

MOOR-VEILED-MATTERS: THE *HIJAB* AS TROUBLING INTERROGATIVE OF THE RELATION BETWEEN THE WEST AND ISLAM

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Justifying their choice of name, the Arab-Andalus music group, Radio Tarifa state their objective is to mark, through their lilting, hybrid rhythms, the indivisibility of the Maghreb and Spain. After all, they say, Tarifa is at the southern-most tip of Spain and close enough to North Africa for the sounds of the *fajr*, or early morning prayers, to carry across the Straits of Gibraltar. While this influence is dependent on the direction of the wind, the landmarks of the Maghreb are, nevertheless, inscribed in more ways than one on the Spanish horizon. For many, though, this proximity is excessive, making Radio Tarifa's efforts at cultural intercourse the exception rather than the norm. More common in the press and from the Spanish authorities is an obsessive focus on this border-zone as a transgressive space where alterity infiltrates surreptitiously, and often illegally, into the nation. Nor is difference so easily confined to the much-patrolled frontiers of southern Europe. The last twenty years have witnessed a steadily increasing rate of immigration from Latin America, Africa and Asia that has coincided with Spain's own growth as a major European nation. In recent years, debates on multiculturalism and cultural diversity have arisen in various parts of the country as a means is sought by the different autonomous communities to manage, and no doubt to contain, a now undeniable presence of otherness in the midst of the everyday. A major venture currently being planned is Forum 2004 in Barcelona, due to take place next year, when the city will be looking to celebrate its diversity through a series of cultural events that call upon understanding difference.

Many of the most contentious issues centre upon the viability and the visibility of Islam in democratic Spain. While the relationship with Islam has been a long-standing problematic in Spain, indeed one that goes back to Islamic rule in medieval times on what is now Spanish soil, this has become even more acute a polemic since the events of 11 September 2001. If Islamophobia is a cultural phenomenon that has accompanied the 'war against terror' in much of the Western world, then in Spain it is compounded by the still troubling novelty of having to develop a toleration of difference when the latter manifests itself not only in terms of the economically underprivileged, migrant worker, but one whose ethnicity and religion arouse old antagonisms in Spanish cultural memory.

These issues came to the fore in 2002 when Fatima Elidrisi, a thirteen

year old Moroccan girl, was refused entry by local schools for wearing a headscarf in accordance with her usual religious practice. Her father, Ali Elidrisi, who lives in Madrid, had entered Spain without legal papers soon after she was born and, having undergone the process of acquiring legitimacy as a Spanish citizen, had finally received permission last year to bring his family over. The local council first accorded Fatima a place in a convent school run by nuns. She was turned away by them for wearing a headscarf, despite the all too obvious fact that nuns also cover their heads as a sign of their religious adherence. Her father then tried to secure her a place in a state-run school. The headmistress here, Delia Duró, once again closed the doors on her. The wearing of a veil, Duró asserted, was unconstitutional and against the rights of women. This was by no means the most extreme of the reactions to emerge from those in authority. Juan Carlos Aparicio, the Spanish Labour Minister, went so far as to compare the wearing of a headscarf with the legally prohibited practice of infibulation, thereby implying that to wear a veil was somehow to violate the contours assigned to the female body by western 'civilisation'. Faced with the choice of either removing her headscarf or else foregoing her education, Fatima chose the latter. For five months, while the matter was contested by various authorities, she remained at home and even began to skip the free Spanish language classes that were on offer to her as a recently arrived immigrant. Finally, in an all too familiar echo of similar wrangles in other European countries and, under the dictates of supposedly liberal multicultural toleration that have already been established elsewhere, Fatima was accepted by the very state school that had turned her away, headscarf and all. Thus, Fatima's case has come to signal a small but significant victory for the claims for recognition made by Spanish Muslims and Muslim immigrants alike.

This paper will focus on Fatima's veil. In referring to Fatima's headscarf as a 'veil', I am aware that the terminology for Islamic head-dress is wide-ranging and nuanced. By swapping 'headscarf' for 'veil', my aim is to exploit the metaphorical potential of the veil in the context of this paper's argument. I want to argue that, at a symbolic level, it acts as the point of contact and excess between culture as lived practice and the norms established by those in political authority. The politics of diversity that operate in Spain translate into liberal theories of tolerating difference, manifest most obviously in the many multicultural ventures supported by regional authorities. Nevertheless, this toleration is confined to certain limits, beyond which it is viewed as dangerous. While these theories operate, the practice is often more problematic, so that in terms of the everyday, their limits are always open to contestation. Thus, Fatima's veil provides a metaphor for two of Spain's struggles with its imagined cultural limits: first, its efforts to define itself as a modern democratic nation that functions in terms of political, regional, cultural and linguistic plurality (post-Francoist Spain is comprised of seventeen regional communities and several recognised languages plus numerous dialects); and second, the paradox of a long-standing cultural

debt to Islam combined with political antipathy. While the former means that many of the debates in Spain are similar to those in other parts of Europe (and are in line with Western norms), the latter reflects a long-standing, historical ambivalence towards Islam. Thus, one side of the debate was able to call upon Spain's commitment to plurality and democracy, arguing that the wearing of a headscarf and the visible allegiance to Islam was just one more case for toleration. On the other side, and particularly prevalent since the events of 11 September 2001, was the often unvoiced view that Islam is fundamentalist and hence a threat to Western democracy, and consequently to toleration itself. This view was complicated by the realisation that intolerance of the veil would undermine the very premises of a politics of toleration. While Fatima won her case, the explosive reactions that it provoked indicate that her veil marks the uncomfortable limits of toleration. Far from screening identity, supposedly its prime function, Fatima's veil exposed an antagonism to alterity, and in particular to the Islamic practices that, since the start of the Spanish Inquisition in 1492, has marked important boundaries for the construction of Spanishness. The complex historical and political dimensions of Spain's convoluted relationship with Islam become even clearer when compared with the reaction to the veil in other European nations.

Head coverings, whether the *hijab*, *chador* or Sikh turbans, have long served as important markers of religious, and hence cultural and ethnic, difference in the more developed nations of the world. For immigrants arriving in the West from the Third World, the acceptance of head coverings in public and professional realms has also become synonymous with acceptance of difference, and by extension, acceptance that notions of national and cultural identity have changed in the host country. Nor can they be considered mere emblems of identity worn by immigrant ethnic minorities: the polemic around their use by members of such groups arises precisely from the perceived threat that they pose to national identity - or perhaps, more pertinently, to national and cultural stability and continuity. The *affaire du foulard* first exploded in France in 1989, in Creil, when three Muslim schoolgirls were expelled by school authorities for wearing headscarves. The case quickly became a contentious issue of debate throughout France and elsewhere, leading to a split between state authorities, on the one hand, and Islamic communities established in France, on the other. Eventually, the then socialist French Minister for Education, Lionel Jospin took the matter to the *Conseil d'etat*, who ruled that French schoolchildren had the right to express their religious affiliations in school, on condition that this did not disrupt school practices. Some five years later, however, a conservative Minister for Education offered a reinterpretation of this ruling, stating that only discreet and unobtrusive religious symbols could be worn in school. Thus, Jewish and Christian symbols, such as a cross or kippah could be worn, but not the more obvious headscarf.¹ Nevertheless, with both the presence of Muslims in France and

1. For more details of the French debate on the Islamic veil, see Anna Elisabetta Galeotti, 2002, *Toleration as Recognition*, Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2002, pp115-136.

2. *Economist*, 10
August, 2002, p11.

other European nations becoming stronger and debate around the veil and claims for Islamic practices becoming more vociferous, the acceptance of the headscarf has become much more widespread in schools around France. As I write this article, however, the *hijab* has once again given rise to controversy between the French state and its Muslim citizens. The government's emphasis on a secular education, we are told, leaves no room for religious symbols within the system, so that nuns and Muslim women alike will be required to bare their heads in state schools. This has led Muslim groups in France to accuse the state of discrimination similar to the kind that Jews were subjected to during the Second World War. As recently as last year, in an article on Europe's Muslims, the *Economist* reassured its readers 'rows about headscarves and *halal* meat at school, not uncommon a few years ago, are now rare'.² As the controversy has new momentum in the current political climate, such hopes now seem premature. Global antagonisms between fundamentalist Islam and Western governments have fuelled hostility towards the fostering of Islam amongst second generation immigrant children, who are also new citizens of Western states. If school children belonging to immigrant Muslim communities are to be moulded into the ideal citizens of a modern European state, it would seem that they must somehow relinquish all public manifestations of the traditions and norms (inherent to) that structure their home lives and cultures of origin. In other words, the children of Muslim immigrants are required, in the name of the citizenship of liberal democracies, to refrain from any gesture related to their backgrounds that might have negative political overtones. The visibility of the headscarf renders it symbolic, then, not of a screen for the wearer's identity, but rather into an emblem of the latter when this is in conflict with what is perceived by the authorities as the desirable norm.

Interesting similarities and differences arise in the case of Sikhs wearing turbans. In Britain, Sikh immigrant workers, who formed part of the large numbers of Punjabis who came to settle in the United Kingdom in the 1950s and 1960s, had to fight for the right to wear the turban in the workplace. Having won their rights, they are now exempt from wearing helmets on motorcycles and other headgear in professions, such as the police force, bus service and the fire brigade. Britain is today home to the largest Sikh community outside India, the largest Sikh temple outside India was recently opened in Britain and the turban is an accepted sight in the British workplace. Similar legal battles took place in Canada in the 1980s, but, as Canadian Sikhs proudly proclaimed in press articles throughout the world on the occasion of celebrating three hundred years of Sikhism, the turban has now found acceptance there.

The question then arises, why, when the established presence of ethnic minorities has become commonplace in the Western metropolis, a peculiarly virulent hostility persists towards Islamic dress. An answer might be found in the report produced by Bikhu Parekh on behalf of the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain, which highlighted Muslims as the most

hated group amongst ethnic minorities.³ Islam is clearly associated with a political charge that other faiths do not seem to attract and this renders it incompatible with Western notions of multicultural harmony. Writing in *The Independent*, Yasmin Alibhai-Brown states that in Britain, the *hijab* was ‘a powerful symbol of the Islamic awakening that followed the *Satanic Verses* furore’.⁴ What makes the *hijab* unacceptable, by extension, is its implicit political weight that signals resistance to Western domination, even while claiming a right to be acceptable in the West. In the current context, it is now impossible to divorce the polemic of the veil in any Western nation (and however politically innocent the wearer as, for example, in the case of a schoolchild) from the global context of tensions in the Middle East and, more recently, the ‘war against terror’ unleashed first on Afghanistan and then on Iraq. Indeed, as the Western press was so quick to point out, one of the principle ‘benefits’ of the US bombing of Afghanistan and the subsequent downfall of the Taliban government was the supposed release of Afghani women from the constraints of the *chador*. That a year and a half or more since the overthrow of the Taliban, Afghani women largely continue to wear the *chador* has to be explained by the Western press as a sign of the lingering vestiges of trauma inflicted by five years of Taliban rule. As *Islamophobia*, a report aimed at examining hostility at official and cultural levels to Islam, suggests, numerous attitudes arise from and contribute to this antagonism towards Muslims.⁵ Islam is often seen as static and different, an inferior faith that instils aggression and is fundamentally hostile to the West. This view then justifies discrimination against Muslims and legitimises an anti-Muslim discourse. Public attitudes to the veil, then, are governed neither by a mere reaction to a piece of cloth worn on the head, nor by well-intentioned expressions of concern by Western feminists who seek to impose their notions of ‘liberation’ on Muslim women. Rather, the veil sparks off the worst fears that plague the West when confronted with Islam. These are not just fears of mass immigration, but also the fears of Western liberals who imagine that lurking behind the veil are the menacing silhouettes of Iranian and Afghani mullahs, Palestinian fighters, and worse, the Western-educated, but fundamentalist Muslims who so skilfully and unexpectedly executed the horrors of 11 September. The veil, as marker of resistance, threatens and incites fear. Toleration reaches its limits in a climate of fear, hampering even the everyday education of immigrant schoolchildren in working-class sectors of the Western metropolis.

There can be little doubt, however, that such a generalised public reaction does not have some benefits for certain interest groups in the West. Fear itself has acted as a veil for the manoeuvres of Western capital, cloaking the working agreements struck up by the US, British and Spanish leaders, Bush, Blair and Aznar, in the months prior to the war on Iraq. Thus, we are faced with the complex role of the Islamic veil as perceived in the West: it is used to invoke fear, and this fear acts as a useful cover for the violence of capitalism. The Islamic veil presents a surface, upon which the acquisitional desires of

3. Bikhu Parekh, Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain, London, Profile Books, 2000.

4. Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, ‘Muslim Women’s Struggle to Wear What They Like’, *Independent*, 23 June, 2003, p13.

5. *Islamophobia*, the Rummymede Trust, 1997.

late capitalism are inscribed in the black ink of fear. This veil of fear in the midst of the 'war against terror' screens the actions of their leaders from interrogation by liberal, democratic citizens in the West. It places a shroud over the fire and decimation rained down upon nations, such as Afghanistan and Iraq, prevents questions being answered about the treatment of prisoners held in Guantanamo bay, provides a license for further routes to be secured for the democracies of the West to the oil fields of the Gulf and authorises the detention of Muslims held in prison as terrorist suspects.

Thus, it can be surmised that in the furore around Fatima's veil, the veil was not the problem *per se*, but rather the epicentre of an explosion of anxieties that accrue to Islamophobia as a global phenomenon, and, interestingly, a key attribute of late capitalism. It is not an isolated case. A similar controversy had arisen and been concluded in the same fashion two years before in Madrid. Yet, in other regions of Spain, it is established practice for Muslim girls to cover their heads if they wish to do so. There was not strong reason pertaining to the facts of Fatima's case that should have made it problematic in the first place. Covering the head is not even alien to established Spanish practice. Nuns are by no means the sole wearers of veils. Even today, it is not unusual for women in rural areas to wear a headscarf in a manner that is almost identical to Fatima. More to the point, what greater reminder of Spanish imperial history and might is there than the *mantón de manila* that screens not only the head but also the face. The *mantón de manila* still veils Queen Sofía on state occasions, is traditional for aristocratic ladies at public events and was worn most memorably a decade or so ago by the celebrity singer Isabel Pantoja, dubbed by the media the 'widow of Spain', when her husband, the famous bull-fighter Paquirri, died after being gored in the bull-ring. The *mantón de manila* itself, it should be wryly added, is not in any way native to Spain, but an import from the Philippines, indicative of the Spanish drive towards self-extension through the appropriation and unquestioned assimilation of a colonised and reshaped 'other'.

The problematic that is the veil, then, lies in its symbolic value as a marker of resistance. In her denunciation of the veil as a symbol of patriarchal oppression, the headmistress of Fatima's school, Delia Duró, might be seen to be acting in a tradition of Western liberal feminism. But this is one-dimensional reading, taking it at mere 'face' value, which fails to take into account that by its very definition, the veil might screen from view meanings and uses that are not open to the gaze of un-nuanced Western eyes. Thus, famously in colonial Algeria, and as shown so clearly in the film *Bataille d'Algiers* (1965), the veil served as a manifestation of resistance. More recently, many supposedly 'liberated' Arab women have embraced the veil as an assertion of distinct identity, thereby constructing for themselves new spatial and political parameters. In particular, the revitalisation of Islam in reaction to the dominance of the West in many parts of the world renders the veil a potent symbol of anti-US sentiments, whilst also announcing to global powers

the existence of realities that intend to remain out of sight and are hence impossible to monitor or control. As Fadwa Guindi states, all meaning attached to the veil in its many forms is contingent upon the historical and political contexts in which it is worn.⁶ The veil has no single significance, but, like all cultural constructs, its symbolic, and hence political, potential is contextually bound. Fatima's veil, then, in the context of mass immigration into Spain, and in the context of the 'war on terror', is read as a threat and the reaction to it can be seen as a defensive move arising from fear of the unknown and the unseen.

6. Fadwa El Guindi, *Veil: Modesty, Privacy, Resistance*, Oxford, Berg, 1999.

Far simpler than acknowledging this fear is, of course, the glib dismissal of the veiled woman as disempowered, so that the removal of the veil can be presented as a kind of liberation. To dismiss the veil as a sign of submission avoids its complex politics. The assumption everywhere in the West (and re-enforced in the media by articles such as the one by Yasmin Alibhai-Brown quoted above that urges Muslim women to shake off the shackles of extreme patriarchy and to seek freedom of expression by throwing off the *hijab*) is that a veiled woman is denied both a face and a voice. The reactions of the educational authorities to Fatima's case suggest that they saw the veiled schoolgirl as stripped of agency. Their objections were framed in a discourse of human rights. Yet Fatima herself was not listened to. She stated on numerous occasions that she, and not her parents, was responsible for her decision to wear the veil. Her parents, she said, did not mind either way. Very many Moroccan women, such as her cousins and friends, she added, did not use the veil, it was a matter of individual choice. Indeed, this was made clear when photographs were circulated in the media, showing Fatima with her Moroccan friends, their heads uncovered, in Madrid. The decision to wear the veil was an act of agency on the part of this teenager and, perhaps, it was this that was most disturbing for the authorities. On the one hand, Fatima's publicly stated stance aligned her unexpectedly, and despite her veil, with European expectations of individuality. It was at one with discourses of plurality and tolerance in the new Spain. Moreover, a commitment to multiculturalism meant that innocuous displays of difference which did not cross the laws of the state should be allowed a certain lee-way. Spain thus aligned itself with other Western European countries by giving a certain amount of room to difference, albeit on the proviso that these multicultural spaces were well contained and manageable. On the other hand, there was the, distinctly uncomfortable and increasingly obvious, fact that what was unconstitutional was not the wearing of a headscarf, but rather the denial of education to a Spanish citizen because of her religious and cultural difference. Furthermore, Fatima, by stating that the scarf was *her* choice and not a cultural requirement, disturbed even those liberal views held by supporters of multiculturalism that members of culturally 'different' groups are somehow homogenous, to be treated as having uniform practices and devoid of individual preferences. In fact, at the core of the issue lies not the case of Fatima or indeed her veil, but the disturbance she caused to

cultural norms in Madrid. By presenting in public the unsettling sight of Islamic alterity in the form of a headscarf, by stressing that this was her choice, by covering her head on the one hand and exposing her will on the other, the norms of cultural acceptance were doubly disturbed. These relate directly to the kind of dress that is acceptable to Spain's desired image of itself. By not ascribing to 'modern', westernised fashions, Fatima stated implicitly that she was at once a citizen of Spain and also a Muslim. Western fashion, of course, often calls upon the exotic or the eastern, although always inscribing them first within symbolic structures that relate to the cultural contexts of late capitalism. In other words, Islamic-style dress can be acceptable and unthreatening in the West if it is first sanitised by being rendered orientalist and exotic. Her headscarf thus foregrounds the presence of Islam in modern Spanish urban space, in the very midst of this newly-gained Spanish Europeanness, a disturbing shadow of alterity that throws doubt and contingency onto what strives to achieve certainties of time and place.

Much of the above may also apply to schoolgirls in France, but the Spanish reaction includes an added historical complexity. The problem of Islam in Spain for Spanish culture arises from the fact that Islam's alterity has long been a feature of the Spanish imaginary. The manifestations of Islam in Spain certainly arouse contemporary anxieties that Spain shares with much of the West. However, they also release a chain of echoes that have long haunted Spanish cultural memory. Reiterations from those in authority about the oppressiveness of the veil and about the subordination of women in Islam thus themselves become a form of veil that conceals from public scrutiny (and which is perhaps also a form of self-deception) an old Spanish anxiety about its own engagement with, and disengagement from, Islam. In part because of its geographical location at the edge of Europe and next to the Maghreb, in part because of the indelible traces of Islam in Spain, and in part because of the legacies of the Inquisition, *el moro*, the moor, synonymous in popular Spanish parlance with Muslim, denotes, not Spanishness at its extremes (as some external stereotypes would have it), but rather the interrogative that arises at the border, forcing an uncomfortable reflexivity. The problematic of Fatima's veil is, then, the discomfort of the precipice, the reluctance to view with generosity or to offer hospitality to an alterity that is too close for comfort. The veil reveals this point of fracture in the border, this double take of both tolerance, with regard to the traces of the other, and of an other that is hard to unravel or interrogate without also unravelling the chaotic narratives of the self. The Spanish reaction to recoil so sharply from a proximity that was once so intimate is doubtless spurred by a haunting that persists despite the attempts of willed amnesia to close down the past.

Gertrude Stein is famously quoted as saying 'scratch a Spaniard and you find a Saracen'. Whilst this statement surely colluded in fomenting Spain's own exoticised image as Europe's southerly, darker-skinned other - an image

that post-Francoist Spain has worked hard to erase and that doubtless also contributes to the stigma attached to the Moor - nevertheless, ever since the Arab invasion of the early eighth century, it is fair to say that Islam has occupied a central position in the Spanish imaginary. The history of Islam in Spain is also the history of Spain in its becoming. While there are regional variations, many of the languages and cultures of Spain abound with the multiple traces of this Islamic past, now subsumed in the guise of one type of Spanishness or another - hence the disturbing silhouette of the Moor on the horizon which, by its very indistinctiveness, threatens to destabilise. Not only did the Islamic presence in Spain last for over seven hundred and fifty years, but, more to the point, the discourses of Spanish racial and religious unity, which began with the Inquisition and were refuelled during Francoism, relied upon constructions of alterity through the icons of Islam. According to the writer Juan Goytisolo, the Muslim is the mirror in which Spaniards see themselves reflected, an image outside of the self but also tied to the self, of the self as other, who imposes an interrogative and causes disquiet. As Goytisolo has gone on to show, Spanish literature through the centuries is rife with anti-Islamic rhetoric, which, by definition, translates into an exaltation of Spanishness. Furthermore, this antagonism is a part of everyday discourse and forms part of the linguistic and social structures through which national identity is constructed and perceived. In post-Francoist Spain, the impetus to refashion international perceptions and hence notions of identity, to accelerate the economy, fuel cultural innovation and acquire confirmed European acceptance has meant that it is all the more imperative to construct cultural fences that firmly demarcate the Spanish from the Moorish. Thus the metaphorical and political opening up of Spain's northern border with France has simultaneously led to a tightening of its southern border with the Maghreb. *El moro* thus becomes anyone who defies set norms, upsets expectations, transgresses imaginations. *El moro* lives across the Straits and threatens to cross shores. *El moro*, once a term used to refer to the unbaptised child in more Catholic times, is now the burglar, the thief, the pickpocket, all that 'we' are not and, by deduction, the negative definer of our 'selves'. The antagonisms of alterity turn especially acute between neighbours who are also relatives conjoined by history.

The happy resolution to Fatima's insistence on the veil is thus not the end of the matter. By dint of identical cases elsewhere and in the past, the decision to re-admit her to school was a foregone conclusion. Instead, what must remain notable is the outcry her veil provoked, when in fact such visible demonstrations of cultural diversity were by no means taking place for the first time, either in the Community of Madrid or elsewhere in the country. The rejections she was met with speak of an unconsidered antagonism to the traces of Islam, one that is weighted with both a regional history and the current global climate of fear. These factors far exceed her individual case and beg recognition. It would appear that for the educational

authorities, the mere sight of her veil sparked off an outrage provoked by the shadow of doubt that their new-found democratic Europeanness may be seen to be, at least in part, Moorish. What has come of Fatima since her start at school? One can only assume that she has settled in well. Yet the outcries continue as more and more visual symbols of Islam crop up around the country, one of many recent ones being vociferous objections by locals to the construction of a mosque on the outskirts of Barcelona. Clearly the significance of Fatima and her veil is best appreciated not when considered in isolation, but as one in an entangled knot of confused and synchronic events.

Ironically, therefore, though Fatima's veil has dropped out of the news, the question of the veil persists in a more pervasive form and in many different guises. The Spanish reluctance to give due place to its Islamic cultural memory, combined with the European obsession with building and monitoring boundaries, means that perceptions of the Maghreb are fraught and often unclear. The veil, in this context of contemporary Spain, is symptomatic of the failure to take into account a historical relation with the Maghreb. It appears as that indeterminacy of memory, which disturbs the physical/geographical divide between Spain as part of Europe and the Maghreb. Perhaps this explains the on-going tensions that surround Islamic practice and the issue of immigration in so many parts of contemporary Spain. A toleration for diversity based merely on the legislative practices pertaining to democratic Europeanness, which resolves particular issues without taking into account the weight of history, will inevitably be shallow and confined to contexts. A politics of toleration that merely adopts multiculturalism as a means of dealing with difference in terms of neatly contained units of culture is pursued by a haunting, precisely because of its disavowal of history. The problem of displaced memories, and the violence that ensues from such displacement, remains and continues to manifest itself in new contexts.

This is also true of attempts to penetrate the veil, to tear its fabric. As a counterpoint to the Spanish desire to alienate the moor in memory and culture are the economic forces impelling Maghrebians to cross over onto Spanish soil. Let us return to Tarifa, that southern-most tip of Spain, gesturing invitingly to those western-most shores of Islam, the Maghreb. Echoing similar, almost daily, accounts in the press, the journalist Juan José Téllez tells of a body washed up on a beach frequented by windsurfers and sunbathers.⁷ It belonged to a young man, one of an increasing number of unfortunate would-have-beens, the sorry wetbacks of the Med, his face and parts of his body eaten by fish and now unidentifiable. Removed from the beach and examined as per routine by forensic experts, the verdict was clear: 'this *moro* obviously drowned; the rest is not our concern'.⁸ Faceless and nameless, dismembered and out of time, he leaves through his very indeterminacy a trail of questions on the sand. The veil, that screen and filter between Spain and the Maghreb, is in fact at its most potent here, not

7. In his recent book *Moros en la costa*, Madrid, Editorial Debate, 2001.

8. My translation, *ibid.*, p.14.

as a symbol of religious or cultural difference, but much more as that which hangs on a wind-blown line of late capitalism demarcating the rich from the poor, the powerful from the powerless, the lucky from the desperate.

This sandy veil of unanswered questions centres more on issues of human rights than any fabric that Fatima may choose to wear on her head (as the educational authorities would see it). So too the story a few months ago of yet another Fatima, this time in her twenties and nine months pregnant, who paid her life savings to a trafficker in order to step onto a raft that took her to Spain. She gave birth on board, in the crowded company of thirty or so others, mainly men, with the boatman acting as midwife. She was lucky. Her child, born in Spanish waters, assured her, for a time at least, a future in Spain, an entry through its guarded frontiers.

At play once again in this penetration of the borders of Spain is the veil with all its metaphoric potential. Situated at the interface of the nation, constructed as a situated body with a specific geography, and culture as lived, contingent practice, the veil subverts any notions of submission and becomes an instrument of seclusion, as of power. Furthermore, in a not untypically enigmatic twist, the veil does not screen the Moor from view, as tradition would ordain, but indeed the Spanish. It is the Spanish authorities, through their increasingly sophisticated monitoring systems that scan the coastlines, through the detailed screening systems that ensue from the legal framework set in place at national and European levels, who shield themselves from view and survey what lies beyond the boundaries that they build and reinforce. The age-old conflicts with the *moro* take on a new light now, as with increasing vigour, this shield, despite all its costly potency is rendered gossamer-thin and ripped by those who have only their lives and little else at stake, as in the cases above. Yet the many questions around the veil remain unaddressed. In increasing droves and for some decades now, it has become clear to most Spaniards, indeed to most Westerners, that the Muslims have come to stay. While a very small minority call upon a shared history as a means of bridging differences and according mutual recognition, for most, it is a question of expecting the Moor to tone down his or her Moorishness and to comply with 'integration' on Western terms. The best the state can offer is a levelling multiculturalism that refuses the historical challenge of its own dubious premises. Under these circumstances, the kind of cultural toleration that stems from recognition cannot be engendered, given the displacement of memory and a play of power that targets the future by placing a lid on uncomfortable aspects of the past and the present. The way is paved then for the veil to present itself yet again, only to be blown further afield, ripped ever asunder by the shattering winds of terror.