

Trapped in the Carceral Net: Race, Gender, and the “War on Terror” *

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Abstract:

The events of September 11, 2001 unleashed a series of security measures designed ostensibly to protect Western nations from terrorist attacks. Many of these measures were aimed at keeping out potential terrorists and neutralizing potential terrorist activities. However, many were also aimed at citizens within the nation, legitimizing their exclusion and denial of rights. Drawing on the case of Omar Khadr, this paper argues that the carceral net ensnaring Omar Khadr was in operation well before 2001. However, since then, the carceral net has tightened to render Muslim bodies unworthy on the grounds of their putative criminality, and as undeserving victims, unbefitting state intervention and societal sympathy. The colour line, I argue, demarcates bodies that are considered worthy as opposed to those precarious others who can be penalized by the state and whose lives simply do not matter. Race, class and gender intersect and interlock to construct particular representations of victimhood as demonstrated by contemporary media representations of Muslim women.

Keywords: Agamben; Carceral State; Criminality; Foucault; Gender; Guantanamo; Khadr; Prisons; Race; Representations; Victims

Résumé:

Les événements du 11 septembre 2001 ont incité une série de mesures de sécurité conçue pour protéger ostensiblement les nations occidentales contre les attentats terroristes. Plusieurs de ces mesures étaient dans le but de tenir à l'écart les terroristes potentiels et de neutraliser des activités de terrorisme potentiel. Cependant, plusieurs ont été dirigés vers des citoyens au sein de leur propre nation, légitimant leur exclusion et leur interdiction d'accès aux droits. En ce basant sur le cas d'Omar Khadr, cet article défend que le filet carcéral qui piégeait Omar Khadr fût en vigueur longtemps avant 2001. Cependant, depuis ce temps, le filet carcéral a été redressé pour rendre les corps musulmans indignes basés sur leur criminalité putative et, en temps que victimes sans mérite, ne convenant pas à l'intervention de l'État et de sympathie sociale. La ligne de couleur, tel que je défends, fait la démarcation des corps qui sont considérés dignes en contraste avec les autres qui sont pénalisés par l'État et dont leurs vies sont sans valeur. Race, classes et genre sont entrecroisés afin de créer des représentations particulières de la victimisation, comme démontré par les représentations de la femme musulmane dans les médias contemporains.

Mots-clés: Agamben; Criminalité; État Carcéral; Foucault; Genre; Guantanamo; Khadr; Prisons; Race; Représentations; Victimes

The ideal point of penalty today would be an indefinite discipline: an interrogation without end, an investigation that would be extended without limit to a meticulous and ever more analytical observation, a judgment that would at the same time be the constitution of a file that was never closed, the calculated leniency of a penalty that would be interlaced with the ruthless curiosity of an examination, a procedure that would be at the same time the permanent measure of a gap in relation to an in accessible norm and the asymptotic movement that strives to meet infinity.

(Foucault, 1978/1995: 227)

The fictions of “race” enable the cruelties and carnage of imperial adventures—because these people are not like us, are not people at all, and their otherness proves that they are lesser, unworthy, dangerous, and to be contained by any means possible.

(Bhattacharyya, 2008: 121)

Introduction

The prolonged incarceration of Canadian Omar Khadr at the US prison camp at Guantánamo Bay speaks volumes to how race, religion and gender are interwoven in the definition of the Other. It also attests to the ongoing stigmatization and penalization of Muslim bodies post-9/11.

Khadr, it will be recalled, was apprehended and imprisoned while still a child soldier; his confinement violated and continues to violate Canada's international commitments to various UN protocols and agreements including the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Yet, the Canadian government has remained the only Western state not to advocate for the return of a citizen incarcerated in Guantánamo Bay or to seek actively his repatriation. In October 2010, to put an end to his imprisonment, Khadr entered into a plea agreement with US military prosecutors thereby accepting an eight-year sentence in addition to the years he has already spent incarcerated at Guantánamo Bay. The terms of the pre-trial agreement indicate that he has the possibility of transferring to a Canadian prison after spending one out of the eight years there. In this paper, I use Omar Khadr as an exemplar of the profound criminalization, isolation and abandonment of those who are considered deviant, disposable and dispossessed Others. His situation is paradigmatic of these Others who are caught within the US carceral net and its growing filaments which have infiltrated, and continue to infiltrate, nation-states throughout the world.

Figure 1: Omar Khadr in Interrogation Room

Source: Wikimedia Commons.



I begin this paper by discussing the carceral net and its deployment of various modalities of power. Drawing from Foucault, Agamben and other theorists, I discuss how Guantánamo, and its counterparts in other nations, is a state of exception that has achieved notoriety as the most visible node of the carceral net. The carceral net is exemplified by a “law and order” approach in which crime is the lens through which governance is exercised. This form of governmentality¹, to use a term coined by Foucault, employs not only a wide array of disciplinary technologies to subject and produce docile subjects but also, through the deployment of juridical power and biopower², serves to manage, contain and/or annihilate those who are perceived to be threats to society.

As this paper demonstrates, the carceral net ensnares those who are defined as different and deviant; a distinction based on the colour line. The racialization of these Others is maintained and communicated through a focus on the inferiorization, deviantization and naturalization of difference. While overt and explicit forms of racism are no longer condoned by the liberal state, colour-blind racism permeates institutional rhetoric and through the mediation of inferential referencing, cordial tonality and culturalized modality, focuses on difference as the site of the abject and contemptible. Victims who are considered worthy of rescue and redemption/reformation have some means by which to escape the most brutal power of the

carceral net. Yet, the very construction of victimhood is raced, classed and gendered. Here, I pay particular attention to media representations of Muslim women, as for example Omar Khadr's mother and sister, and Suaad Hagi Mohamud, a Canadian woman of Somali heritage refused return to Canada on rather spurious grounds. I examine these representations in terms of how the women are constructed as unworthy and undeserving. I suggest that guilt by association, mediated through race, religion and gender, diminish the worthiness of Omar Khadr's status as victim deserving of societal and state intervention. I argue that Omar Khadr's story serves a morality tale, instructing "us" as spectators how to behave as docile citizens and inviting us to legitimize the rationality of the carceral net.

The Carceral Net

In his analysis of the rise of the carceral state, Michel Foucault (1978/1995) argues that the prison serves as a paradigm of sorts—organizing the particular ways in which society objectifies the criminal while congealing and legitimizing disciplinary functions. The prison as emblematised in the panopticon—the icon of surveillance and objectification—naturalizes and legitimizes not only the disciplinary functions of society but also the state's right to surveillance including the power to define those who can be classified as deviant/criminal and illegal as well as the techniques by which they can be objectified and rendered manageable. The regimes of truth that circulate to legitimize such surveillance and the subjects/objects of its gaze are contingent on the "norm" and the normalizing power of disciplines. As Foucault (2003: 45) contends, "[w]e should not, therefore, be asking subjects how, why, and by what right they can agree to being subjugated, but showing how actual relations of subjugation manufacture subjects".

The carceral net can be defined in terms of finely intermeshed grid of regulatory and disciplinary powers where governance occurs through crime control, legitimized by a "law and order" agenda (Gottschalk, 2008). It therefore includes disciplinary functions in terms of the organization of space and time governing individual lives through normative prescriptions, functions exercised by various disciplines (e.g., psychiatry, criminology) and institutions (e.g., prisons) tasked with the management of behaviour, as well as regulatory functions in terms of the management of populations. However, what differentiates the carceral from other institutions in society is the centrality of crime as the nodal point around which relations of power are organized. The criminal or delinquent is thus at the core of the rationality underpinning the carceral state—s/he is used to make intelligible the meaning of transgression, what crimes are committed and the punishments that are to be meted. As Foucault (1978/1995: 303) asserts, "[t]he carceral 'naturalizes' the legal power to punish, as it 'legalizes' the technical power to discipline".

Guantánamo symbolizes an extension of the U.S. carceral state. Located in Cuba, outside of the U.S., and against the will of the Cuban state (Gregory, 2006), Guantánamo has been defined as a "state of exception", that is, a place made possible by the suspension of the rule of the law, where the suspension itself constitutes the law (Agamben, 1997; Razack, 2005; Tagma, 2009). It is a condensed and concentrated manifestation of the carceral state that deploys different modalities of power ranging from the sovereign power of the U.S. state, its disciplinary apparatus, and biopower, which is manifested not only in the control of populations but in the right to "let die" (Foucault, 2003). Each of these modalities is characterized by a network of capillaries and nodal points that intermesh and interlock, forming the body of the carceral state.

However, while Guantánamo exists as a limit case, the interwoven threads that anchor it to the US circulate throughout the world, rendered possible in part by the globalization of the “war on terror” and the importation of the carceral apparatus. Thus, prisons such as Abu Ghraib (in Iraq) and Bagram (in Afghanistan), are hallmarks of this kind of importation, and within the US domestic sphere, the construction of super-max prisons and the detention and indefinite imprisonment and torture of whole groups of people are enduring reminders of the entrenched nature of the carceral state (Davis, 1983). Gottschalk reminds us, in the U.S., “[on] any given day, more than seven million people—1 in every 32 adults—are incarcerated or on probation or parole or under some form of community supervision” (2008: 236).

In *The Souls of Black Folk*, W. E. B. Dubois (1965/1999: 221) penned the following observation: “The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line, the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea”. The “colour line” separates out those who are to live from those whose lives do not matter, or who are “let to die”. As various scholars have demonstrated the colour line is apparent in the racialized distinctions and classifications made among citizens and non-citizens, the treatment afforded to them, and their vulnerability to criminalization, incarceration and eviction from the nation-state (Backhouse, 1999; Bahdi, 2003; Bannerji, 2000; Chan & Mirchandani, 2002; Razack, 2008a; Thobani, 2007). Race then is the colour line separating out those with privilege and those whose lives can be subjected to various forms of exclusion. Gottschalk (2008: 236) argues that in the U.S., “if current trends continue, one in three black men and one in six Hispanic men are expected to spend some time in jail or prison during their lives”. Similarly, Luke Vervaet (2010), in his discussion of Belgium and other European prisons, argues that it is Arab men and Roma women that suffer higher rates of incarceration in Europe, and further, that the abuse they are subjected to parallels if not mimics the kind of torture that has been witnessed at Abu Ghraib and elsewhere. The rest of the European states, he suggests, are increasingly adopting the US model. He notes, “even if Guantánamo eventually closes, the problem that Guantánamo symbolises—the lawlessness, racism and imperialist mentality of the powerful—remains” (2010: 31).

In Canada, the high numbers of indigenous men and women (The Correctional Investigator, 2010), as well as the high number of black men who are imprisoned (Denney, Ellis & Barn, 2006; Wortley, 2003), attest to the growing influence of a law and order agenda by the current Conservative government. According to recent news accounts, the federal government has committed \$2.1 billion towards expanding the capacity of federal prisons in Alberta, Ontario, Saskatchewan, and Quebec over the next five years (CBC, 2011, January 10). While, like Guantánamo, prisons epitomize the most explicit manifestation of the carceral state, it is the finely intermeshing threads of the prison/governance regimes pervading the rest of the social order that should also concern us. Here too, the colour line marks the point of separation between citizens, partial citizens and non-citizens—those who can be confined, indefinitely detained, or deported elsewhere (e.g., Tanovich, 2008).

Immigration has been a nodal site where the threads of carcerality mesh. Gottschalk observes that in the U.S., “the number of immigrants held in special detention centers and elsewhere on any given day has increased more than eleven-fold since the early 1970s”, and that “the immigration service has become a mini-Bureau of Prisons” (2008: 246). In Canada, there are numerous accounts of extended detentions, legitimized by the application of security certificates, deportations, as well as outright exclusions (Razack, 2008a). Indeed, the Canadian

nation-state has been built on these exclusions, and tentative or conditional inclusions, all premised on a hierarchy of race where whiteness is privileged.

Canadian citizenship emerged with the clear intention to produce racial divisions among the populations within the territorial bounds of the nation-state, divisions which remain significant to this day and which continue the project of all racial states to produce national/racial homogeneity in the face of actual heterogeneity.

(Thobani, 2007: 102)

Omar Khadr's Canadian citizenship did not protect him from the US carceral state. Nor did his citizenship facilitate his repatriation back to Canadian soil. Hence, whether one has official citizenship status or not seems to make no difference when it comes to the colour line.

If race is the demarcating line separating those whom the state allows to "let live" as opposed to those it chooses to "let die" (using Foucault's terms), then where can we locate the life that is permitted to live, but is rendered "civilly" dead? Agamben's (1998) concept of bare life as embodied in *homo sacer*—a man (sic) who can be murdered with impunity but whose life cannot be sacrificed—offers us a way to conceptualize this liminal figure, a figure who is alive and yet dead. The incarcerated inhabitants of Guantánamo signify *homines sacri*—those abandoned as bare life who can be murdered with impunity but are not considered fit to be sacrificed. And while Agamben does not use the term "sacrifice" in its religious sense, his use of it alludes to the social valuation attached to that which can be sacrifice or be regarded as worthy of sacrifice to appease the powerful.

Agamben suggests that in the current political climate, we are all, to some extent, *homines sacri* (1998: 115), but in so doing, he fails to take into consideration how race, gender and class differentiate degrees to which bare life is produced. Tagma (2009) contends that not all life is bare life but rather only that life which is maintained in a state of exception—marked by its categorization as being "devoid of value" (Agamben, 1998: 139). This notion of being "devoid of value" corresponds in part to Butler's (2004) conception of precarity and precarious lives—those lives that do not matter. And here again, we come back to the colour line, as it is the line that determines those whose lives matter and those which can be expunged with impunity or dispossessed of political and/or human rights and banned from society.

The Colour Line and Colour-blind Racism

In the current political climate, it has become unfashionable to draw attention to this colour line. Rather, racism is now "colour-blind" making no reference to phenotypic differences, but mediating a discourse of racialization. As Bonilla-Silva (2002) has pointed out, colour-blind racism in the U.S. emerged after the abolition of Jim Crow laws that made explicit reference to skin colour to differentiate those whose lives mattered from those who were considered dispensable if not disposable. In the UK, Gilroy (1991) has remarked on emergence of a new racism or what Entman (1990) calls "modern racism", as a way to distinguish contemporary racism from older forms of racism that specifically referenced skin colour. This new racism utilizes culture, religion, academic performance, civic engagement and a host of other "non-racist" or liberal criteria by which to advance the notion of inferiority and to naturalize this inferiority by reference to cultural membership and biological heritage. In Canada, Razack (1998) has underscored the use of "cultural racism" by which racism and its connotations and

denotations of presumed inferiority are communicated and sustained through reference to culture.

In her analysis of the “war on terror”, Gargi Bhattacharyya (2008) points to this use of culture as a way of cementing a civilizational discourse to legitimize war against the barbaric and premodern Others (e.g., Said, 1978). Focusing specifically on the embodiment of the various narratives used to justify the “war on terror”, she observes

the proposition that identities are based on cultures and that cultures are separate and absolutely different enables all kinds of terrible things to be said, and sadly believed. This is a language of racism that has learned to disavow the terms of ‘race’ in order to rejustify racist practice.

(Bhattacharyya, 2008: 96)

She notes that while previously blackness was manufactured as the marker of deviance within U.S. culture, it has now become enjoined with narratives of dangerous brown men, continuing the same mythologies of deviance and inferiority, a deviance and inferiority that the carceral state seeks to contain, neutralize, and “cast out” (Razack, 2008a) if need be.

The embodiment of difference, through attributions and allegiances to culture and its various symbolic codes, has assumed heightened salience with the pervasive and amplifying power of the mass media. The visual codes circulated through the mass media have resulted in a situation where orange jumpsuits are now iconized symbols of the prisoners held at Guantánamo, the hooded figure of the torture victim has become an emblematic icon of those held at Abu Ghraib, and the veil has become the most visible and powerful semiotic carrier of the oppression of Muslim women. Bhattacharyya states, “[w]ithin European nations Muslim bodies have entered public consciousness as entities that are too veiled, too bearded, too covered” (2008: 98). Razack (2008a) argues that the imperiled Muslim woman, the barbaric Muslim man, and the white civilized European have become the main characters in the global theatre of the “war on terror”.

However, embodied signs like those circulated in the ongoing “war on terror” only work when they activate a chain of associations embedded in a common stock of knowledge as for example, legacies and histories of colonialism and Orientalism (Karim, 2000; 2002; Said, 1978). This stock of knowledge with its regimes of “truth”, imparted and reproduced through popular culture, makes it possible to then link symbols like the veil to particular cultural traditions; traditions that have been classified and categorized as exotic, inferior, and backward relics and practices of traditional, premodern societies. The reality of the veil, its political moorings and its symbolic use as a site of resistance, or the widespread practices of veiling (as once having been common in Europe or used also by men, as for example of the Tuareg), are occluded from this popular lens.

Although race is not explicitly referenced in these iconic images, the images themselves, as Sontag (2003) argues, instruct the reader/viewer how to read them and thereby suggest privileged meanings. She reasons, “[p]hotographs lay down routes of reference, and serve as totems of causes: sentiment is more likely to crystallize around a photograph than around a verbal slogan” (2003: 85). Through the language of inferential racism where “naturalized representations of events and situations relating to race, whether ‘factual’ or ‘fictional’ . . . have racist premises and propositions inscribed in them as a set of unquestioned assumptions” (Hall, 1990: 12-13), and cordial racism where “[r]acial reference vaporizes, racisms evaporating into

the very air we breathe" (Goldberg, 2009: 343), these images communicate race while simultaneously, the text accompanying them denies the centrality of race. Instead, the prevailing discourse is a liberal one where the illusion of equality masks all inequalities.

A classic example of this kind of "erasing of race" (Jiwani, 2006) is evident in what occurred in the case of Suaad Hagi Mohamud. A Canadian citizen, Mohamud left for a two-week visit to see her mother in Kenya. When attempting to return, she was denied permission to board the airplane on the grounds that her physical appearance did not conform to her passport picture. As Odartey-Wellington (2010) has pointed out, there was no attempt to corroborate Mohamud's identity despite her pleas to contact people at her work place in Canada and her offer of other pieces of identification. When interrogated, she could not answer questions that Canadian officials felt could and should be answered by the "average Canadian" (though this in itself is a debatable point). Mohamud was left stranded in Kenya for three months until she pushed for a DNA test that would help confirm her identity. *The Toronto Star* reproduced the following photographs of Mohamud before her departure and after her attempt to board the plane back to Canada.

Figure 2: Screen Image from *The Toronto Star* website

Source: <http://www.thestar/news/article/703643--photos--are--same--woman--experts--say>; the photo was published in the October 1, 2009 edition of the paper.



Indeed, aside from the affect expressed in these images as well as the glasses, the only other difference is the darker skin tone and the veil worn by Mohamud in the second picture. While in the first, she appears "Westernized", in the second, she appears "Islamicized". But again, there was no acknowledgement of race or racism as being a factor in the Canadian authorities' treatment of Mohamud. As the *Toronto Star* noted, experts that the paper consulted reported that the two pictures were of the same woman, yet Canadian officials did not seem to share that perspective.

The colour line separating those whose lives do not matter from those whose lives need to be protected is alive and well as evident in the discourse of securitization that permeates and penetrates the current social climate. The coding of threat levels in the U.S., from *red* indicating

the highest level of concern, to the persistent *yellow* suggesting caution, attests to the pervasive climate of fear that has been cultivated in response to a perceived threat. While the colour coded levels directly reference the threat of terrorism, the general climate of fear that has been cultivated is now focused on threat that is multifaceted (Altheide, 2007; 2009), ranging from school shootings and everyday crimes, to terrorist attacks.

It has been argued that the focus on colour and its cultural codification has to do with the ocular emphasis of Western colonialism (Wyn Davis, Nandy & Sardar, 1993), an emphasis amplified by the scopic regimes of contemporary surveillance mechanisms. The power of visual technologies today, “do not simply refract or record an event, but become the event by transcribing a political code onto the built environment, cultural memory and the politicized body” (Feldman, 2005: 205). These technologies deploy an actuarial gaze, which is “the visual organization and institutionalization of threat perception and prophylaxis, which cross cuts politics, public health, public safety, urban planning and media practice” (*Ibid*: 206). The operationalization of such a gaze in the “war on terror” has thus affixed connotations and denotations of threat to bodies that are seen to be different, and to cultural icons that are connected to those different bodies. It is thus not surprising then that Suaad Hagi Mohamud’s body was seen as one not belonging to the Canadian nation-state, but rather as one that threatened to transgress sovereign national boundaries. Visual technologies then serve not only to screen out risk but also to prohibit the entry of that which is considered foreign—they are the latest and militarized technological arms of the carceral state, sedimenting the colour line.

The Victim—One Way Out of the Carceral Net

Gottschalk (2008) argues that one of the few ways out of a carceral net is through the adoption of a victim status. However, as the literature on crime and media indicates, that status revolves around constructions of worthiness (Dowler, Fleming & Muzzatti, 2006). Race, class, and sexuality determine what constitutes worthiness in a victim. Constructed as threats to national security, alleged terrorists stand little chance of being considered worthy victims. On the contrary, the stereotype of the sleeper cell underpins the racial profiling at play in the capture of alleged terrorists (Odartey-Wellington, 2004; Razack, 2008b; Smolash, 2009), making male Muslim bodies in particular “lethal” (Dossa, 2008). There is a definite gendered aspect to the construction of the worthy victim³. Rebecca Wanzo argues that the “difference between idealized victims and others demonstrates which discourses make victims legible to the state or media” (2008: 114).

To be considered worthy, the potential or actual victim has to be able to fit into the role of the “salvageable” or the “rescue-able” person, the person who can be reformed as a “docile citizen” to quote Foucault (1978/1995), and/or who can participate as productive member of society. Such a person has to project and convey “innocence”. Prison reform is predicated on this logic, as are the various disciplinary functions exercised in other total institutions. Other initiatives include drawing in potentially wayward and deviant others into more productive roles via employment, especially if they can be persuaded to do so for their own economic interests. Poverty and other forms of structural violence (as for example, the structural adjustment programs of the International Monetary Fund) become the push factors for compelling people to engage in migrant work, underpaid and seasonal work, and the like (Wright, 2006). More recently, thinly disguised commercial ventures operating as training enterprises in Afghanistan

serve to draw in poverty-stricken people, primarily women, in an effort to recoup them and convert them into consumers.

In the context of the “war on terror”, victimhood remains an elusive mantle of protection, available only to the figure of the mute, victimized and veiled Muslim woman whose body can be *used* to communicate specific messages. Her resilience, when rendered visible, is often appropriated to affirm the presumed patriarchal nature of Islam, and subsequently harnessed into rescue projects, or channelled into “constructive” enterprises that enable contributions to a global economy as evident in the examples of the rescue projects aimed at Afghan women (e.g., Jiwani, 2009b). In contrast to her victimhood which can be strategically used in the interest of the nation-state and its imperial exploits, the body of the veiled Muslim Canadian woman inside the nation has little purchase value. Rather, as with the experiences of Suaad Hagi Mohamud, she is left to fend for herself and only through pronounced advocacy, is she even granted her rights. She is the internal Other whose membership/citizenship in the nation-state is continually questioned and conditional. The figure of the “extremist mother” (Bhattacharyya, 2008) or the female fanatic mediated through the image of the suicide bomber is the aggressive Other; as a mother figure, she is regarded as inept, fostering irrational hatred in her offspring. The colonial archetype is the colonized woman who is considered too fecund and whose sexuality can be overpowering if not tamed and used to service the sexual needs of the colonizers (McClintock, 1995; Shaheen, 2003; Shohat & Stam, 1994).

Guilt by Association

In the case of Omar Khadr, it would appear that while his status as a worthy victim has been an ongoing project on the part of advocates, one constantly delegitimized by the Canadian and American states, the portrayal of his mother, Maha Khadr, as an “extremist mother” figure and of his sister Zaynab, as a rebel, sutures his fate as the irredeemable Other. In other words, his family and the recounting of his family’s activities, statements, and actions render him as a subject beyond reclaim. For example, a CBC News Online article focusing on the Khadr family was entitled: “Al-Qaeda Family: A Family divided”. Despite including the word “divided”, the article went on to describe the links between the Khadrs and al-Qaeda. In reference to the women in the family, the article stated: “The mother and daughter in Pakistan support the al-Qaeda cause, but insist the family was never an accepted part of the terrorist organization” (CBC, 2004, March 3). Shephard (2008) makes note of other news accounts that suggest that Omar Khadr’s mother periodically returned to Canada only to have her children born here and took them back to Pakistan and subsequently Afghanistan immediately thereafter. She was desirous to return to Canada because one of her sons was injured and required medical care (Shephard, 2008). Hence, she appears as an opportunist interested only in profiting from her citizenship by accessing healthcare and other services designated for deserving Canadians (i.e., those who are faithful to the country).

Another CBC News Online report dated October 30, 2006, provided an additional backgrounder to the Khadr family. This time the story focused on Abdullah Khadr, one of Omar’s brothers. Yet, guilt by association interlaced the story as Abdullah was stated to have spent more than a year in prison in Pakistan, and his father described as a financier for al-Qaeda. Omar’s mother and sister were depicted in black hijabs and niqabs with bulleted points offering the following descriptions:

Maha Khadr

- Ahmed Said Khadr’s wife
- Born in Palestine, moved to Canada
- Married Ahmed Said Khadr in Canada
- Moved with husband, six children to Afghanistan in the 1980s

(For visuals, see <http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/khadr/>)

Similarly, Zaynab Khadr’s description in a condensed bulleted form offered the following profile:

Zaynab Khadr

- Daughter in Pakistan
- Allegations that she was involved with her brother, Abdullah, in running an al-Qaeda training camp in Afghanistan in the 1990s.

(For visuals, see <http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/khadr/>)

As evident in the descriptive tags accompanying the pictures, neither Zaynab nor her mother appear to be mute, oppressed Muslim women. Rather, Maha Khadr, born in Palestine, fits the stereotypical media icon of the fanatical Palestinian woman, invoking a chain of association with other Palestinian women that the media has reported on—the suicide bombers, and the “ululating” women who apparently celebrated the fall of the Twin Towers in New York on September 11 (e.g., Jiwani, 2009a). That aside, the very mention of Maha Khadr as moving to Canada underscores her immigrant status, and further, that she moved with her six children (the traces of Orientalized fecundity are invoked here), also adumbrates with stereotypes of disloyal and opportunistic others. Both mother and sister are represented then as foreign others whose doubtful loyalty to the country has contributed to their involvement in terrorist networks.

The representation of these women in hijabs (head coverings) and niqabs (face veils) positions them outside the realm of the Canadian norm. Both these forms of covering have caused consternation among Canadian authorities. Public condemnation has been particularly vociferous in Quebec where the designated authorities have attempted to follow the pattern of France and Belgium in attempting to ban the veil (e.g., Scott, 2007). Hence, in Quebec, the niqab has already been outlawed with regards to voting; women are now required to show their face to be allowed to vote (e.g., RaceLink, 2007). More recently, a woman wearing the niqab was denied access to French language education on the pretext that her face covering did not permit second language instruction (CBC, 2010, May 18).

The public condemnation and abhorrence of the veil is suggestive of many factors. Zine (2009) posits that the threat posed by the veil can be attributed to the fear of cultural dilution on the part of the dominant cultural group; a group that perceives itself to be under siege by a rapidly growing immigrant and hybridized population. This echoes in part the sentiments fuelled in Quebec by the public opposition to the veil. There is another element here that Fanon (1965) and others have alluded to—and that is the desire on the part of the West to unveil the Muslim woman, a desire that is both sexual and hostile. Meyda Yeğenoğlu suggests:

The veil attracts the eye, and forces one to think, to speculate about what is behind it. It is often represented as some kind of a mask, hiding the woman. With the help of this opaque veil, the Oriental woman is considered as not yielding

herself to the Western gaze and therefore imagined as hiding something behind the veil. It is through the inscription of the veil as a mask that the Oriental woman is turned into an enigma. Such a discursive construction incites the presumption that the real nature of these women is concealed, their truth is disguised and they appear in a false deceptive manner. They are therefore other than what they appear to be.

(1998: 44)

It is this notion of secretiveness, of concealment that in part incites the reactionary response to Muslim women in veils, and that, as Yeğenoğlu and others have observed, provoked Western obsessions with unveiling as part of various educational and “liberatory” initiatives (Abu-Lughod, 2002). However, this response is itself embedded in the long tradition of Orientalism, a tradition that has become amplified and yoked to the “war on terror” (Agathangelou & Ling, 2004; Stabile & Kumar, 2005), and harnessed by imperial feminism to parade the presumed liberation of Western women (Franks, 2003; Russo, 2006; Vivian, 1999). As Minoo Moallem posits: “Western egalitarian feminism is invested and complicit with unifying notions of the West as free, secular, democratic, and modern. Islamic fundamentalism has become ‘the name’ for a unified Islamic world, which is unfree, religious, oppressed, and traditional” (2005: 163).

The Lesson

Katz (1987) argues that crime news serves as a vehicle to impart morality tales. In other words, our exposure to such news implicitly and explicitly instructs us as to how to behave, what to avoid and how to become docile subjects. As viewers and spectators of the global “war on terror”, we are privy to previously held state secrets. Nowhere is this more evident in the present panic caused by the release of classified information by WikiLeaks. Yet, these secrets are not secrets in the true sense of the word given the widespread and global circulation of the horrors committed at Abu Ghraib and the practices of various governments in suppressing dissent. But as publicly unleashed bits of information, they nonetheless make us complicit in the ongoing war and through the terrifying images they communicate, they provide us with the syntax of threat levels, security concerns, and representations of Others who need to be cast out and kept out at all costs. We thus become disciplined subjects, our subjectivities fashioned by the intricate lattice of different technologies of power.

Conclusion

The ever-reaching fibriles of the carceral net have been reinforced and fortified by the rationalizations of the “war on terror”. Terrifying and terrorizing, the visual discourses and practices of the war ensnare subjects through heightened surveillance mechanisms enhancing their visibility. Invisibility or minimal visibility is only rendered possible through docility and faith in the pastoral power⁴ of the state—where the state becomes the patriarchal pastor protecting his flock. But even here, the threat of hell-fire should one sin, makes it incumbent on subjects to obey. The rewards of obeisance are communicated through participation in a consumer economy, laying low and adhering to the “norm”. For racialized bodies, such a norm becomes an untenable fiction achievable only conditionally and tenuously. Race is a proxy of risk in this setting (Bahdi, 2003). “Moderate” Muslim voices or those who articulate an anti-

Islam perspective are embraced but only insofar as they can articulate the dominant perspective (Riley, 2010).

The liberal response is, “It’s not about race; it’s about threat!” However, the threat itself is constructed and conceived in an abstracted manner, devoid of context and disinterred from history. “Threat” assumes many faces—the colonized female subject who can appease through exotica and erotica, but whose fecundity needs to be kept in check in case she breeds a potential challenge to colonial hegemony; then again, the colonized woman needs to be kept in check to serve the colonizers as nanny, as jezebel, or as the model docile subjugated subject. The colonized man has to be kept at bay for his presumed uncontrollable sexual appetite; his brutal strength; his irrational impulses and his potential to usurp colonial power. Keeping the men contained or ensnared in the carceral net frees up the women so that they can be used in the interests of colonial power. But this does not apply to all women. Some women remain disposable particularly if they are not considered valuable to the nation-state and if they represent the threat of cultural dilution and a weakened sovereignty.

Hence, on the global stage constructed by the “war on terror”, the figure of the mute, oppressed and victimized Muslim women, veiled and subjected to patriarchal violence through Islam, serves to legitimize the rescue project—what Gayatri Spivak (1988) has aptly phrased as the “white men rescuing brown women from brown men”; or, through educational initiatives that are thinly disguised commercial ventures, with the intent to get these women to buy into the consumer capitalism. She then becomes the worthy victim. In contrast to her passivity and victimization, is the “warrior brother” (Moallem, 2005) whose irrationality, inherent violence and patriarchal tendencies need to be subjugated. Subjected women are thus assured that their colonized male counterparts will be reformed and their potential or actual threat neutralized. However, the figure of the extremist Muslim mother acts as a foil to the victimized woman. She is the progenitor of the suicide bombers—she infuses her children with unreasonable and irrational impulses. She too needs to be contained. For her, there is no sympathy, as she does not constitute a victim deserving of rescue. Rather, she needs to be excluded if not shunned altogether. Women like Suaad Hagi Mohamud remain on the margins, subject to exclusion if their “illegalities” can be legitimized.

Pastoral power (Foucault, 1982; Young, 2003) is used to convince and coerce subjectification, where subjects place their faith in the priestly power of the state to safeguard the population against all evil. That evil has now assumed the form of Islamic fundamentalism and has been iconized in the representation of al-Qaeda and its sleeper cells. Razack (2008b) has drawn attention to the analogy here between “sleeper cells” and cancer cells, both constitutive of risk. Where such risk is read onto different bodies, the possibilities of constructing a victim status deserving of intervention are grim. Such bodies are rendered “bare”—murdered with impunity but not “good enough” to be sacrificed for any noble cause. Guilt by association, guilt by religious affiliation, and guilt by difference become the discursive technologies of power, leaving little room for resistance.

Nevertheless, discourses of resistance are prevalent and apparent as evidenced by the numerous activists, lawyers, and scholars who have engaged in a variety of tactical interventions. For example, the orange prison garb of the inmates of Guantánamo Bay has been adopted by hip-hop artists as a form of symbolic identification and to communicate the increasing criminalization of Muslim men (see for example music videos by the Narcycist). The hijab has been taken up by young Muslim women as a way to resist the Western gaze and to reclaim identity (Hoodfar, 1993; Alvi, Hoodfar & McDonough, 2003). The public outrage over explicit

violations of civil liberties combined with the work of various civil society groups has underscored the fact that while we may be unwilling spectators and thus participants of this “war on terror”, we are also witnesses to its fabrications and excesses. To quote Foucault: “War is the motor behind institutions and order. In the smallest of its cogs, peace is waging a secret war” (2003: 50).

Figure 3: The Narcicyst's P.H.A.T.W.A.

Source: Screen shot from video posted on
YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WdwZCvx4Ri4>.



Notes

- * This research was facilitated by a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.
- 1 Governmentality pertains to structures of governance. This includes not only state governance but also how individuals are conditioned or socialized into governing themselves through self control in ways that articulate with the political and economic interests of the state. As Foucault argues, “[t]he contact point, where the individuals are driven by others is tied to the way they conduct themselves, is what we call, I think government” (cited in Lemke, 2002: 52).
- 2 Foucault (2003) differentiates biopower from disciplinary and regulatory powers. Biopower is a technology of power based on the science and oriented towards the management of populations. The biopolitics underpinning biopower are directed towards “taking control of life and the biological processes of man-as-species and of ensuring that they are not disciplined, but regularized” (2003: 246-247). Foucault adds, “[s]overeignty took life and let live. And now we have the emergence of a power that I would call the power of regularization, and it, in contrast consists in making live and letting die” (Ibid: 247).

- 3 The gendering of threat as signified by different bodies manifests differently according to the race and class of victims. Of the over five hundred missing and murdered aboriginal women in Canada, only those who have died and whose murders are recognized as murders are reconstructed as worthy victims in the mainstream press (Jiwani & Young, 2006). Similarly, as Stillman (2007) has observed young women of colour are rarely accorded much media attention whereas missing white girls feverishly capture the public imagination and mobilize policing authorities.
- 4 Foucault (1982) defines pastoral power as previously linked to religious institutions but now adopted by the state. The analogy is to the relationship of power between the pastor and his folk. Pastoral power thus appears as benevolent, involved in safeguarding individual and public interest. It is exercised by the state, public institutions, and organizations in civil societies.
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