the Punjab between 1984 and 1992, to the Indian central leadership. Besides psychological considerations, two socio-political dynamics actually explain why a collective trauma gave birth to the largest and longest political mobilization ever animated by the Sikh diaspora. The first such dynamic is the social and geographical origins of the emigrants which have played a significant role in their support of, or their opposition to, the Movement. The second dynamic is the transformations of Canadian, American and British public policies regarding immigrant communities, as well as the new trends in these countries' foreign policies. These structural changes have offered institutional encouragement to the politics of identity of the "new" Sikh diaspora, not merely defined by its dispersal anymore, but also by its new degree of political mobilization and the renewed intensity of its cultural and political bondage with Punjab, however imaginary it may be.

Differentiation among the Sikh Diaspora and its impact on the diasporic endorsement of Khalistan

In order to understand which fractions of the Sikh diaspora became most supportive of Khalistan in the aftermath of Operation Bluestar, one must first look at the social and geographical origins of the immigrants. Throughout the diaspora, it is generally *Jat* Sikhs, and among them *amritdharis* (or initiated Sikhs), who have been the most adamant in promoting Khalistan. What, then, can explain the elective affinities of *Jat* Sikhs with the Khalistan Movement ? Three factors seem to have been causally intertwined: (1) the traditionally devout religious conviction of the *Jats* (who are encouraged to become initiated

⁶³ Interview, Brampton (Ontario), 12/08/99
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and to remain *keshdari* Sikhs -keeping unshorn hair- although many had become *mona* or *sahajdhari* in the diaspora) and the fact that the attack on the Golden Temple induced a new religious fervour in their ranks. Therefore, the initial phase of the Khalistan Movement, which clearly advocated for the foundation of a sovereign Sikh theocracy⁶⁴, spoke eloquently to formerly or newly baptised *Jat Sikhs*. They were then highly supportive of a Sikh theocracy, given that the individual spiritual transformations many of them experienced after Operation Bluestar were equated with the necessary transformation of Punjab. The physical and spiritual transformations they underwent were projected onto the Punjabi body politic⁶⁵; (2) as a caste of farmers and landlords, *Jats* are the Sikhs who keep the strongest economic, cultural and political links with the Punjab; many of them maintain property as well as strong family ties in their homeland, such that “good governance” in the Punjab is tantamount to preservation of their economic prosperity and that of their relatives. Moreover, some *Jats* who hold land in the Punjab maintain the dream of returning to their homeland in their advanced years; and this desire for eventual return convinced many, after Operation Bluestar, that the Punjab had now fallen prey to poor governance, and that the only solution was secession from India; even corruption of Sikh bureaucrats or politicians in the state was attributed to India’s control over the Punjab, which would have obliterated the Panthic spirit; (3) having prospered economically and socially in the diaspora, some *Jats* forged strong economic and political ties with the established power structure of their host states; these connections strengthened their status as community leaders in the early days of the Khalistan Movement, because they were the only ones who had access to the host state media and authorities, and were therefore the only ones who could express the grievances of less privileged Sikh immigrants. Hence, the rise of the Khalistan Movement offered the *Jat* elite occasion to assert its domination over the diaspora; however, this instrumentalist perspective should not obscure the fact that many *Jats* who dedicated themselves to the Khalistan Movement expected no personal benefit from it : their commitment was often activated by the Hindu-Sikh notion of *seva* (benevolent service to the community) and such politics of charity can never be reduced exclusively to the promotion of self-interest⁶⁶.

⁶⁴ Although most of the Khalistani militants that I met in Britain and Canada told me that Khalistan would not be a Sikh theocratic state, the *Document of Declaration of Khalistan* (issued from the Golden Temple on April 29, 1986, by the five-member Panthic Committee) clearly states that “Control of religion over the State shall be constitutionally established and Sikh Religion will be the official religion of Khalistan. It will be the duty of the Government to promote Sikhism in Khalistan”. Ironically, this document was given to me by a top militant of the International Sikh Youth Federation (ISYF) of Canada who told me that Khalistan would never become a theocratic state...

⁶⁵ On Sikh politics of the body, cf. P. HERSHMAN, « Hair, Sex and Dirt », *Man*, n°9, 1974 ; Patrick OLIVELLE, « Hair and society : social significance of hair in South Asian traditions », in Alf HILTEBEITEL and Barbara D. MILLER, *Hair. Its Power and Meaning in Asian Cultures*, Albany : State University of New York Press, 1998 ; J.P.S. UBEROI, « Five Symbols of Sikh Identity », in T.N. MADAN (ed.), *Religion in India, op cit.*

⁶⁶ Such politics of charity cannot be limited to the promotion of self-interest because it may involve two other interpenetrative dynamics : a sincere commitment to the community, offering a sense of identification; class- or caste-based motivations, encouraging community leaders or prestigious individuals to offer funds or benevolent work to the underprivileged of their community, in order to prevent their denial of the prevailing social order. On Laurent Gayer – The Globalization Of Identity Politics : The Sikh Experience – Mai 2002 22
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Hence, the *Jats* have been more responsive to the project of Khalistan than any other community in the diaspora. All over the world, Sikh religious minorities (*Namdharis*, *Nirankaris*, *Radhasoamis*) and Sikh outcastes (*Ravidasis*) have been very critical of the Khalistan Movement⁶⁷, in which they saw a new attempt by the *Jat* elite to reassert its dominant position, not only in the Punjab but also in the diaspora⁶⁸.

Another group which has been suspicious of the separatist component of Sikh ethnicity are the *Ramgharias*. They belong to the craftsmen caste and many of them are “twice migrants”, having resettled in Britain after their expulsion from East Africa in the 1970s-1980s. As a result, they developed their own diasporic identity and organizations. The myth of return is less important in their ranks than among the *Jats*’; since their settlement in Africa, their direct links with the Punjab have weakened, and they have “preserved” their religious traditions and kinship patterns rather autonomously⁶⁹. Having prospered economically in the diaspora, they enjoy a much higher social status abroad than in the Punjab and consequently, contest the leadership of overseas *Jats* whom they accuse of using Sikh homeland politics solely to reinforce their hegemony.

Multiculturalism and the rise of Khalistan in the diaspora

Beyond the social and geographical origins of the immigrants, the evolution of the immigrants’ host states policies regarding immigrant communities as well as the changes in their diplomacy, played a great role in the new politics of identity of the Sikh diaspora. In the three major countries where the Sikh emigrants have established rooted communities, multicultural policies began to be implemented from the 70s onward⁷⁰, offering Sikh “ethnic

this second point, cf. Christophe JAFFRELOT, “La stratégie de bienfaisance des nationalistes hindous. Conjurant l’aspiration égalitaire des basses castes”, *Critique internationale*, n°5, Fall 1999, where the authors suggests that the *Seva* politics of the *Sangh Parivar* is clearly linked with the desire of dominant castes to maintain a socio-political status-quo preventing the scheduled castes from joining caste-based political parties committed to the reshuffling of the social order.

⁶⁷ On this issue, cf. Roger BALLARD, “Differentiation and Disjunction among the Sikhs” and Eleanor NESBITT, “Valmiki in Coventry. The Revival and Reconstruction of a Community”, in Roger BALLARD (ed.), *Desh Pardesh. The South Asian Presence in Britain*, London : Hurst, 1994.

⁶⁸ The *Jat* political leadership is not an « old tradition » of Punjabi politics : it has only been established since 1962, after the Akali Dal split which led to the marginalisation of Master Tara Singh’s faction. Until then, it was the urban *Khatri* and *Arora* castes that dominated Punjabi politics. Cf. Hamish TELFORD, « The political economy of Punjab. Creating Space for Sikh Militancy », *Asian Survey*, vol 33, n° 11, November 1992, where the author also suggests that the conflict between the « moderate » Akali Dal and the « fundamentalists » gathered around Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and the AISSF, in the 1980s, was mainly a class-conflict between *Jats*.

⁶⁹ Cf. Parminder BHACHU, *The Twice Migrants*, London : Tavistock, 1985; Parminder BHACHU, “The East African Sikh Diaspora : The British Case”, in Steven VERTOVEC (ed.), *Aspects of the South Asian Diaspora*, Delhi : OUP, 1991.

⁷⁰ In 1968, the British Home Secretary, Roy Jenkins envisaged « not a flattering process of uniformity, but cultural diversity, coupled with equal opportunity, in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance ». However, the implementation of such a multicultural program only began in the 1980s, with the investigations of the Rampton and Swann
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entrepreneurs” a great opportunity to promote their views in governmental circles. It was Canada which first opened the way. In October 1971, Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau announced to the Canadian Parliament that multiculturalism was to be promoted to the level of official government policy. Since then, “Federal multiculturalism has evolved from an all-party agreement with minimal formal authority, to the status of statutory and constitutional law with the potential to funnel government-ethnic relations into yet unexplored realms”⁷¹. Although Britain and the US did not adopt such a formal, institutional framework designed to uphold the cultural diversity of their societies, they can still be regarded as multicultural states since they have both adopted measures expected “(..) to assist individuals in preserving their language, culture, and identity, to educate the public about the virtues of tolerance and the benefits of cultural diversity; to sensitize the delivery of social services such as health or education, to culturally diverse clients; to promote national unity, identity and integrity by reconciling diversity with common goals and aspirations; and to transform diversity into a resource with potential political and economic benefits at home and abroad”⁷². Through this process, “new” diasporas have emerged in Canada, Britain and the US, as well as in Australia. Nicholas Van Hear recently described these new diasporas as “people with multiple allegiances to place”⁷³. This phenomenon is not unique to diasporic individuals nor to transnational communities in general, and Georg Simmel already noted its emergence in Europe in the nineteenth century. However, the “new ethnicities” of immigrants in Western Europe and Northern America, largely influenced by multicultural policies upholding “cultural” diversity, clearly constitute the climax of this process that Bertrand Badie calls the “volatility of identities” (*la volatilité identitaire*)⁷⁴. Whether multicultural policies were successful in this context is an issue beside my point. What I wish to suggest here is that the adoption of more or less formal multiculturalist policies in Canada, Britain and the US had a great influence on their immigrant communities. As far as the Sikhs are concerned, while Operation Bluestar triggered a renewed interest among the Sikh diaspora for its religious identity, the institutional

Committees on education. In the US, multiculturalism started being debated in the late 1980s, following the failure of the « colour-blind » approach of the Civil Rights Movement. Let us also precise that in Canada, multicultural policy, which attained a much more institutional rank than in the two other countries, was initially expected to settle the Quebec issue, and not to promote non-European cultures. On the rise of multiculturalism in Britain, Canada and the US, cf. John FRASER, “Multiculturalism in Britain : Fragmented Reality or Policy Option ?”, *Affari sociali internazionali*, n°1, 1993; Nathan GLAZER, *We Are All Multiculturalists Now*, Cambridge/London : Harvard University Press, 1997; Denise HELLY, “Le multiculturalisme canadien” and Raymond BRETON, “Les nouveaux modes d’organisation ethnique au Canada”, *Hommes & Migrations*, n° 1200, July 1996; Christian JOPPKE, « Multiculturalism and immigration : A comparison of the United States, Germany, and Great Britain », *Theory and Society*, vol 25, n°4, August 1996. Bhiku PAREKH, « Equality in a Multicultural Society », *Citizenship Studies*, vol 2, n° 3, November 1998 ; John REX, « Multiculturalism in Europe and North America », in John REX, *op cit*.

⁷¹ Angie FLERAS & Jean Leonard ELLIOTT, *Multiculturalism in Canada. The Challenge of Diversity*, Scarborough : Nelson Canada, 1992, p. 68.

⁷² *Ibid*, p. 267.

⁷³ Nicholas VAN HEAR, *New Diasporas. The mass exodus, dispersal and regrouping of migrant communities*, London : UCL Press, 1998, p. 4.

⁷⁴ Bertrand BADIE, « Réseaux transnationaux et instabilité mondiale », *Relations internationales et stratégiques*, n°20, Winter 1995.

framework of its major host states not only legitimated such politics of identity in the private sphere but also in the public one. Praise of bilingualism and “unity in diversity” encouraged immigrants to reinterpret their “traditions” and to have them recognized by state or federal authorities, in a context of economic and social uncertainty⁷⁵. From an internal perspective, multiculturalism then sustained the emergence of new grievances regarding the protection of minorities’ religious rights, leaving to community leaders (who were generally supportive of Khalistan) the power to define their community “traditions”. As far as Canadian Sikhs are concerned, Verne Dusenbery suggests that the advent of such multicultural policies could be the main explanation for the diasporic endorsement of Khalistan : “much as Ghadar party members sought to end the disgrace following their treatment in North America by changing the colonial map of India, so too Khalistan supporters in the diaspora can be seen to gain a measure of respect and power in countries of the diaspora by changing the contemporary political map of South Asia”⁷⁶. In this perspective, also developed by Mark Juergensmeyer⁷⁷, Sikh diasporic politics of the homeland have more elective affinities with “trojan nationalisms” described by Arjun Appadurai than with the “long distance nationalism” model of Benedict Anderson. For Anderson, “one might be inclined to view the rise of nationalist movements and their variable culminations in successful nation-states as a project for coming home from exile, for the resolution of hybridity, for a positive printed from a negative in the darkroom of political struggle”⁷⁸. In a previous article⁷⁹, Anderson had also been speaking of “nationalism from afar” as a radicalised form of nationalism : it would assume “a heavy sense of guilt and overcompensation, a ritualistic and symbolic fervour often found in the attempt to retain the old ethnic ingredients”⁸⁰. Such a paradigm, although interesting, is

⁷⁵ The rise of the Khalistan Movement in the diaspora was congruent with a period of economic recession and violent racism in Britain, Canada and the US. As noted by Ballard in the British case, during the 80s, « Sikhs (...) found themselves disproportionately vulnerable » to a « severe industrial recession », particularly in the textile and engineering sectors. As a result, in Britain, « by the mid-1980s as many as half of all middle-aged Asians industrial workers had lost their jobs », while they were becoming increasingly vulnerable to racist crimes and racial riots. Cf. Roger BALLARD, *Desh Pardesh*, *op cit*, p. 100. Harry Gouldbourne also suggests that, in Britain, « any sense of insecurity (...) tends to encourage articulate Sikhs to support the demand for an independent and secure homeland in the subcontinent ». Cf. Harry GOULDBOURNE, *Ethnicity and Nationalism in Post-Imperial Britain*, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 152.

⁷⁶ Verne A. DUSENBERY, « A Sikh Diaspora ? Contested Identities and Constructed Realities », in Peter VAN DER VEER, *Nation and Migration, The Politics of Space in the South Asian Diaspora*, Philadelphie : University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995, p. 34.

⁷⁷ According to him, overseas Sikhs would suffer from a « Ghadar syndrome » which he defines as « a militant nationalist movement (...) created abroad by expatriates, for whom the movement is also an outlet for economic and social frustrations, and a vehicle for their ethnic identities ». Cf. Mark JUERGENSMEYER, « The Ghadar Syndrome : Nationalism in an Immigrant Community », *Punjab Journal of Politics*, October 1979, p. 14. In another article published nine years later, the authors precises his thoughts and suggests that the Khalistan Movement was endorsed in the diaspora mainly because overseas Sikhs were « socially marginal to the [home] community [in Punjab] » and « were looking for a center to Sikhism and wanted to be associated with it » in order to gain « a sense of belonging ». Cf. Mark JUERGENSMEYER, « The Logic of Religious Violence », *op cit*, p. 385.

⁷⁸ Benedict Anderson, *The spectre of comparisons. Nationalism, Southeast Asia and the World*, Londres/New York : Verso, 1998, p. 65.

⁷⁹ Benedict ANDERSON, « Ice Empire and Ice Hockey : Two Fin de Siecle Dreams », *New Left Review*, 214 : 146-150, 1995.

⁸⁰ Such as described by Floyia ANTHIAS, « Evaluating “Diaspora”. Beyond Ethnicity ? », *Sociology*, vol 32, n° 3, August 1998, p. 565.

probably not the best clue to interpret Sikh diasporic politics of the homeland. Indeed, the concept of “trojan nationalism” proposed by Arjun Appadurai seems much more accurate to describe it : “Territorial nationalism is the alibi of these movements and not necessarily their basic motive or final goal”⁸¹. In the case of the Sikh diaspora, the claiming of Sikh sovereignty over the Punjab then seems to contain politics of recognition⁸² in the host states rather than the exportation of a clear strategy of state-building to the Punjab⁸³. Hence, according to John Rex, the kind of interest in the homeland retained by overseas Sikhs suggests “some applicability of the concept of a nationalist diaspora” to Sikh communities abroad, but “this is balanced by the seeking of whatever economic [and political] opportunities are available in the transnational community”⁸⁴.

Among overseas Sikhs, the externalization of such localized politics of recognition was encouraged by the diplomatic evolutions of their host states. The end of the cold war and the new uncertainty of world order associated with it has deeply affected American, Canadian and British foreign policies and, to some extent, regarding certain regions, ethnic and/or corporate lobbying, has been filling their strategic and ideological vacuum. This is particularly obvious in the case of the US, where Yossi Shain recently detailed the nexus that exists “between multicultural developments in the domestic front and US foreign affairs”⁸⁵, resulting in the fact that “US based diasporas are increasingly playing a greater role in US foreign policy with significant consequences for international conflicts and US domestic affairs”⁸⁶.

It is in this context that some members of the Sikh diaspora have been setting up their own “private diplomacy”, relying on lobbying activities at the host states level and on interventions in multilateral organizations - which some Khalistani cadres have tried to institutionalize (so far unsuccessfully).

⁸¹ Arjun APPADURAI, *Modernity at Large*, Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 1996, p. 165.

⁸² On this issue, cf. Charles TAYLOR, *Multiculturalism and “the Politics of Recognition”*, Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1992; Charles TAYLOR, *Multiculturalism, Examining the Politics of Recognition*, Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1994; Linda NICHOLSON, “To Be or not to Be : Charles Taylor and the Politics of Recognition”, *Constellations*, vol 3, n° 1, 1996.

⁸³ None of the Khalistani leaders that I met in Britain and Canada (belonging to the Khalistan Council, the Dal Khalsa, the Khalistan Commando Force, the World Sikh Organization and the International Sikh Youth Federation) could present me a clear reflection on state-building and political sovereignty, their emphasis being put on the « Sikh Nation » rather than on the theorization of the Khalistani state. This was also noticed by Ram Narayan KUMAR, *The Sikh Unrest and the Indian State : Politics, Personalities and Historical Retrospective*, Delhi : Ajanta Publications, 1997, p. 391-392, where, after a long fieldwork, the author states that “Khalistan is not a serious concept even with those who engage in terrorism in its name (...). Although the resolve to fight is undaunted, the goal is not necessarily Khalistan”.

⁸⁴ John REX, *Ethnic minorities in the Modern Nation State, Working Papers in the Theory of Multiculturalism and Political Integration*, MacMillan/St Martin’s Press, 1996, p. 106-107.

⁸⁵ Yossi SHAIN, *Marketing the American Creed Abroad. Diasporas in the US and their Homelands*, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 197.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

The advent of Sikh private diplomacy

As François Constantin recently showed, the privatization of foreign policy involves two distinct dynamics : (1) individual actions with an international outcome, inducing an answer from states; (2) private relations supported by governments, in order to implement a public or personal policy⁸⁷. In the case of the Sikh diaspora, although the Indian government is said to have used private informers and infiltrators in the ranks of overseas Sikh separatist groups, it is mainly the first dynamic which has been decisive. Hence, I will only discuss this first point here, i.e. the macropolitical outcomes of the Sikh diaspora's microactivities in favor of Khalistan.

The active lobbying animated by Sikhs of the diaspora during the last two decades has been targeted at public opinions and at politicians of their host states (at the parliamentary or governmental level), to global human rights NGOs and, finally, to international organizations. The main protagonists of this lobbying are six organizations based in the diaspora : the Khalistan Council (founded in 1980 in the Punjab but led from London by J.S. Chauhan); the Dal Khalsa (founded in the Punjab in 1978 but now based in Britain since the exile of its leaders in 1984); the Babbar Khalsa (also founded in the Punjab in 1978 but based in Canada and Britain since the beginning of the 80s); the International Sikh Youth Federation (ISYF, founded in 1984 in Britain and now active in the UK, Canada, the US and Pakistan); the World Sikh Organization (WSO, founded in New York in 1984 and soon operating from the US, Canada and, to a lesser extent, the UK) and, finally, the Council of Khalistan (founded in 1987 in the US by Dr. Gurmit Singh Aulakh). Of these six organizations, the four first ones have supported, more or less directly, the armed struggle in the Punjab, providing funds⁸⁸ and, less frequently, men⁸⁹, to guerrilla groups. The *Babbars*

⁸⁷ François CONSTANTIN, « La privatisation de la politique étrangère. A partir de la scène africaine », *Pouvoirs*, n° 88, 1999.

⁸⁸ According to Arthur Helweg, *gurdwaras* in Canada, Britain and the US sent thousands of dollars weekly to guerrillas operating in Punjab. He also quotes Manbir Singh Chaheru, top militant of the KCF, who claimed to have received 60 000 US dollars from Sikh organizations based in Britain and Canada. Cf. Arthur HELWEG, *op cit*, p. 322.

⁸⁹ I personally met two British Sikhs who are members of the Khalistan Commando Force and who remain very close to the exiled leader of the KCF, Wasson Singh Zaffarwal. These two individuals have been visiting the training camps set up in Pakistan for the Khalistani militants. However, they never took part in any armed operation on Indian soil and told me that, at the time of their visit, there were hardly any Sikh from the diaspora in the guerillas' ranks, who mocked the inability of boys from Britain and Canada to fight "without a bottle of Coke". Yet, it seems that a handful of overseas Sikhs did get involved in acts of violence in India, with the help of the Pakistani intelligence agencies, who would now try to enlist young Sikh immigrants entered illegally in their countries of residence. Cf. Praveen SWAMI, "Journeys into terrorism", *Frontline*, September 19, 1997.

are known for their advocacy of violent means⁹⁰ and they were suspected in the bombing of an Air India flight in 1985, although others attributed the planning of the bombing to Indian agents⁹¹. The Dal Khalsa and the Council of Khalistan, which work closely in Britain, have also supported armed struggle until recently and one militant of the Khalistan Commando Force even told me in London that it is Chauhan who suggested the name for the Punjabi guerrillas in the aftermath of Operation Bluestar; the same person, working for the Council of Khalistan and the Khalistan Commando Force at the same time, although having lost direct contact with the Punjab since the last three generations, provided training and arms to guerrillas in Pakistani camps in the middle of the 80s; he is now the spokesperson of the Panthic Committee⁹² in Britain. The ISYF also supported violent means in the Punjab until recently, in support of the underground militants of the All India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF). Hence, only the WSO and the Council of Khalistan denounced violence as a way to achieve Sikh sovereignty over the Punjab, committing themselves "To strive through peaceful means, for the establishment of a Sikh Nation, KHALISTAN, in order to protect the Sikh identity and faith as ordained by the Guru Panth in the daily prayer "RAJ KAREGA KHALSA"⁹³.

Since most of Khalistani organizations based overseas lent both moral and financial support to violence for a time, and since violent incidents erupted among different overseas Sikh factions, they soon had to clarify and justify their positions to their host state authorities. After the early attempts by Chauhan and a few diasporic individuals to mobilize international public opinion in favor of Khalistan from the 70s onwards, this was the second source of Sikh international lobbying : "as supporters of a particular organization became involved in legal or even criminal cases due to various disputes, especially involving members of the ISYF and Babbar Khalsa, the involvement of police and governmental agencies has forced its leaders to respond"⁹⁴. The two other origins of Sikh international lobbying are: (1) the rise of human rights violations in Punjab, which led to the foundation of many human rights group, and to the publicizing of these violations by all Khalistani organizations, in foreign media, in front of parliamentarians or government officials, at the yearly meeting of the UN Subcommission on human rights and, finally, in front of global human rights NGOs, such as Amnesty

⁹⁰ The 50 member group, based in Vancouver, claims responsibility for 40 murders in the Punjab between 1979 and 1981.

⁹¹ Zuhair KASHMEREI & Brian McANDREW, *Soft Target. How the Indian Intelligence Service Penetrated Canada*, Toronto : James Lorimer & Company, 1989.

⁹² The five-member group that declared the independence of Khalistan in the Golden Temple on April 29, 1986, composed of Dhanna Singh, Gurbachan Singh Manochal, Wasson Singh Zaffarwal, Arur Singh and Gurdev Singh Usmanwala.

⁹³ World Sikh Organization, *Constitution and By-Laws*, Los Angeles, 13th of January 1985, p. 2. Literally, Guru Gobind Singh's phrase « Raj Karega Khalsa » (included in the daily *Ardas* prayer) means « The *Khalsa* shall rule » and is often quoted by Khalistanis as the proof that the last Guru was in favor of Sikh political sovereignty. However, the phrase is very diversely interpreted and all Sikhs, whether in India or abroad, do not read it the same way. Moreover, Khalistanis rarely use the religious term « *Khalsa* » to refer to the Sikh nation and prefer the more political Urdu word "*Quaum*".

International, Human Rights Watch, etc.. This is not to say that human rights violations led to a genuine and instinctive mobilization of the diaspora, but rather that it was an instrumental resource for the promotion of Khalistan in western countries and in the UN; (2) lastly, and perhaps most importantly, “The Indian government’s pressure on host states to control what it termed “Sikh terrorism” has prompted community leaders to rebut “India’s disinformation campaign” at international venues”⁹⁵.

The outcome of this international campaign for Khalistan are widely diverse, although all were activated in order “To promote and protect Sikh interests all over the world by participating in the formulation and implementation of the policies of the Sikh nation”, as stated in the 5th objective of the WSO’s constitution⁹⁶. It is then the definition of such Sikh interests, in the the Punjab and abroad, as well as the motives, resources, methods and targets of each organization and sometimes of each leader, which have created the diversity of Sikh international lobbying. In the 70s, Jagjit Singh Chauhan tried to promote Khalistan all over the diaspora and to lobby all major host states. He used the media’s voice, by publishing materials in support of Khalistan in American newspapers, or by giving interviews to the BBC in Britain; he approached parliamentarians, such as US Senator Mark Hatfield, Senator Jesse Helms (presently Chairman of the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee), Senator Sam Nunn, Charles Percy and Alexander Haig. In 1982, while in the US at the invitation of Jesse Helms⁹⁷, he led a demonstration of 200 Sikhs representing about 10 organizations of Canada and the US on Dag Hammarskjöld Plaza, in front of the UN building in New York, asking for a UN intervention in Punjab; to get the support of the UN, Chauhan has also attended the yearly meeting of the UN Subcommission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (SPPHR). Finally, Chauhan opened contacts with retired army officers in the US, such as General Daniel Graham, Co-Chairman of the American Security Council, a far-right organization affiliated with the World Anti-communist League; interestingly, it is through the ASC that Chauhan, as well as Ganga Singh Dillon, seem to have opened contacts with Pakistani officials. Hence, Chauhan’s lobbying, which is now much less active due to his advanced years, was a complex process. He presented his “consistent case for sovereignty by emphasizing a secular vision” which would have abhorred violence⁹⁸. Indeed, Chauhan told me : “*We never wanted to create a State on the basis of religion. We want only nationhood, national, democratic, secular. That befits the principles of Sikhism*”⁹⁹. Yet, in order to achieve such a “secular” and “democratic” project, he

⁹⁴ TATLA, p. 155.

⁹⁵ D. S. TATLA, *op cit*, p. 156.

⁹⁶ WSO, *op cit*.

⁹⁷ Although denied a visa at first, Chauhan was invited by Jesse Helms to testify before the U.S. Senate Agriculture Committee.

⁹⁸ TATLA, p. 141.

⁹⁹ Interview, Southall (UK), 16/07/99.

did not hesitate to solicit the support of American far-right activists or Congressmen, to call on the BBC for Indira Gandhi's murder, to support KCF guerrillas and to unite his efforts with the Pakistani Jama'at-i-Islami and the Afghan groups abroad. Apart from these contradictions, Chauhan's international lobbying effort appears remarkable in the sense that he was the first leader to advocate Khalistan abroad and the last to promote it on an all diasporic scale, travelling tirelessly between Britain, Canada and the US, between Sikh communities and host state authorities, before settling down permanently in Britain, where he opened a "Khalistan House".

Since Chauhan failed to establish his organization as the undisputed power center of the Khalistan Movement abroad, every major Khalistani organization has chosen to limit the scope of its major activities to only one or two countries, though there may sometimes be "branches" (that is an office and a handful of workers) in several others.

Beyond promoting Khalistan in western media and parliamentary committees, building ties with states (from Pakistan¹⁰⁰ to Ecuador¹⁰¹) or opening contacts with transnational actors as diverse as global human rights NGOs, mercenary firms¹⁰² and anti-communist activists, some diasporic Sikh leaders have adopted other methods to promote their cause in the international public sphere. In January 1993, the Council of Khalistan, led from the US by GS Aulakh, has joined the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO)¹⁰³, based in Den Hague, before being expelled from it¹⁰⁴. The WSO, for its part, has

¹⁰⁰ Beyond the close contacts between Chauhan and G.S. Dhillon and the Pakistani army and intelligence agencies, since the beginning of the 1980s, several training camps set up in Pakistan for Khalistani militants have been spotted by the Indian intelligence services in Kothatial, Niazberg, Sargodha, Attock, Gujranwalla, Sobha Singh, Rawalpindi, Nankana Sahib and Rahmiyar Khan. Cf. Anne VAUGIER-CHATTERJEE, *op cit*, p. 84, as well as her article "Le Pendjab : du séparatisme à la normalisation démocratique", *Hérodote*, n°71, 1993. The Pakistani support to Khalistanis does not seem over yet : a few months ago, Ganga Singh Dhillon was invited in Pakistan to set up a religious body similar to the SGPC, and some people suggest that he might have used this opportunity to revive Sikh militancy in Pakistan, with the full support of the ISI. Moreover, several top Khalistani militants remain active in Pakistan, such as Lakbir Singh, President of the main faction of the ISYF, based in Canada and the US. Hence, although several overseas Khalistanis told me that they have lost confidence in the sincerity of Pakistan's support to their cause, it is obvious that young Sikhs –from the Punjab and, to a lesser extent, from the diaspora- are still trained in Pakistani camps. As always, the strategy of the ISI is to train these militants in very small groups, prevented from keeping contacts one with another so that the Pakistanis keep them under control. This is precisely what led the two KCF militants that I met in London to argue with Pakistani agents and, subsequently, to be expelled from Pakistan.

¹⁰¹ At one time, J.S. Chauhan's organization claimed to have the support of Ecuador for the establishment of a sovereign Republic of Khalistan. An Ecuadorian diplomat took part in a rally organized by the Khalistan Council in Birmingham but things never went further. Cf. *Observer*, 5 May, 1985.

¹⁰² In the middle of the 1980s, Gurpartap Singh Birk and some of his followers from New York and New Orleans attended the Merc School, offering courses in guerilla warfare to various mercenaries. Later, these Sikhs also selected a site for a guerilla training camp in Columbia, New Jersey. Cf. the various reports by Lynn Hudson in *India Abroad*, 1985-1986.

¹⁰³ The UNPO was founded in 1991 by « representatives of occupied nations, indigenous peoples, minorities, and other disenfranchised peoples who currently struggle to preserve their cultural identities, protect their basic human rights, safeguard the environment or regain their lost countries », in order to « provide a voice for the oppressed, captive or ignored peoples of the world, those who cannot otherwise address the international community in its primary international fora, such as the United Nations ». The organization's covenant also precises that the UNPO shall provide its 52 members with « assistance in effectively utilising available procedures of United Nations bodies and specialised agencies and of other international and regional organizations » (Title I, Article 2, point b), as well as « training in bilateral and multilateral diplomacy, including United Nations diplomacy and the principles of international law » (point c). Cf. UNPO homepage : <http://www.unpo.org/>
Laurent Gayer – The Globalization Of Identity Politics : The Sikh Experience – Mai 2002
<http://www.ceri-sciences-po.org>

tried (unsuccessfully) to obtain the status of consultative member (as an NGO) in the UN Economic and social council (ECOSOC) from 1987 to 1994¹⁰⁵; it has also financed and arranged the visit of three Canadian MPs to Punjab, from January 15 to January 22, 1992¹⁰⁶. The ISYF, for its part, organized several demonstrations on Capitol Hill (Washington D.C.), along Kashmiris, and it supported memoranda sent to the Secretary of the UN by the Panthic Committee of Amritsar¹⁰⁷. Many Khalistani organizations based in the diaspora have also started up web sites on which they advertise Khalistan, their workers' achievements, and the personality of their leaders¹⁰⁸.

To what extent can this complex, fragmented and often contradictory lobbying be considered a success ? At the global level, it has succeeded in convincing transnational human rights NGOs to investigate and publicize human rights violations in the Punjab¹⁰⁹. Its influence on international public opinion¹¹⁰ is much harder to evaluate and, to a large extent, it seems that the Sikhs have lost that battle so far, since they are very often thought of as "terrorists" or "fundamentalists". They also encountered difficulties in the UN, where the WSO -despite its use of Canadian lawyers to present itself as an NGO- was denied the status of consultative member in the ECOSOC, because "there has been no change reflected in the scope, aims and objectives of the WSO that would clearly show it is not a liberation or separatist movement. The WSO's constitution clearly states that it seeks to establish a Sikh

¹⁰⁴ Although the Sikhs' claim to join the UNPO was recognised, the representativity of Aulakh and his organization was questioned.

¹⁰⁵ After seven years of unsuccessful lobbying to obtain consultative status in the ECOSOC, Ram Raghbir Singh Chahal, International President of the WSO, asked for sanctions against the Chief of the NGO Unit of the UN, Farida Ayoub. On May 13, 1994, he wrote to Mr. Nittin Desai, Under Secretary General of the UN Department of Policy Coordination of Sustainable Development. The letter reads : « (...) As a contributing member of Canadian, American and International Society, we expect to be treated fairly and with respect on all occasions by the UN, and have been sorely disappointed in the unprofessional behaviour of Ms. Ayoub (...) We therefore respectfully request a full review of Ms. Ayoub current status with the UN, and recommend appropriate disciplinary action ». A copy of the letter was also sent to the Permanent Mission of Canada to the UN and to Boutros Boutros Ghali.

¹⁰⁶ The three MPs were : Barbara Greene (Progressive Conservative Party), elected from Don Valley North ; Derek Lee (Liberal Party), elected from Scarborough-Rouge River ; Svend Robinson (New Democratic Party), elected from Burnaby-Kingsway. Cf. the report *The Canadian Parliamentary Delegation Visit to India*, January 15-22, 1992.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. *Memorandum to the Secretary General of the United Nations*, presented on December 10, 1993 by the Panthic Committee and « the Global Sikh community ».

¹⁰⁸ <http://www.khalistan.com> ; <http://www.burningpunjab.com> <http://www.khalistan.net> ; <http://www.geocities.com/Hollywood/Makeup/2732/Youth.htm> ; <http://khalistan-affairs.org> ; <http://syf.jaj.com> <http://www.khalistan.demon.co.uk> ; <http://www.dalkhalsa.org>

¹⁰⁹ Cf. « India : will past human rights violations in Punjab remain forgotten ? », Amnesty International, 10 August 1999 ; « India : a Vital Opportunity to End Impunity in Punjab », Amnesty International, August 1999 ; « India, a mockery of justice : The case concerning the « disappearance » of human rights defender Jaswant Singh Kalra severely undermined », Amnesty International, 20/07/98 ; « Dead Silence. The Legacy of Abuses in Punjab », Human Rights Watch, 5/94. All these reports can be found on the web sites of the two organizations. Cf. <http://www.amnesty.org> and <http://www.hrw.org>

¹¹⁰ On the nature and the influence of global public opinion, cf. Frank Louis RUSCIANO *et al.*, *World Opinion and the Emerging International Order*, Westport/London : Praeger, 1998, where the authors suggest that « World opinion defines the boundaries of an international public ; it creates global markets and global identities ; it affects the behaviors of nations ». Hence, alongside national interests, an « imagined international community » would be

Nation, Khalistan, in order to protect the Sikh identity (...). We should like to again draw WSO's attention to paragraph 17 of Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) wherein it requires that organizations should have a general international concern in matters of human rights, not restricted to the interests of a particular group, a single nationality or a single State or restricted group of States"¹¹¹.

Finally, at the national level of their host states, the outcome of Khalistani entrepreneurs' mobilization depended on the lobbying system of each country. Therefore, everything suggests that, despite the strong links between the Sikhs and Britain resulting from their intimate past colonial relationship, it is in the United States that their campaign for a sovereign Sikh state has received the greatest political support, while economic rationality and promotion of national security have driven Canadian authorities to be more receptive to India's plights against "overseas terrorists" than to Sikh immigrants' denunciation of human rights violations, allegedly perpetrated by Indian armed forces on Punjabi civilians.

Beyond the significance of ethnic lobbying in each of these countries, the outcome of Sikh mobilization in their host states has also been affected by the nature of the bilateral relationship existing between India and the respective host states of the Sikh diaspora. In Britain, despite historical relation with India, "Indo-British relations were thought to be of little value and limited impact"¹¹² for long. Their intensity was only revived in the 1980s, due to the new challenges posed by the UK based diaspora to Indian economic and political authorities. Why the economic success of Indian emigrants established in Britain attracted the envy of India and how Indian authorities tried to benefit from it is not the subject of this discussion¹¹³, but the renewed intensity of Indo-British ties in the aftermath of Operation Bluestar definitely is. This new pattern of Indo-British relationship was largely linked with the activities of Khalistani militants active in Britain, to whom British authorities applied a double standard : in the case of militants violating British laws, "the punishment given was strong and stiff" but in the case of those whose activities were affecting India only, "No action was taken against those who collected arms, sent vast amounts of funds for terrorists, organized training of terrorists or armed them or made inflammatory statements on radio or in print media"¹¹⁴. From 1986 to 1992, the relationship between the two countries was strained by the difficult negotiation of an extradition treaty which could enable India to put overseas Sikh militants under trial –and into detention- on its soil. Finally, after years of mutual suspicion and

emerging, which « heralds the end of an idea as evolutionary, and replaces it with a series of encounters defined by constantly shifting definitions of the Other » (p. 8-11).

¹¹¹ Letter of Mrs. Farida Ayoub, Chief, Non-Governmental Organizations Section of the ECOSOC to Mr. Ram Raghbir Singh Chahal, International President of the WSO, 6 June 1994.

¹¹² K.N. MALIK, *India and the United Kingdom, Change and Continuity in the 1980s*, New Delhi : Sage, 1997, p. 20.

¹¹³ On this issue, cf. K.N. MALIK, *op cit*, p. 121-140.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 108.

accusations, the Suppression of Terrorism Act was signed on 21 July 1993, opening a new age of mutual trust and closer economic ties between the two countries.

Indo-Canadian relations were also affected by and decisive for Khalistani militancy. In the aftermath of the attack on the Golden Temple, Indira Gandhi pressed Canada "not to help Sikh separatists"¹¹⁵. After the Air India disaster of 1985, the Canadian government, suspecting Canadian Sikhs to be implicated in the bombing, started considering the whole community as a threat to its national security and a supporter of international terrorism. An extradition treaty was subsequently signed between India and Canada on 6 February 1987 and the Canadian authorities have not been receptive to Sikhs' call for Khalistan ever since¹¹⁶, although state and federal officers have been lobbied more successfully in favor of the protection of Sikh religious rights on Canadian soil, which is becoming the main activity of most Sikh Canadian organizations¹¹⁷.

In the US, Khalistani militants have been heard with greater attention, due to several factors : (1) as Yossi Shain shows, "The fact that Congress, and therefore constituency politics, has an important voice in U.S. foreign policy, compounded with the ready access of ethnic groups to American and thus global media, provides a fertile base for an organized and strongly committed diaspora which may transform itself into a powerful political player with transnational implications"¹¹⁸; (2) as suggested by Darshan Singh Tatla, "The poor history of Indo-US relations has also provided the Sikh lobby with a space for argument"¹¹⁹. Indeed, since 1959 and until recently, American diplomats have based their policies for South Asia on the support of Pakistan rather than India, who greatly annoyed the U.S. with its policy of non-alignment, its support for the Communist block and "its habit of "moral pontification" at the United Nations"¹²⁰. From a practical viewpoint, Sikh lobbyists in America have obtained the active support of many Congressmen with Sikh constituents, such as Norman Shumway (Stockton), Wally Herger (Yuba City), as well as that of major Congress members such as Republicans Jesse Helms and Dan Burton. The issue of human rights violations in the Punjab and the right of the "Sikh nation" to sovereignty were also debated in congressional resolutions (such as H. Con. Res. 343 of August 1988, related to "human

¹¹⁵ *Toronto Star*, 18th of June 1984.

¹¹⁶ On October 24, 1994, another treaty was even signed between the two governments on « mutual assistance in criminal matters », highly criticized by Khalistani organizations based in Canada. The WSO, for instance, published the text and critics of the Treaty on December 9, 1994.

¹¹⁷ In Canada and the US, since the beginning of the 90s, the WSO has been increasingly involved in lobbying for the recognition of the Sikhs' right to wear turbans in public jobs and *kirpans* (Sikh daggers) in schools or airplanes. The most famous of such campaigns was animated in favor of the allowance of *amritdhari* Sikhs in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), while retaining their articles of faith, especially the turban. The campaign begun in 1987 and succeeded in 1990, when Solicitor General Pierre Cadieux officially adopted a new policy to allow Sikh religious articles of faith in the RCMP.

¹¹⁸ Yossi SHAIN, *op cit*, p. 52. However, according to Shain, the power of such diasporas relies on their ability to « justify their actions in terms of American national interests and values, answer to their U.S. ethnic compatriots, and prove their loyalty to their home country ».

¹¹⁹ TATLA, *op cit*, p. 165.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

rights of the Sikhs in the Punjab of India” or H. Con. Res. 37 of March 1997, related to the right of self-determination of the “Sikh Nation”¹²¹). Debates have often focused on amending aid programs to India according to its compliance of international standards of Human rights. In 1991, Dan Burton suggested the termination of foreign aid to India if it continued to refuse the presence of international human rights organizations in Punjab. In 1992, another resolution of this type was passed and it led to a small reduction in US developmental aid to India. Sikh lobbyists have even received the attention of the President and the Vice-President. In 1993, in answer to a letter by Gary Condit co-signed by 22 Members of Congress, Bill Clinton wrote “I am aware of the chronic tensions between the Indian government and the Sikh militants, and share your desire for a peaceful solution that protects Sikh rights (...). It is clear that abuses still occur (...) and we regularly raise our concerns about them with senior officials in the Punjab government. Human rights is an important issue in US-Indian relations. We will continue to make our concerns known to the New Delhi authorities, and I will look forward to your continuing advice as we proceed”¹²². On February 5, 1997, in answer to GS Aulakh, Al Gore wrote “A high priority of this nation’s foreign policy agenda is to strengthen efforts to promote democracy and uphold human rights in regions across the globe. Such efforts not only reflect American ideals, but they also represent the best strategy to ensure our security and to build a durable peace (...). Your views are important to us as the President and I formulate policies to advance the cause of peace around the world”¹²³. Hence, as long as they express their grievances in terms of human rights diplomacy¹²⁴ and American national interests¹²⁵, Sikh lobbyists or American Congressmen supporting them seem to have encountered some success, although it is still difficult to evaluate it fully.

¹²¹ Presented by Gary Condit (D-CA) and Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA) and « Expressing the sense of Congress that the Sikh Nation should be allowed to exercise the right of national determination in their homeland, Punjab, Khalistan ».

¹²² Reproduced in Khalistan Affairs Center, *Lest We Forget*, Washington D.C. On May 12 1994, Condit wrote another letter to President Clinton, co-signed this time by 37 MCs, on the occasion of Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao’s visit to the US. The letter read « (...) We believe that the world has turned its back on the Sikhs of Punjab, Khalistan long enough. As the United States did in Puerto Rico, India should allow the right of self-determination in the Sikh homeland so that a peaceful and lasting solution to the dispute may be forged (...) ».

¹²³ Reproduced on the web site of the Council of Khalistan : <http://www.khalistan.net/washtimes.htm>

¹²⁴ On human rights diplomacy, cf. Nigel DOWER, « Human rights and International Relations », *International Journal of Human Rights*, vol 1, n° 1, printemps 1997; Rein A. MULLERSON, *Human rights diplomacy*, Londres : Routledge, 1997; Carol O’HALLORAN, « Human rights as *realpolitik* : the US in the CSCE », *RUSI and Brassey’s Defence Yearbook*, 1991.

¹²⁵ In October 1987, the Congressional Research Service pointed out how the conflict of the Punjab was affecting US interests : « a. Because the crisis has exacerbated India-Pakistan relations, it has made it all the more difficult for the US to pursue its policy of supporting Pakistan militarily in its stance against the soviet occupation of Afghanistan. b. The crisis affects the lives of thousands of immigrant Sikhs in the US, who are troubled and fearful for the fate of their relatives and friends, and it appears to be stimulating a greater flow of Sikh immigration, both legal and illegal. c. The conflict also appears to have brought another terrorist movement to the US, and possibly given scope for counter intelligence operations by Indian intelligence agencies here » (quoted by DS TATLA, *op cit*, p. 167).

Through this brief presentation of Sikh private diplomacy, it appears that host states and global human rights NGOs have been keener on responding to the requests of Khalistani organizations than multilateral organizations and international public opinion. However, at the host states' level, the outcomes of Sikh lobbying have been related to the place of multicultural policies in their domestic and foreign affairs and to the answer of host governments to India's offensive against expatriate Sikh separatists. Therefore, far from being detached from the state-centric world, Khalistani militants of the diaspora have constantly interacted with it, provoked it, lobbied it, initiated new domestic and new diplomatic policies, either on the host or home state side.

CONCLUSION

Driven to politics in their host states by war in their homeland (reversing the Clausewitzian proposition that "war is the continuation of politics"), Sikh ethnic entrepreneurs of the diaspora have finally acted in continuity rather than in disjunction with "identity blind" politics of integration which Sikhs, in their various countries of residence, had adopted until the 80s. Far from detaching their community from its host state politics, Khalistanis of the diaspora have succeeded in making Sikhs more visible in their host states. This local politics of assertion and recognition has simultaneously swept into the international public sphere, where it contributed to the emergence of a global Sikh voice.

However, on the Punjabi field, the result of the Sikh diaspora's leadership on the Khalistan Movement has been much less successful. Indeed, everything suggests that the popularity of the Movement has faded among Sikhs of the Punjab. As one elderly Sikh living in Amritsar told me :

"It is mostly Sikhs abroad who support Khalistan. Because they are not under pressure. They can talk anything they like. But Sikhs who live in India, they cannot talk of Khalistan. No country ever allows separation. (...) Educated people don't want bloodshed (...). Sikhs in India, they suffer from movements launched without thought"¹²⁶.

This increasing gap between Sikh diasporic politics of the homeland and homeland politics is unlikely to lead to the end of the Khalistan Movement abroad. My fieldwork

suggests that the idea of an independent Sikh State is still very popular among *Jat* Sikh immigrants settled in London, Toronto and Vancouver, whatever their age or gender. The main reason for this is that diasporic endorsement of Khalistan, at least among the *Jats*, has been primarily linked with their politics of recognition in their various host states. In a sense, Sikh diasporic politics of the homeland are primarily an amalgamation of local politics of recognition which have successfully come to the fore in host state policies and, to some extent, in the international public sphere; however successful it has been in creating a global Sikh *voice*, the coalescence of such local politics of recognition has provoked an *exit* reaction from Sikhs of the Punjab towards the Khalistan Movement¹²⁷. Hence, in the global village where Khalistani militants purport to be active¹²⁸, globalizing a local voice seems far easier than localizing a globalized one. An office, a computer connected to the world wide web and every individual can become a transnational ethnic entrepreneur whose actions may induce an answer from states. Yet, it seems much harder for such long distance nationalists to adapt their globalized rhetoric and activities to the very different local contexts of their host and home states. Indeed, nothing attests yet to the fact that long distance nationalism is becoming “the ground on which an embattled ethnic identity is to be fashioned in the ethnicized nation-state that [long distance nationalists] remain determined to inhabit”¹²⁹. In the Sikh case, long distance nationalism was not so much linked with the myth of return and “the resolution of hybridity” as with *local* politics of assertion and integration sustained by the politics of hybridity *encouraged* by the multiculturalist movement, which deeply affected the Sikh diaspora’s relation with its host and home states. Indeed, the rise of multiculturalism has encouraged what we could call the “extraverted integration” of the Sikh diaspora : since the 80s, overseas Sikhs are more interconnected than ever with Punjab; yet, they remain distinct from Sikhs of their homeland and so do their politics *vis-à-vis* Punjabi politics. In the Sikh diaspora, the main issue remains local integration, although the advent of multiculturalism has given a new shape to this quest for recognition, allowing it to be completed through the assertion of an ethnoreligious identity at the national level¹³⁰ and to be externalized at the international level by the growing legitimization of ethnic diplomacy. In that perspective,

¹²⁶ Interview, Southall, 18/07/99.

¹²⁷ We are here referring to Albert HIRSCHMANN’s categories. Cf. Albert HIRSCHMANN, *Exit, Voice and Loyalty*, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1970.

¹²⁸ Almost all the Khalistani militants that I met, especially in Canada, referred to McLuhan’s phrase. However, does this mean that Canadian Sikhs are more globalized than their counterparts in Britain or, on purpose, that they are more localized (McLuhan being Canadian and his works being well advertised in every decent bookshop throughout the country) ?

¹²⁹ Benedict ANDERSON, *The spectre of comparisons, op cit*, p. 74.

¹³⁰ Clearly expressing this desire of integration through the assertion of Sikh ethno-religious ethnicity the President of the WSO told me how proud he was of his daughter born in Canada since : « She’s always covering her hair when she goes to school... She’s taken the French immersion... She’s a very brilliant student... She was a Gold medal in Elementary School... And she’s very committed to the faith ».

“diaspora denotes a condition rather than being descriptive of a group”¹³¹. Diasporas are probably transnational *societies* rather than transnational *communities* of emigrants, defined by the experience of being “*from* one place and *of* another”¹³².

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¹³¹ Floyia ANTHIAS, « Evaluating « Diaspora ». Beyond Ethnicity ? », *Sociology*, vol 32, n° 3, August 1998, p. 565.

¹³² *Ibid.*