

## How to Accumulate National Capital: The Case of the “Good” Muslim

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***Abstract:***

This paper explores the practices of certain high-profile Canadian Muslims who call themselves “progressive” or “moderate” as an example of attempts to increase one’s claims to national belonging through a reification of tropes that designate many Muslims as fanatical, scary and a threat to the Canadian nation. Through tracing the different understandings of “Muslim” and “Canadian” identities and an examination of articles printed in *The National Post*, this paper argues that this accumulation occurs in three main ways, with portrayals of the “good” Muslim as a patriotic Canadian, as an object of threat from other Muslims and as a protector of oppressed Muslim women. However, in a context marked by rampant Islamophobia throughout Canadian society, these nationalist practices may do more to produce further racialisation of and violence towards those that they positioned as “bad” Muslims than to ensure any lasting claims to national belonging for those who assert themselves to be representative of the “good” Muslims.

***Keywords:*** Identity; Islam; Islamophobia; *National Post*; Racialisation; Tarek Fatah

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**Résumé:**

Cet article explore les pratiques de certains musulmans canadiens influents qui se disent “progressistes” ou “modérés” comme un exemple de tentatives pour augmenter la réclamation à l’appartenance nationale à travers la réification de tropes qui désignent plusieurs musulmans comme fanatiques, effrayants et une menace à la nation canadienne. En retraçant les différentes conceptions des identités “musulmanes” et “canadiennes” et en examinant des articles imprimés dans le journal *The National Post*, cet article soutient que cette accumulation survient de trois façons principales, avec des représentations du “bon” musulman comme un Canadien patriotique, comme l’objet de menace fait par d’autres musulmans et comme protecteur des femmes opprimées musulmanes. Cependant, dans un contexte marqué par une islamophobie exubérante à travers la société canadienne, ces pratiques nationalistes peuvent faire plus pour avancer la production de racalisation et de violence envers ceux qu’ils positionnent comme étant de “mauvais” musulman, que pour assurer toutes revendications durables à une appartenance nationale pour ceux qui s’affirment comme des représentants de “bons” musulmans.

**Mots-clés:** Identité; Islam; Islamophobie; *National Post*; Racialisation; Tarek Fatah

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**The Racialisation of Canadian and Muslim Identities**

Many Muslims in Canada find themselves in the precarious position of being made to feel that their national and religious identities are exclusive to one another. This paper attempts to explore the words and practices of high-profile Muslims known to be “progressive” or “moderate” as an example of attempts to increase one’s claims to national belonging through a reification of tropes that continue to designate many Muslims as fanatical, scary and a threat to the Canadian nation. The paper begins by tracing a brief history of understandings of “Muslim” and “Canadian” identities in relation to each other, followed by a move to a theoretical grounding of the development of a “good” Muslim identity as a practice of accumulation of national capital. It then argues that this accumulation occurs through portrayals of the “good” Muslim as three distinct types: a patriotic Canadian; an object of threat from other Muslims; and a protector of oppressed Muslim women.

Through a history of colonial exclusions, Canadian identity has always been unequally accessible to those who attempt to claim it. The “identity is defined by those who position themselves as ‘ordinary Canadians’ or *Canadian-Canadians*—as opposed to ‘ethnic’ or ‘multicultural Canadians’—both referring to a category of unmarked, ‘non-ethnic’, white Canadians” (Arat-Koç, 2005: 40, *emphasis is in original*). Thobani writes that this dichotomy has been, in fact, fundamental to the creation of national identity, asserting that “a national identity that is formed primarily in relation to that which it excludes remains tied to the excluded, and the excluded Other becomes the nation’s ‘double’” (2007: 20). Through recent and

increasing efforts to exclude them from Canadian identity, Muslims—who often bear “the mantle of the allegedly unassimilable and undesirable immigrant” (Isin & Siemiatycki, 2002: 192)—have become an integral part of this Otherness against which Canadianness is defined.

With a rise in fears of perceived threats posed by Muslims around the globe both before and since September 11, 2001, the country has seen what Sedef Arat-Koç describes as “a campaign to increasingly define Canadian identity along civilizational lines, as part of ‘Western civilization’ and in a ‘clash of civilizations’ framework” (2005: 32). In this process, Muslims are seen not only as outsiders, but also as potential *threats*, whether they come from outside of Canada’s borders or from within them (Isin & Siemiatycki, 2002: 192). Measures to control Canadian Muslim populations—including increased surveillance and arrests—are seen as necessary and justifiable, as they “[will] not affect ‘real’ or ‘ordinary Canadians’, but only specifically targeted minorities” (Arat-Koç, 2005: 39). Thus, in many arenas, those marked as Muslim within Canada are coming up against a “rigidity of the newly configured boundaries of Canadian identity and the precariousness of national belonging and limited political citizenship for nonwhite minorities” (Ibid: 33). For example, Sherene Razack points out in her discussion of the arrests of 17 Muslim men on terrorism charges in June 2006 that media reports made distinct efforts to depict the men as “Canadian-born”, but not allowing them to be seen as unqualified “Canadians” (2008: 3). Regardless of whatever nominal citizenship they hold, some Canadian Muslims are finding themselves in positions of accessing only “a fragile narrative of ‘Canadianness’” (Zine, 2006: 246), if at all.

Of course, it is essential to acknowledge that not all Muslims are people of colour, and even those Muslims who are people of colour do not all come from backgrounds readily associated with Islam. For the purposes of this paper, the emphasis here is on the process of racialisation of both “Canadian” and “Muslim” identities. Razack explains,

Race informs everything concerning how I have come to think about Muslims in today’s world. As I have shown, Muslims are stigmatized, put under surveillance, denied full citizenship rights, and detained in camps on the basis that they are a pre-modern people located outside of reason, a people against whom a secular, modern people must protect themselves.

(2008: 174)

Yet again, Muslim identity is much more complex than is reflected in the categories mentioned here; the very fact of talking about a racialised “Muslim” identity that excludes many Muslims of European backgrounds also reflects a secularisation of the way that Muslim identity is constructed, which is a problematic process in itself and worth further research and elaboration. However, as Razack’s demonstrated, the label of “Muslim” is being used repeatedly as a dividing line. This line between modern and pre-modern becomes a site of racial divisions, a colour line drawn in order to define the two sides as intrinsically opposed and racially distinct. The processes and effects of the construction of “Muslim” as a racialised category, and particularly the ways that this construction is deployed by certain Muslims themselves, will be the focus of the analysis that follows.

However, even if we start from an understanding that our discussion about “Muslims” as a racialised category presents an incomplete picture of the range of identities that the category can actually encompass, the situation is not quite captured by an explanation that situates the white, non-Muslim obedient Canadian subjects on one side and the dangerous, disloyal and

untrustworthy Muslim outsiders on the other. Mahmood Mamdani's *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim* traces some of the history of the narrative of a "clash of civilisations" between "Western" and "Islamic" civilisations, arguing that the narrative has also included a thread focusing more on fundamental differences *among* Muslims than those between Muslims and other groups. The perception then becomes that "the West must remain a bystander while Muslims fight their internal war, pitting good against bad Muslims" (Mamdani, 2005: 23). Although the international relations framework used in Mamdani's work means that it is perhaps less useful for this analysis than some other sources are, this paper will continue to draw from the dichotomy that he illustrates, in part because of the challenge that it poses to the suggestions that Muslims are only ever portrayed as outsiders at war with Western civilisation, and in part because of the sheer simplicity of his terminology regarding "good" and "bad" Muslims. As will be demonstrated throughout this paper, other words have come to represent these categories of "good" and "bad" with relation to Muslims. For example, many of the texts that will be cited use the words "moderate" or "progressive" in order to indicate a "good" Muslim, while the word "Islamist" is commonly used to refer to "bad" Muslims. At times, these terms are used interchangeably to reflect the language being used in the articles referenced, so they should all be understood as part of the same "Good Muslim/Bad Muslim" dichotomy.

In the political context of a white settler society, Ghassan Hage's (2000) work on white nationalism is especially useful as a way to understand the racial dimensions of the creation of a good Muslim/bad Muslim dichotomy, and so it is within his articulation of the notion of accumulation of national capital that the analysis that follows can be situated. While Hage acknowledges constructions of national identity that include certain people and exclude others, he argues that these constructions are rarely so polarized:

The either/or, inclusion or exclusion conception of national belonging is paradoxically less present in everyday popular conceptions of the nation than it is among social analysts. People strive to accumulate nationality. They recognise themselves as more national than some people and less national than others. They are also recognised by others in a similar fashion.

(Hage, 2000: 52)

As seen, Hage links this accumulation of nationality specifically with attempts to accumulate "Whiteness", claiming that "it is only by naturalizing its hold on this Whiteness that a group can achieve aristocratic status" (2000: 65), with reference to a status where one's belonging in the nation is seen as natural and unquestioned. The goal of such national accumulation becomes, therefore, inextricably linked with race and with an attempt to position one's own group on the "good" side of the colour line. Hage goes on to argue that in this process of establishing its presence within the national community, "a group succeeds in imposing its symbolic violence on the national field by naturalizing its aspirations and ideals into national aspirations and ideals" (Ibid). The current political climate may mean that the level of accessible whiteness might be limited for any Muslims (especially Muslims who are immigrants and/or people of colour, although even some white Muslims may come to find themselves less firmly situated within the category of whiteness) and that the colour line between "Muslim" and "Canadian" does, to a large degree, remain strongly intact. However, Hage's point is that whiteness should be understood as a set of characteristics, of which it is possible to possess some without possessing

others, and that the fact that one might not possess all of them does not negate the relevance of the characteristics that one does possess.

### **The “Good” Muslim in Canadian Media**

This research examines the ways that “good” Muslim figures are constructed, and construct themselves, in Canadian media. Although markers of “bad” Muslim identity—oppression of women, terrorism, wearing of religious clothing, and so on—have been discussed extensively (see for example, the “Dangerous Muslim Men” discussed in Razack, 2008; or a similar image described in Jiwani, 2005: 55), the particular processes needed to identify the “good” Muslim have received less examination. If, as Mamdani argues with regards to the post-9/11 context, “[all] Muslims were now under obligation to prove their credentials by joining in a war against ‘bad Muslims’” (2005: 15), how are these credentials proven? It is not enough, after all, to be simply not “bad”. It is clear that this proof comes through active production of a certain kind of western, secular national subject, an identity that is defined not only through a lack of visible violent or fanatical tendencies, but is instead achieved through specific practices of national accumulation (including, it must be said, practices that are by definition inaccessible to many Muslims). With this in mind, it is useful to examine the articulation of “good” Muslim identity as a way that, according to Hage’s framework “people can accumulate certain forms of Whiteness and in so doing claim more governmental belonging over less capital-endowed others” (2000: 60). In the process, an attempt can also be made to uncover the drawing of the colour line in places where this “good” Muslim identity is demonstrated.

In choosing to focus on media, it is worth considering Yasmin Jiwani’s description of the importance of the role of the media in constructions of Canadian national identity when she writes that “[i]n a nation whose geographic size is enormous and whose population lives on a miniscule percentage of the total land mass, the role of the national media assumes even greater import when considering issues of social cohesion and the construction of an imagined community” (2005: 51). Moreover, as Amir Saeed argues “[i]n relation to race and ethnicity, the media provides information where public knowledge is fragmentary” (2007: 448). Both of these scholars point to the role of the media as a source of information that serves a very political role in shaping national public opinion and understandings of exactly who can be included within the nation. Given this powerful role that the media plays in producing knowledge and a sense of national identity, it is important to examine the content of the messages that it conveys.

This paper focuses in particular on a collection of articles published in the *National Post* between November 2007 and March 2009. The *National Post* was chosen partly because of its prominence as one of Canada’s largest-circulating national newspapers and partly because of what seems like an especially strong investment in building certain people as “good” Muslims, as demonstrated by the number of articles it has published that relate to the topic. The articles selected represent the majority of those from the time period that make specific reference to particular “good” Muslim figures, and were compiled primarily through searches of the newspaper’s website for names of specific people already well-known for their statements as Muslim spokespeople; these searches, in turn, produced other names that were also investigated further. An examination of these articles raised three main themes that will be developed in the remainder of this paper: first, the creation of a “good” Muslim identity through fervent and unquestioning displays of national loyalty; second, the construction of an Islamist threat that “good” Muslims, as well as other Canadians, need to fight; and third, the particular use of

statements related to gender and sexuality in the creation of the “good” Muslim identity. Although it would be simplistic to assume that all of these themes apply equally, or even at all, to each of the figures discussed in this article, they all arise frequently and, in the words of several different people, Muslim and not; it is for this reason that this paper focuses on a combination of several voices expressed within one newspaper rather than focusing on the more extensive words and writings of any one figure. The discussion of these three main tropes will highlight some of the multiple ways that journalists, as well as the “good” Muslim figures themselves, create, maintain, and strengthen the divide between “good” and “bad” Muslims. It is worth noting that these themes arise not only in the statements made by the Muslim speakers themselves, but also in the writing of the journalists who quote them; the construction of the “good” Muslim takes place from both within and outside of Muslim communities. Also worth noting is that the focus of this paper is on how these discourses are mobilized and not on the personal experiences of any of the individuals discussed, although the complexities of some of their individual experiences and relationships to Canadian identity may be an interesting subject for further exploration.

### **The “Blood Traitor”**

One particular article, because of its especially obvious use of race language to describe Muslims (both “good” and “bad”), can set the stage for an investigation of the three points mentioned above. In an opinion piece titled “The courage of the ‘blood traitor’”, journalist Jonathan Kay writes about members of certain “ethnic groups” in Canada who have had the “courage” to speak out about “criminals and terrorists” in their communities, and who have in turn faced violence and threats from other members in their communities (Kay, 2007, November 27).

Kay’s unusual overt use of language around “blood”—suggesting a biological basis for the construction of Canadian Muslims as a racialised group with certain inherent qualities—is perhaps no surprise, given some of his previous writing. For example, soon after September 11, he wrote:

We should not pretend that an effective fight against terrorism [in Canada] can be waged in a truly colour-blind fashion. The fact is, those who plot the annihilation of our civilization are of one religion and, almost without exception, one race.

(cited in Ismael & Measor, 2003: 115)

However, surprising or not, and although thematically rather similar to many of the other articles discussed in this paper, this language is noteworthy because of its blatancy. The idea that the “principled insiders” he identifies among Canadian Muslims—including “Tarek Fatah, Irshad Manji and Salim Mansur”—are traitors not only to their cultural or religious communities, but specifically to communities defined by “blood” suggests a greater risk on their part and emphasises the violence within their communities as supposedly innate. While most of the other articles considered here are notably less explicit in constructing “Muslims” as a race, this particular article is an example of how clearly race thinking affects media constructions of Muslims, and its principles, if not its language, are echoed throughout most of the articles that follow.

## The Patriotic Muslim

“Good” Muslims often identify themselves through exaggerated shows of patriotism and national loyalty. Unlike those Canadians whose whiteness means that their citizenship and identity are unquestioned, most Muslims, like many immigrants and people of colour in Canada, “must express their loyalty and allegiance explicitly and visibly” (Arat-Koç, 2005: 43) in order to assert claims to national belonging. This creates a climate in which “Muslims as racialized immigrants are being compelled to act as virtuous citizens, reproducing the dominant ways of being a citizen rather than issuing a fundamental challenge to the racial and orientalist foundations of citizenship” (Isin & Siemiatycki, 2002: 207). Options for exercising or demonstrating citizenship do not extend beyond celebrations of that citizenship; to apply a critical eye to either the institution of citizenship or to the country itself would result in one’s membership in the nation being called into question.

These attempts to accumulate national belonging through displays of patriotism express themselves in several ways. One article defines a “moderate Muslim” as someone who “seeks to live in a ‘state of Islam’ *within a nation to which he freely gives allegiance*” (Kay, 2008, October 8; *emphasis is added*). The expression of national allegiance becomes an integral part of the definition of a moderate Muslim; the possibility of moderate Muslims who may, for various reasons, resist aligning themselves so closely with any one state simply does not exist. Patriotism becomes, therefore, a prerequisite for any further accumulation of national capital that someone may wish to acquire. In another article, Tarek Fatah even laments a statement by the Ontario Human Rights Commission that he feels penalizes him for being *too* patriotic, saying that “[as] soon as we say Canada is our home and we have to defend her traditions, freedoms and secular democracy, we will be considered as the outside” (cited in Brean, 2008). Loyal to Canada’s principles even beyond what the system expects, Fatah portrays himself especially worthy of national belonging through his unconditional defence of the country in the face of any criticism. A necessary result of this emphasis on unquestioned national devotion is that anyone who criticises Canada must be strictly censured, a process that further reifies the claims to national identity of those doing the censoring. The idea that *Maclean’s*, a national magazine, might be fuelling racism is described by Fatah as “bullshit” (Ibid). Fatah, along with Manji and Mansur, is hailed for refusing to adhere to “a party line that blames every problem on Islamophobia” (Kay, 2007, November 27). In contrast, El-Farouk Khaki, an immigration lawyer and gay rights activist who ran as an NDP candidate in the 2008 election, is implicitly accused of being an Islamist because of his suggestion that the Canadian legal system may be “anti-Islam” (Kay, 2008, October 2). This accusation—especially given the ludicrous association of a queer activist with Islamism, a vague term for a set of ideologies not generally known for their acceptance of non-heterosexual identities—highlights the significance of this demand for uncritical patriotic sentiment. Those who reject the existence of racism and Islamophobia are reaffirmed as good Muslims and appropriate national subjects, whereas the perspective of someone who points out imperfections in Canadian legal systems (even someone who, as an immigration lawyer, might have some authority on the subject) is quickly dismissed and harshly criticized.

A further integral element of the emphasis on national loyalty is a particular allegiance to secular principles. The Muslim Canadian Congress, along with its then-president Farzana Hassan, is described as “[representing] secular and progressive Muslims” (Iverson, 2009), a label that, in the context of the article, privileges this secular framework and associates it with commitments to women’s rights and equal marriage. Journalist Barbara Kay argues that “a

Muslim may observe shari'ah privately and remain a good Canadian, but a Muslim cannot be a good Canadian and endorse official shari'ah" (October 8, 2008). In other words, although private religious identification as a Muslim can be tolerated, public support for certain "official" religious legal principles would automatically make one a bad Canadian. (This argument might have been clearer had Kay defined what she meant by "official shari'ah", although her lack of attention to the necessity of defining it and her assumption that "official shari'ah" is necessarily antithetical to good Canadianness may speak for themselves). In another article, Kay quotes Fatah: "Anyone, he says, 'who brings religion into politics should be suspect' because they 'are a threat to western civilization'" (Kay, 2008, October 2). Although many may argue that "secular Muslim" is in itself a contradictory term or that secularism as a concept, rooted as it is in Christian European histories, inherently excludes Islam and Muslims (Mamdani, 2005: 46-47), it retains significant power in defining who does and does not belong within conceptions of Canadian identity, and indeed within western civilisation as a whole. Secularism functions as a primary mechanism for establishing racial divisions; the "secular/religious divide . . . functions as a colour line, marking the difference between the white, modern, enlightened West and people of colour, in particular, Muslims" (Razack, 2008: 148).

It is, of course, important to acknowledge that no amount of patriotism will secure national belonging with any kind of certainty; the very expectation of this national loyalty makes it clear that (those radicalized as) Muslims are being held to higher, and much more precarious, standards than are non-Muslim white Canadians. There are parallels here with the citizenship papers described by Hage although they prove the formal citizenship of their holders, being asked to show them demonstrates a "national non-belonging to the dominant culture" (2000: 51). Razack writes, in a discussion about the Norwegian context that can certainly be applied to Canada, as well, that "[t]o belong, immigrants must indicate their gratitude and praise of the host culture, but since belonging is premised on membership in the bloodline that shares the nation's history, to be an [immigrant] is always to be non-Norwegian, compliance and guest behaviour notwithstanding" (Razack, 2008: 122). While vocal expressions of patriotism appear to be necessary for the construction of a "good Muslim" identity and for the accumulation of claims to a national identity, they do not guarantee the extent to which such national belonging will be recognised; in fact, their very necessity negates the possibility of a full, unchallenged national belonging.

### **The "Good" Muslim under Threat**

A second common theme that arises in relation to the construction of the Muslim figures in these articles is a repeated invocation of a narrative of being under threat from the "bad" Muslims (or "Islamists"). In this "contemporary form of race thinking, namely, the story that we are under siege by Muslims and that our governments must save them from this threat" (Ibid: 175), the constant emphasis of a looming danger facing Canadians—a danger to which these good Muslims are also vulnerable—attempts to construct the "good" Muslims part of the nation under threat, rather than as part of the threat itself. Fatah and Hassan legitimize this race thinking by warning that "Canadians are justified in raising concerns as to whether this is a sign of the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in their own backyard" (2007), and another article by Fatah points to the particular peril of "groups who, under the guise of multiculturalism, promote a foreign affairs agenda that is to the detriment of Canada" (2009). Acting as native informants, these figures confirm that their communities do indeed pose a threat, but that this is a danger to which they too

are vulnerable. Another journalist voices concern that those who are “tasked with protecting *us* from *our enemies*” are not sufficiently vigilant (Kay, 2008, October 2; *emphasis is added*); her focus in the rest of her article on the dangers that “Islamists” pose to the “moderate” Muslims that she describes clearly positions the moderate Muslims as members of this “us” in need of collective protection. This process of actively constructing certain Muslims as “bad” and, therefore, less Canadian can be compared to what Hage describes as one element of a nationalist practice in which “[national] subjects not only struggle to accumulate and position themselves in a dominant position within the field, but also to position others where they deem them to belong” (2000: 66). By asserting an authority not only to identify themselves within the Canadian national identity, but also to identify others as outside of it, these figures are claiming a greater level of national capital in the form of being able to have their say on how the nation’s boundaries should be defined.

The articles employ various tropes in order to emphasise the intensity and widespread nature of the danger that “bad” Muslims are seen to pose to Canada and Canadians. The foreignness of these Muslims is repeated in many of the articles; ominous references are made to the influences of “ Hamas and Hezbollah” (Fatah, 2009) and of “Saudi Arabia and Iran” (Fatah & Hassan, 2007). Words like “shari’ah” (Kay, 2008, October 8) and “fatwa” (Kay, 2008, October 2) are left in the original Arabic and unexplained, constructing them as foreign concepts, impossible to translate (or, at least, not worth translating) for English-speaking readers in Canada. Moreover, the word “fatwa” is clearly used—both by Barbara Kay (2008, October 2) and by Raheel Raza, whom the former quotes—to refer to a death threat (both Kay and Raza also seem to assume that their audiences will understand it as such), despite the more accurate translation of the word as a religious decree, which can encompass a wide range of topics and only rarely refers to such threats. The focus on the danger as being of foreign origin reinforces the attempts to portray a sense of national cohesion among all those perceived as being under this threat.

The dangerous Muslims are also discussed as specific threats to Canadian legal and political systems. The spectre of shari’ah law, “the litmus test for dividing real moderate Muslims from Islamists” (Kay, 2008, October 2), arises frequently, and any supporters of “shari’ah” (a concept that is never well-explained) become, automatically and unequivocally, extremists whom Canadians should fear. The New Democratic Party, in particular, is discussed as the site of a “flood” of “Islamists” (Ibid); the extent of the threat intensifies with the suggestion that these Islamists have taken over an entire political party. Moreover, Fatah suggests that it is Canada’s own systems and principles such as “multiculturalism” (Fatah, 2009) and “freedom of speech” (Fatah, cited in Kay, 2008, October 2) that Islamists are exploiting and manipulating for their own gain. This portrayal of a vulnerable system that is already being infiltrated by outsiders heightens the perception of the danger and of its urgency.

While “good” Muslim figures such as Fatah and Raza are active in pointing out these threats, many of these articles also, importantly, construct them specifically as *targets* of such threats. Jonathan Kay describes Muslims Irshad Manji, Salim Mansur and Tarek Fatah as “identity-politics dissidents who’ve been labelled ‘malicious, scandalous and defamatory’ by members of their own communities” (2007, November 27). In one article, Barbara Kay extols the courage of the “handful of courageous ex-Muslim and moderate-Muslim challengers, who incur fatwas and risk physical danger in speaking out” (2008, October 8). Her combination of “ex-Muslim” and “moderate-Muslim” is interesting, as if it may almost be possible to conflate the two. In another instance, Barbara Kay’s article reads like a celebration of Mansur, Fatah and

Raza as Muslims of “courage and eloquence” who should be “saluted” by “grateful Canadians” (2008, October 2). These three figures thus become positioned as good Canadians not only because they, like other Canadians, face the same Islamist threat, but also because of the work that they do to protect the nation from this danger. Raza goes so far as to identify herself as “the proud recipient of a fatwa”; she later jokes about being fifth on a list (created by “Islamists”) of “most hated Muslims in the world” and hoping to one day make it to the top of the list (cited in Kay, 2008, October 2). This sense of pride feeds into what Razack describes as a context of “media panics [that] afford an opportunity for . . . race pleasure” (Razack, 2008: 150). In this process, Raza reinforces her belonging with her national audience through a shared “pleasure in one’s own superiority and the other’s abjection” (Ibid).

The image of being under attack clearly serves to reinforce nationalist claims; it also seems, in and of itself, to act as a source of credibility for these Muslims. Receiving a “fatwa” or a derogatory comment from a conservative Muslim thus becomes as important a credential to prove “moderate” status as any actual accomplishment they may have made, and Barbara Kay’s article calls on us to listen to them because of these dangers that they face, long before she mentions anything related to their academic or work background or community involvement. Kay writes as if the fact that these figures are excluded from many mainstream Muslim communities is reason enough to listen to them, a move that further widens the divide between these “good” Muslims and other—i.e. “bad”—Muslims whose interests are so far from those of mainstream Canadians that their disapproval must be a sign of something good.

This particular construction of “good” Muslims as the objects of threats from other Muslims has several significant implications. Perhaps most obviously, it positions these figures as members of a national community who are under threat from having “our” political systems taken over by Islamists (Kay, 2008, October 8) and places this “us” on the modern and civilized side of the racial dividing line. By extension, it also asserts a huge degree of power over those who may disagree, since, in this disagreement, they risk aligning themselves with the fanatical Muslims who have been so hostile to these “good” Muslims’ agendas. Kay’s articles in particular leave little room for dissent; those who disagree with these figures are effectively defining themselves as inherently Islamist. The description of this threat also has resonances with Hage’s comments on racism and nationalism as specifically spatial practices. For example, his argument that,

There is a dimension of territorial and, more generally, spatial power inherent in racist violence that the categories deriving from the concept of ‘race’ cannot by themselves encompass. While such practices are ‘informed’ by racist modes of classification, I will maintain that they are better conceived as nationalist practices: practices which assume, first, an image of a national space; secondly, an image of the nationalist himself or herself as master of this national space and, thirdly, an image of the ‘ethnic/racial other’ as a mere object within this space.  
(Hage, 2000: 28)

By constructing themselves (and being perceived by others) as part of a national space under attack from foreign threats (whether these threats come from outside of the country or from dubious citizens inside of it), these “good” Muslim figures are seen to assert a claim of ownership over the national space, as a space in which they too are threatened, and that they have pledged their commitment to protect.

### **Women’s Bodies as Proof of National Benevolence**

The “good Muslim” image is maintained through specifically gendered practices; as Jiwani argues, “[n]ational mythologies are undoubtedly gendered” (2006: 53). Further,

Women are seen in terms of their role as signifiers of culture: the boundary markers between *us* and *them* that underlie and structure the relationship of the dominant colonizers to the subordinated colonized . . . Thus, women’s bodies have been used to solidify national boundaries, and to differentiate outgroups.

(Jiwani, 2006: 181; *emphasis is in original*)

While the role of women’s bodies as markers of national or cultural boundaries might be more commonly raised in articulations of certain conservative Muslim identities (for example, through clothing restrictions or patriarchal control of women’s movement), descriptions of the female body also take a central role in some of the very vocal claims to “moderate” or “progressive” Muslim identity made by journalists or by such “moderate” and “progressive” Muslims themselves.

For example, “good” Muslim women include: those women who are oppressed by their communities; those whose adherence to certain religious practices is seen as imposed rather than voluntary; and those who can therefore be rehabilitated into mainstream Canadian society. Razack describes,

Against the figure of the illegitimate asylum seeker and the bad immigrant, there was also the good immigrant, one for whom we could feel pity and who was deemed assimilable. In the latter category were women fleeing gender-based persecution, women the West was prepared to save providing a case could be made that their own cultures were too patriarchal and their own positions too pitiable to endure the violence.

(2008: 126)

Included in this category are young women like Aqsa Parvez, a teenager whose murder in 2007 has been blamed on family conflicts involving religious clothing. Fatah and Hassan (2007) describe Parvez as someone who was “only trying to be herself, was only wishing for a normal adolescence amid Canada’s rich cultural mosaic”, incorporating her into the “good” Muslim category for her perceived rejection of her father’s religious oppression. By extension, they claim that “teenage girls are often lectured over the virtues of the hijab by their family members” and that Canadian culture makes little outcry over “their oppression from within their own community, or even their own family” (Fatah & Hassan, 2007). While their observations are no doubt true for some young Muslim women, Fatah and Hassan seem to deny the possibilities of the existence of Muslim girls and young women whose lives do not fit into the narratives they describe. Instead, they appropriate the possibilities of such violent stories for their own political purposes in order to assert their own legitimacy through their concern for these girls. In their focus on young women coerced into religious practice by their families and communities, Fatah and Hassan manage to claim “good” (or at least “assimilable”) Muslim status both for the women they describe as well as for themselves as champions of these women. They also reproduce a structure that positions many women of colour as testaments to the virtue of

Canada's national identity: "[a]s victims, they become recipients of Canadian benevolence signified through the various rescue attempts of the state and its agencies, and as survivors, they signify the success of multicultural tolerance and liberal values" (Jiwani, 2005: 53). This move further emphasises the "good" Muslim's exaltations of patriotism, as discussed earlier. Another article describing a young "Islamist" Muslim man (Bell, 2008) makes no such allowances for the possibility of coercion or community oppression that he may have faced; it seems to be only young women who are at risk of this or who may be saved from it.

As Fatah and Hassan showed us in the previous paragraph, the "good" Muslim figure also asserts itself through its identification and rejection of patriarchal traditions seen as widespread (or at least potentially so) within Muslim communities. Hassan argues that, "[a]s a Muslim woman from Pakistan, I have seen the negative effects of polygamy" (cited in Ivison, 2009), and journalist John Ivison describes her as exposing "the dark side of polygamy in the Muslim world, where women are treated as 'sub-humans' and children end up traumatized". Hassan paints polygamy as always and intrinsically non-consensual (Ivison, 2009), which creates a paternalistic portrayal of all women in polygamous marriages as victims with little or no agency of their own. Along with pointing out such apparently oppressive traditions, the "good" Muslims also attempt to align themselves with "the role of the nation as an icon of tolerance and as a 'rescuer' of those who are victims of barbaric cultures and practices" (Jiwani, 2005: 53). They are clear that *they* are the ones who are doing the most for Muslim women, in opposition to anti-racist or feminist activists whom Raza and Fatah, respectively, accuse of "political correctness" and "left-wing racism" (Kay, 2008, October 2).

Of course, no discussion of the use of Muslim women's bodies for political purposes would be complete without a discussion of their clothing. A *National Post* editorial (Take off the veil, 2009) identifies the wearing of a facial covering as something that "most of us [Canadians] deem offensive". The editorial goes on to argue that the contention that such clothing should be permitted as an exercise of religious freedom is something that,

Most moderate Muslims are rightly wary of supporting, because the implication would be that Islam's core view of women is fundamentally dehumanizing, and therefore entirely incompatible with life in the West—in which case every instance of veil-wearing should be regarded as suspect.

(Take off the veil, 2009)

The suggestion here, of course, is that veiling is inherently oppressive and that moderate Muslims, by definition, are suspicious of such practices. Any Muslim who does wear a niqab becomes inherently un-moderate, with no possible alternative reading of what such clothing might mean. Moreover, lest readers adopt a misguided view about the violence involved in forcing a woman to remove this clothing in certain circumstances, the writer argues that

Those who seek to require the abandonment of the veil in certain urgent contexts are actually the tolerant ones—even though they are often cast as bigots by Islamists. That is to say, they are defending the right of Muslim women to live as Muslims within our culture, and, by extension, their right to wear the veil except in certain fleeting instances. It is a position that recognizes that a Western way of life and certain misogynistic (as we regard them) social customs can co-exist.

(Take off the veil, 2009)

It is unclear whether “those who seek” is in reference specifically to Muslims, but the writer’s mention of Muslims opposed to the veil both before and after this paragraph certainly reads as a call for “moderate” Muslims to fight actively against such practices. Muslims are asked to align themselves with this “we” who find veiling misogynistic, yet whose benevolent culture permits it, most of the time. As with the urge described above to rescue Muslim women from polygamy, this article constructs “good” Muslims as the “tolerant ones”, as opposed to those activists advocating for religious freedoms who are supposedly making things worse for women.

The irony here is that while Fatah and Hassan (2007) so clearly berate “[r]adical Muslim men” for “[considering] themselves ultimately responsible for the conduct of the womenfolk”, such conduct is strikingly present and pervasive within the claims made by these “moderate” Muslims in order to assert their own identities and claims to national belonging in a society that defines its goodness, at least in part, by its apparent benevolence towards women. They continue to use women’s bodies to define their own location and moral virtue, even when the virtues they extol are ones like charity and benevolence, rather than the “bad” Muslim values of chastity and honour. Hassan, described as someone who “[supports] gay marriage but opposes polygamy” (Iverson, 2009), further manages to use images of open-mindedness regarding queer issues to define her own “progressive” status. The continual rhetorical use of women’s bodies as a way to highlight their own values as good national subjects strips many Muslim women of agency in making their own political and religious decisions, situating these “good” Muslims as not as different as they might hope from those whom they chastise for using the position of women in their society as a marker of their own social worth.

## **Conclusion**

We have seen here the kind of national capital that can be accumulated through practices such as repeated demonstrations of national devotion, expressions of fear of attack from racialised Others, and claims to paternalistic benevolence when it comes to (seemingly) oppressed women. These processes are often violent, serving to further racialise those who do not themselves take on these practices and achieving the accepted status of some Muslims only at the expense of many other Muslims who do not or cannot conform to the same standards expected of these “good” Muslims. It must be remembered, however, that such accumulation still only results in partial and contingent belonging to the national identity. As Hage asserts,

No matter how much national capital a “Third World-looking” migrant accumulates, the fact that he or she has acquired it, rather than being born with it, devalues what he or she possesses compared to the “essence” possessed by the national aristocracy. The latter are those who [...] only have to be what they are as opposed to those who are what they do. They are nationals and behave nationally because they are born nationals, as opposed to the other groups who have to behave nationally to prove that they are nationals.

(2000: 62)

As shown in this paper, various practices have all served as mechanisms for the accumulation of national capital by those who see themselves as “moderate” and “progressive” Muslims and by non-Muslim Canadian media figures who reinforce the existence of such “good” Muslim

identities. Yet in a context marked by rampant Islamophobia throughout Canadian society, these nationalist practices may do more to produce further racialisation of and violence towards those that they positioned as “Islamists” than to ensure any lasting claims to national belonging for those who assert themselves (and are described by others) as being representative of the “good” Muslims.

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