



Darkmatter Issue 3
Racism in the Closet
Interrogating Postcolonial Sexuality

Editorial: Racism in the Closet - Interrogating Postcolonial Sexuality

Posted By [henriette gunkel](#) and [ben pitcher](#) on 2 May 2008 @ 1:00 pm in [3-Postcolonial Sexuality](#) [May 08], [Issues](#) | [No Comments](#)

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In September 2007, the liberal German daily newspaper *Süddeutsche* published an article entitled 'Migrant kids against Gays'.¹ The article referred to the results of a study initiated by the German Lesbian and Gay Federation (LSVD), investigating attitudes among German students towards homosexuality, comparing those of German, Russian and Turkish backgrounds.² According to *Süddeutsche*, the study showed that 'migrant kids in particular strongly rejected homosexuality',³ and that German kids were more likely to be *weltoffen*, that is, open minded or cosmopolitan. While on the one hand all migrant subjects are hereby constituted as a single category – that is, not German and hence not *weltoffen* – there is at the same time a hierarchy constructed within the migrant community through the problematization of religion. As the article in *Süddeutsche* continues, 'the rejection of homosexuals is increased amongst adolescents of Turkish origin with increasing religiousness. The study shows that the rejection of homosexuality also depends on levels of social integration: those with hardly any connection to [German] society are particularly homophobic'.⁴

Thus the status of migrancy is read back through Turkishness, which in turn functions as a religious category. The more religious (meaning Muslim) the less tolerant (meaning 'gay friendly') and the less *weltoffen* you are. The question of open-mindedness (*Weltoffenheit*) is directly linked to the question of 'integration': those marked out by a religious identity are considered unable or unwilling to integrate. German values (symbolized, of course, by 'cosmopolitan' Berlin, the nation's moral as well as political capital) are accordingly placed under threat by Islamic migrants. By commissioning this survey, the LSVD – as Germany's largest gay and lesbian organization – played a part in consolidating a 'progressive' conception of German values through the rejection of the Muslim subject. Homophobia is thus simultaneously nationalized and racialized. In an act of audacious historical revisionism, Germany becomes equated with gay rights (as an expression of its general regard for 'human rights'), while Islam is constituted as homophobic (and thus outside a discourse of 'human rights'). Gay rights are thus mobilized in anti-immigration discourse as a key signifier of European cultural superiority, as (white) gay Germans assert their membership of the national community through the construction of the figure of the homophobic Muslim.

The example of the LSVD survey, which assembles categories of race, sexuality and religion, demonstrates the willingness of the German gay leadership to align themselves with the politics of the mainstream right. The construction of German nationalism as the progressive and tolerant champion of homosexuality is a project also shared, for example, by the Christian Democrat-led government of Baden-Württemberg, which introduced into the nationalist 'integration debate' a new questionnaire commonly known as the 'Muslim Test'. This questionnaire is primarily aimed against the state's Turkish community and applies exclusively to applicants for German citizenship from so-called Muslim countries. The majority of the 30 questions are related either to gender and sexuality (e.g., 'How do you view the statement that a woman should obey her husband, and that he can beat her if she doesn't?' or 'Imagine that your son comes to you and declares that he's a homosexual and would like to live with another man. How do you react?') or are linked to the issue of terrorism (e.g., 'you learn that people from your neighbourhood or from among friends or acquaintances have carried out or are planning a terrorist attack – what do you do?').⁵

As this edition of darkmatter will show, the LSVD survey and 'Muslim-Test' are not isolated examples, and they represent tendencies that are becoming increasingly entrenched across contemporary Western states and societies. As gay rights become articulated to the nation and used as markers of European, Western or 'civilizational' superiority, they are simultaneously becoming detached from their historical relation to a left-wing politics. Borders and battle lines that were once thought set and certain in our wars

of position are suddenly revealed to be in flux, as political antagonisms are more than ever before 'being formulated in terms of moral categories'⁶, and the seductive lexicon of liberation struggles is mined by a variety of dubious social actors intent on providing for themselves a veneer of ethical legitimacy.⁷ As sexuality has come to play a major role in shaping dominant Western attitudes towards cultural difference, scholars and activists the world over are becoming starkly aware of the normative racial bias in hegemonic forms of sexual politics.

In an attempt to make some sense of this problematic, we are drawn, along with several contributors to this edition, to consider the importance of the social, cultural, political and economic exigencies of the War on Terror.⁸ Race and sexuality have been central to the moral economy of the War on Terror, from representations of Afghanistan and Iraq to the abuses at Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib.

Jasbir Puar has been a key theorist of postcolonial sexuality in the context of the War on Terror, and has powerfully demonstrated how discourses of sexuality and race have been readily combined with and against markers of identity and citizenship. Puar argues that counterterrorist discourses are not only 'intrinsically gendered, raced, sexualized, and nationalized' but also that they actively produce normative patriot bodies 'that cohere against and through queer terrorist corporealities'. The terrorist subject thus becomes a trope for the production and reproduction of US/Western exceptionalism 'through the insistent and frantic manufacturing of "homosexuality" and "Muslim" as mutually exclusive discrete categories'.⁹

Puar's work has shown that the sexual politics of the War on Terror not only provide a tool for underwriting the moral superiority of its antagonists, but have served a wider function in organizing and shaping a diverse range of mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, as the terrorist subject is directly linked to the figuration of 'non-integrated' citizens, migrants and their families. In this process, Islam has come to be constituted as one of the main obstacles to successful 'integration' within the West and for the implementation of democracy outside of it (see, for example, the current debate on the EU accession of Turkey). Through this discursive formation, 'the Muslim' is constituted as an 'impossible subject' within contemporary nationalist discourses, as Catherine Raissiguier points out in this edition.

We are pleased to include in this edition a very interesting contribution from Puar, as she answers some of our questions about her critical practice. Puar summarizes some of the arguments in her recent book, *Terrorist Assemblages*, and sets out her position in regard to a number of key debates in feminist and queer theory. In particular, Puar considers the positionality of her own work, queer's claim to oppositionality, the politics of intersectionality and the theory of assemblage, and the relationship of her work to that of Judith Butler.

Puar's lead is taken up by Jin Haritaworn, who considers how the assimilation of certain forms of (white) gay subject into social citizenship has not only occurred against the backdrop of the War on Terror, but has moreover served as a mode of its legitimation, reinscribing gay (and queer) identity within the imperial parameters of race and nation. Relating such phenomena to the longstanding orientalist genealogies critiqued so powerfully from postcolonial feminist positions, Haritaworn discusses the problematic incorporation of gay men into the British army, and the role played in Britain by Peter Tatchell's *Outrage* in 'the post-9/11 gender regime'.¹⁰

The War on Terror also occupies an important conceptual status in Catherine Raissiguier's article, which attempts to account for the sudden political and media visibility of the black feminist group *Ni Putes Ni Soumises* in France since 2003. Raissiguier argues that the profile of NPNS is linked directly to the scapegoating of Muslim men – and by extension Islam in general. In Raissiguier's analysis, discourses of gender and sexuality circulate around the figure of the 'arab-Muslim-maghrebi', constructing Muslim women as 'either victims of tradition and religion or vectors of integration'. Raissiguier demonstrates how the putatively universal principle of *laïcité* is hereby overdetermined by a form of racial normativity, concealing the profound inequality that inheres in the Republican myth.

Suzanne Lenon also explores the raciological structuring of national identity in her analysis of debates around the introduction of same-sex marriage legislation in Canada. Lenon argues that both pro- and anti-positions function metonymically as discourses representing 'what "Canada" as a nation stands for and what it means to be "Canadian"'. Thus viewing same-sex marriage as a project of civility, Lenon demonstrates how an idea of the nation (and particularly the national past) comes to be articulated in an idiom of liberal tolerance which perversely reinscribes the whiteness of Canadian homosexuality. Such

discourses are used to reinforce Canada's international standing in a civilizational hierarchy, where gay rights have come to figure for the nation's political class 'as the newest manifestation of Western civility'.

Lenon's stress on same-sex marriage as a form of neoliberal governmentality relates to the latest work of Elizabeth Povinelli, whose book *The Empire of Love* attends to the specificities of liberal governance in relation to gender, race and sexuality in two very different communities in Australia and the US. The *Empire of Love* is reviewed here by Silvia Posocco.

Damien Riggs's article explores how the normative power of whiteness operates in Australia in the 'complex interrelationships between Indigenous communities, white queer people, and the children they seek to adopt'. Riggs considers some of the thorny epistemological issues generated out of this nexus, in particular the conflicts between white academic and Indigenous knowledge claims. Like Haritaworn, Riggs argues that we need to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the positionality of the (white) queer subject if we are to properly account for the continuing privileges of whiteness.

Adi Kuntsman follows Puar in questioning the transgressiveness of queer, and explores the complicity of queer sexuality with dominant racial and nationalist formations in Israel/Palestine. Kuntsman shows how the Israeli queer scene 'is saturated with the notion of European superiority', and demonstrates how queer immigrants to Israel from the former Soviet Union negotiate their sexual and national identity through the rejection or demonization of the *Mizrachim* (Asian/North African Jews) and Palestinians, in order to identify with the *Ashkenazi* elite.

The way in which the racial logic of the Israeli queer scene constructs Israel as a European state serves as a reminder that the complexities of what we are calling postcolonial sexuality are not confined to the West, and neither can they solely be understood in relation to the imperial logics of the War on Terror. Though much scholarly attention has been generated by and is focussing on the West in the current conjuncture, important work has been done for quite some time on racism and sexuality, and in particular the racialization of sexuality studies.¹¹ One reason why this work has not been properly acknowledged within mainstream academic circles is, ironically, that much of it derives from non-Western scholars, or explores subjects outside the West. Such work has proven well-equipped to challenge the normative racial bias of Western and Eurocentric identity paradigms, and the associated tendency to force recognition of non-heteronormative sexualities into the frame of a Western gay and lesbian politics.¹² The tendency to impose Western concepts as signifiers of modernity continues to be an important area of investigation, and it is mirrored in the conceptual failure to acknowledge and incorporate postcolonial and transnational sexualities into queer theory and practice. It also underlines the extent to which the sex/gender organization of many postcolonial states are still constituted, in cultural and political terms, along colonial lines, and goes some way to explaining the continuity of white gay supremacy within metropolitan sexual cultures, as well as the rise of the discourse of homosexuality as a Western practice.¹³

The populist and rightwing notion of homosexuality as un-African (an idea of cultural exemption that is not limited to the African context)¹⁴ is challenged by the photographic work of Zanele Muholi, in her images of black lesbian sexuality in post-apartheid South Africa. Muholi's work resists the idea that the decolonized subject is necessarily heterosexual. In this issue, Muholi presents a collection of images from a work in progress called *Is'khathi* (period), an exploration of the 'cultural politics of blood'.

Contemporary South Africa is also the subject of Nolwazi Mkhwanazi's contribution to this edition, which explores the appeal to culture as a mechanism of sexual control. Mkhwanazi considers how sexual politics has been manifest in the ethnicized leadership struggle within the ANC, focusing on the recent rape trial of Jacob Zuma and considering the wider currency of hegemonic sexual discourses - as well as their contestation - in other recent cases of sexual violence.

This special issue brings together a wide range of scholarship on postcolonial sexuality. A postcolonial frame has highlighted the implicit whiteness of Western theories of sexuality, pointing to the complex ways in which the concepts and practices of sexuality are central to racisms, nationalisms and (neo) colonialisms. Although engaging with a range of theoretical perspectives, all the contributions here share an acknowledgement that it is impossible to think about apparent conflicts between sexuality and race as negotiable and soluble claims within a framework of rights and recognition, and instead take as a point of departure the knowledge that their differential positioning in any social formation will invariably overdetermine the outcome of any such settlement. As such, all contributions have stressed the

importance of situated and historically contextualized approaches to race and sexuality in order to understand their profound significance to the structuring of our contemporary social orders. If there is a more general conclusion to be drawn, the work collected here demonstrates, above all, how important it is for us to de-Westernize and confront the normative racial bias of theoretical production if discourses of gay rights and liberation are not simply to act as proxy forms of cultural imperialism.

While it remains imperative to challenge all forms of social discrimination, from whatever quarter, the articles collected here prove that it is just as necessary to remain vigilant to the tendency of a 'progressive' critique to become subsumed in and overdetermined by falsely universal ethical frameworks. For us to recognize that discourses of racial superiority can easily speak in a lexicon of sexual freedom is to acknowledge that no politics is immune from the key determining structures and systems through which power is currently manifest. The prevailing logics of the War on Terror drive home to us the urgent and forceful need to clear racism out of the closet.

Ben Pitcher and Henriette Gunkel, May 2008.

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Notes

1. 'Migrantenkinder gegen Schwule'. [↩]
2. The study, based on a thousand interviews with pupils from twelve different gymnasiums and comprehensive schools in Berlin, was undertaken by the Christian-Albrechts-University in Kiel. [↩]
3. 'Vor allem bei Migrantenkindern stieß Homosexualität auf starke Ablehnung.' [↩]
4. 'Die Ablehnung von Homosexuellen steigt laut Studie vor allem bei türkischstämmigen Jugendlichen mit zunehmender Religiosität. Sie hänge außerdem vom Grad der Integration ab, heißt es weiter. Wer kaum Anschluss an die Gesellschaft habe, sei besonders schwulenfeindlich.' [↩]
5. For more on the LSVD survey, and a discussion of how the 'Muslim Test' was welcomed in sections of the German gay community, see Haritaworn, Tauqir and Erdem, forthcoming. [↩]
6. Chantal Mouffe (2005) *On The Political*. London: Routledge. p. 75. [↩]
7. Gay rights are not alone here in being co-opted to shore up nationalist and imperialist projects. In particular, discourses of feminism – though a longstanding tool of Western colonialism (see, for example, Leila Ahmed (1992) *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press) – have increasingly been called upon in the context of the

War on Terror. A number of articles in this edition explore the important relationship between discourses of race, gender and sexuality. For more on this problematic, see Ben Pitcher (forthcoming) *The Politics of Multiculturalism: Race and Racism After Anti-Racism*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. [↵]

8. The War on Terror is hereby understood in the most expansive sense as a description of a project predicated on, but not reducible to, US imperialism, which has also served to give structure, shape and substance to a panoply of (often longstanding) racialized practices to do with immigration and security regimes, social control and 'cohesion', as well as instituting a particular set of narratives of identity and belonging. [↵]
9. Jasbir Puar (2005) 'Queer Times, Queer Assemblages', *Social Text* 84–85, Vol. 23, Nos. 3–4, Fall–Winter 2005. pp 121, 126. [↵]
10. Tatchell's position as a de facto apologist for the War on Terror is an interesting illustration of the normative racial bias in insufficiently reflexive discourses of gay rights, particularly as espoused by those otherwise socially positioned to benefit from gender, race and class privilege. For more on Tatchell and Outrage, see Leslie Feinberg (2006) '[Anti-Iran protest misdirects LGBT struggle](#)' In *Workers World*; Aken'Ova et al. (2007) 'African LGBTI Human Rights Defenders Warn Public Against Participation in Campaigns Concerning LGBTI Issues in Africa Led by Peter Tatchell and Outrage!' press release of 31 January, 2007; Jasbir Puar (2007) *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* Durham, NC: Duke; Haritaworn, Tauqir and Erdem (forthcoming). [↵]
11. See, for example, Kopano Ratele (2001) *The Sexualisation of Apartheid* Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of the Western Cape: Cape Town; Donald L Donham (2002) 'Freeing South Africa: The "Modernization" of Male-Male Sexuality in Soweto' in Inda, Jonathan Xavier and Rosaldo, Renato (eds) *The Anthropology of Globalization. A Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp.410-427; Amanda Lock Swarr (2004) 'Moffies, Artists, and Queens: Race and the Production of South African Gay Male Drag', in *Journal of Homosexuality* 46 (3/4): 73-89; Katrin Sieg (2002) *Ethnic Drag: Performing Race, Nation, Sexuality in West Germany*. Social History, Popular Culture, and Politics in Germany Series. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press; Limakatso Kendall (1998) "'When a Women Loves a Woman" in Lesotho: Love, Sex, and the (Western) Construction of Homophobia', in Murray, Stephen O. and Roscoe, Will (eds) *Boy-Wives and Female Husbands. Studies in African Homosexualities*. New York: Palgrave, pp. 223-241; Ruth Vanita (2005) *Love's Rite: Same-Sex Marriages in India and the West*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan; Gloria Wekker (2006) *The Politics of Passion*. New York: Columbia University Press. [↵]
12. Such practices include, for example, the tendency for Western organizations providing funding to lesbian and gay organizations to utilize the categories of a Western sexual politics, thus forcing non-Western organizations into conceptual and, ultimately, political modes that operate in very different ways in non-Western contexts. This instance reminds us of the 'adhesion contract' that the recent US government forced on NGOs that are dependent on US funding worldwide. The US government threatened to only fund organisations that are in line with their HIV/AIDS politics (meaning those who preach abstinence) as well as with their pro-life, meaning anti-abortionist, stance/politics. As a consequence NGOs changed their constitutions in order to receive further funding. Needless to say that this form of blackmailing is not only undertaken by the US government but also by other main funding bodies. [↵]
13. See, for example, Henriette Gunkel (forthcoming) *The Cultural Politics of Female Same-Sex Intimacy in Post-Apartheid South Africa*. Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute. [↵]
14. See, for example, Alan Sinfield (1994) *Cultural Politics - Queer Reading*. London: Routledge. [↵]

Article printed from darkmatter: <http://www.darkmatter101.org/site>

URL to article: <http://www.darkmatter101.org/site/2008/05/02/racism-in-the-closet-interrogating-postcolonial-sexuality/>

Loyal Repetitions of the Nation: Gay Assimilation and the 'War on Terror'

Posted By [jin haritaworn](#) on 2 May 2008 @ 12:59 pm in [3-Postcolonial Sexuality \[forthcoming May 08\]](#), [Issues](#) | [No Comments](#)

Judith Butler is in town. The foyer of the London School of Economics is packed with a young giddy crowd. We arrive half an hour before the talk, too late to secure a seat, and are herded into a televised theatre. This must be the intellectual equivalent of pop fandom, I think. Or of England playing.

Even in the film theatre, the air is filled with exhilaration. We become spectator participants to Butler's mediated, yet larger than/live performance on screen. From the critical questions – Are women's and gay rights now instruments in the 'war on terror'? How have sexual freedom and progress become tools in the civilizing mission? *Is this what we fought for?* – we are swiftly moved to humour, as Butler ponders (and I paraphrase from memory and notes):

Do I want to kiss in public? Yes. Do I want everyone to watch? (pauses, laughs) Do I want *everyone* to watch? (laughs very hard)¹

Almost simultaneously, the two separated halls erupt into laughter, thickening our critical audience into community. We are progressives against the war, united by our critique of the state, which has appropriated our struggle for sexual expression and misdirected it against those to whom we have allied ourselves: the migrants tested on their views on homosexuality in the Dutch civic integration examination, the Iraqi prisoners in Abu Ghraib violated by torture methods purported to 'sexually liberate' them, the growing populations in West and Central Asia whose deaths and disenfranchisement are legitimated with their 'backward', 'barbaric' gender regimes.²

After six years of studying these disturbing trends in relative isolation,³ I welcome the belated entry (or rather, return) of explicitly anti-racist discourse to queer and feminist community. However – I struggle with the seemingly endless repetition of this question about positionality – *are all kisses the same?*⁴ What made Butler's joke so common sense (or queerly sensible) that it instantly glued this particular audience together? Mine is, of course, a question about the cultural politics of this emotional performance of communal humour⁵ and about the publics and counter-publics constructed by it. How do these new demarcations contest or cement boundaries, including around queer discursive and material space itself?

For example, kisses are embedded in, and invited or concealed from, various public spheres, not merely with regard to their subjects' gender, but also, and increasingly, their colour. Thus, two same-sex kissers who are brown may not be read as transgressive outlaws, but on the contrary as secretive, repressed, closeted victims who are exceptionally brave and in *need* of liberation by their already-liberated (white) siblings, as well as by the state. Kissing, as a spectacle of sexual freedom, encapsulates the very discourses of gendered modernity which Butler critiques.⁶ Vice versa, the transgressiveness of the white queer kisser is never outside these discourses, either. In fact, collective imaginings of brown homophobic onlookers may prolong, and themselves constitute, this moment as playful, transgressive and queer.

Butler's discourse, while doubtlessly well-meaning, neglects the unequal terms of this sexual playing field. Like some of her other work it is curiously silent on the question of queer positionality.⁷ Her sole focus on the state lends credence to a thus far silenced critique (without, however, acknowledging it directly). On the other hand, it leaves intact the notion of an innocent gay subject, who is victimized even by a state which appropriates its righteous struggles for citizenship and alienates it from its coalitions with other Others. Butler's discourse problematically disremembers the struggles which queer people of colour have waged over queer whiteness and racism. It dismembers once more from the queer discourse those who have demanded coalitions all along, and have traditionally fallen into their cracks.

Out of these multi-issue struggles, earlier documentations and theorizations have emerged of the ways in

which rhetorics of women's and gay liberation have been deployed in the war. Some of these (especially Jasbir Puar's) anticipate several of Butler's arguments. These writings are characterized by complex engagements, not just with the state but multiple publics and counter-publics, including, importantly, the gay leaderships in places such as Germany, Britain, the US, and Israel.⁸ There, dominant gays have actively participated in the 'war on terror'. For this, they are rewarded, on the one hand with a limited increase in sexual rights, and on the other, with a symbolic inclusion into nations which belies an ongoing homophobia. This secures not only a loyal citizenry willing to legitimate racism and war as human-rights projects, but also pacifies sexual liberation struggles and dislocates them from the national to the international (or at least, the interracial) level.

Basic to this multi-issue critique is a memory of earlier Orientalisms, especially the ongoing investment by white feminists in colonialism and imperialism.⁹ The (symbolic) entry into citizenship by (some) gay subjects, it argues, is predicated on the globalization of anti-Muslim racism in an international context of war, as well as the various local and national regimes of migration and/or occupation with which this war intersects. The myth of gay assimilation is crucially *enabled* by a redefinition of the West as sexually progressive.

This article synthesizes and develops some of these tools, especially Jasbir Puar's and Amit Rai's discussions of gender and sexuality discourses in new knowledges of 'the Orient'. Sexual freedom has moved from the realm of the immoral or perverse to the realm of the morally superior, a central ingredient of US and Western exceptionalism. It has vacated the realm of the monstrous for the failed and perverse heterosexuality of the terrorist and terrorist-look-alike. In Puar's words, queerness is the 'new optic through which perverse populations are called into nominalization for control'.¹⁰

Staying with the theme of masculinity, and drawing on earlier work by Jennifer Petzen, the article then reflects how the (symbolic) entry by (some) gay subjects into citizenship has been enabled by an embrace not only of imperialism but also of a heteronormative masculinity among white gay men.¹¹ This is illustrated with a semiological analysis of covers of the British gay community publication *Pink Paper*, which celebrated the lift of the ban on homosexuality in the army and the simultaneous invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq in late 2001 as human rights victories. Using an Irigarayan frame, I argue that the performance of military masculinity, once a subversive, parodic repetition of a violently heterosexual masculinity from which gay men were excluded, has become a loyal repetition to the nation. However, the problem of sexuality discourse in the 'war on terror' is not merely one of gay assimilation. Queer and other sex-radical contexts, too, are not outside the exceptionalist logic of a sexually free West. I illustrate this with the fundraising efforts for Iraqi LGBT in queer spaces at the time of writing, in early 2008.

Ready for war: Sexual performances of Western exceptionalism

The critique of modernity has a long genealogy within postcolonial, anti-racist feminist, and queer of colour thought. As early as 2002, Puar and Rai published a sophisticated analysis of the emerging discipline of terrorism/counter-terrorism studies in the US, which has proliferated with the renewed military, political and economic interest in the Middle East.¹² Puar and Rai argue that gender and sexuality discourses are central to these new knowledges, which draw on anthropological and psychological arguments in order to explain the apparent proneness of 'Muslim' cultures to producing terrorists. In particular, it is an improper, failed heterosexuality, manifested in polygamy and other 'dysfunctional' family structures, which produces these 'evil' masculinities, whose destruction serves as the spectacular rationale for the 'war on terror'.

The depictions of masculinity most rapidly disseminated and globalized through the war on terrorism are terrorist masculinities: failed and perverse, these function and are metonymically tied to all sorts of pathologies of the mind and body – homosexuality, incest, pedophilia, madness, and disease.¹³

The authors note the dominance of the monstrous in media representations of Osama bin Laden, Al Qaeda, the Taliban and Saddam Hussein, who are described as 'monsters', 'dirtbags', 'terror goons', and 'diabolical henchmen'. Using a Foucauldian frame, they show how this spectacle *queers* 'terrorist-look-alikes' (a term which usefully describes how 'terrorist' has become the default reading for Muslims, and 'Muslim' the default reading for ambiguously brown people). They lift the discourse on terrorism out of its dominant time frame of culture, modernity and civilization by showing how it is part of the West's own family of monsters:

The undesirable, the vagrant, the Gypsy, the savage, the Hottentot Venus, or the sexual depravity of the Oriental torrid zone shares a basic kinship with the terrorist-monster.¹⁴

This queering occurs in a changing context of Orientalism. Perversity has shifted, and is no longer synonymous with sexual freedom. On the contrary, sexual freedom now signifies the exceptional status of American and, arguably, European societies, which are able to imagine themselves as morally superior in their support of female, same-sex and other alternative sexualities.¹⁵ The West, once the bearer of civilizational morality (monogamy, heterosexual marriage, sexual control), has reassumed its rightful place, but now in the name of a sexual liberation. In this, the 'terrorist' has partly replaced the white gay person as significant sexual Other.

That this has little to do with actual gay-friendliness becomes clear when we examine the prominence of homophobia in representations of terrorism and the 'war on terror'. Among the early examples documented by Puar and Rai are images circulated of Osama bin Laden, anally penetrated by the Empire State Building, and of a US Navy bomb aboard the USS Enterprise (in operation since world war two) with the scrawling 'Hijack this Fags'.¹⁶ Puar's later work showed how the sexual torture of Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib, too, was debated in exceptional terms. This was despite the fact that the torture was perpetrated within the notoriously homophobic setting of the American and British militaries,¹⁷ and that it actively employed sexist, homophobic and transphobic technologies such as dressing the prisoners up in women's underwear and forcing them to engage in crudely stereotyped fantasies of gay sex.

Butler's presentation partly repeats Puar's description of Abu Ghraib as a site where 'Arab sexualities' are produced, by both the torturers and the anthropologists who were commissioned to write their scripts (especially Raphael Patai, the now infamous writer of *The Arab Mind*).¹⁸ Puar, however, went much further than Butler, by problematizing the participation of gay actors in this debate. The torture was widely condemned by activists as exploiting the 'cultural vulnerabilities' of Muslims (a notion which Butler's presentation partly repeats), to whom nudity, same-sex contact and cross-dressing is essentially anathema. This euphemizes the torture, and the war within which it occurs, as violating only in their sexual/cultural offensiveness.¹⁹ It also repeats the very essentialism of Islam as sexually backward and repressed which underlies the civilizing mission it sets out to critique.²⁰

Butler's call to coalitions between 'sexual' and 'religious' actors, while doubtlessly well-meant, misses how these actors are co-constituted or, in Puar's words, how 'terrorist bodies' are produced 'against properly queer subjects'.²¹ It ignores how white gay sexualities have been invited to leave the realm of the perverted and vacate it for brown Others. It ignores, further, the investments which many 'sexual' and 'ethnic' actors have in presenting their causes as non-overlapping, following the mainstreaming of single-issue identity politics in multiculturalist regimes of recognition.²² Populist naiveties about the innocence of the oppressed subject to the contrary, straight Muslims and white queers are no 'natural allies' against the state, but would have to actively forge allied positions, not only with each other but, more importantly, with queer Muslims. While this need has been well-documented for straight Muslims, challenges to the innocence of the white gay subject have so far not been received. This asymmetry must again be understood within the privileging of gender over race at this historical juncture, and the role offered to gay leaderships in participating in national and imperial projects.²³

Elsewhere, we have argued that the state needs new feminist and gay citizenries in order to legitimate the 'war on terror' as a human-rights project.²⁴ Feminists, long ridiculed as hysterical man-haters, and queers, traditionally criminalized and pathologized as promiscuous perverts and threats to the family and nation, have suddenly been declared part of an Occidental tradition of 'women' and 'gay-friendliness'. Unfortunately, the discovery of women's and gay rights as 'core values' reflects less on gendered progress than on racial regress. The invitation of (some) gay subjects into the national project is inseparable from the wars on Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as the onslaught on civil rights and liberties in America and Europe, and the debates around 'cohesion', 'integration' and 'the future of multiculturalism' which frame these political, military and economic measures. Puar, drawing on the Foucauldian notion of biopolitics, argues that the emergence of queer subjecthood 'is a historical shift condoned only through a parallel process of demarcation from populations targeted for segregation, disposal, or death, a reintensification of racialization through queerness'.²⁵ Racism and imperialism are thus enabling factors for gay citizenship.

The invention of a tradition of gay-friendliness barely coincided with (and in some cases preceded) belated legal reforms of discriminatory statutes and policies. The British age of consent (which had constructed gay men as paedophiles) was equalized in 2001, and the ban on gays in the army was lifted in the same year. The infamous Section 28, which had prevented the 'promotion of pretend-families' at school (generally equated with the teaching of gay-positive material and even with coming out on the job), was repealed in 2003. Its repeal necessitated the Parliament Act, as the House of Lords, that pillar of British tradition, had repeatedly vetoed its abolition through parliamentary means. In Britain as well as Germany, same-sex partnership only became a possibility in 2001. Debates continue over same-sex adoption, with distinct echoes of the spectre of gay promiscuity and perversion, and its threat to family values and the national morality. This is even more so the case in the US. There, anal sex (and other practices considered 'sodomy') was criminalized in some states until 2003; same-sex unions are either not recognized legally, or entail few substantive rights; and the army continues to operate a policy of 'Don't ask don't tell'. Nevertheless, gay leaders in both Europe and the US have signed a new sexual contract which claims that sexual liberation has been achieved. Under this changed sexual hegemony, traditions of criminalization and pathologization have been revised and rewritten into traditions of gay-friendliness and sexual freedom.

This amnesia will surprise less if we examine the payoffs for the white gay subject, who has been lifted from the discursive realm of the public toilet and the asylum onto the stage of mainstream politics. Postcolonial feminism, albeit commenting on a different historical era, contains important lessons here. Meyda Yeğenoğlu argues that European women in the nineteenth century assumed sovereign status by asserting their superior status over 'Oriental women', and their expertise in liberating them from their 'backward, patriarchal' cultures.²⁶ This colonial relationship of patronage has continuities with the ostensibly postcolonial era. According to Chandra Talpade Mohanty, commenting on western feminist scholarship on third-world women in the 1980s:

This average third world woman leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and being 'third world' (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc.). This, I suggest, is in contrast to the (implicit) self-representation of Western women as educated, modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities, and the freedom to make their own decisions.²⁷

The sexual politics under examination here are clearly within the same genealogy. Gay leaders have benefited from the colonial continuities of the 'war on terror', not only symbolically but also materially. One example is the LSVD (Lesbian and Gay Association Germany), which has assumed an aggressive stance of competition with the TBB (Turkish Federation Berlin Brandenburg) over public funds. In its claim for the larger piece of the diversity pie, the LSVD has asserted its expertise in the integration of 'pre-modern' migrants. Part of this 'missionary position' is the patronage of migrant queers, especially the Turkish-German group GLADT (Gays and Lesbians aus der Türkei), who have resisted this client role by publicly disaffiliating from the Association.²⁸ Most of its limelight, however, the LSVD has gained from piggy-backing onto the debate around the so-called 'honour killing' of Hatun Sürücü, a young heterosexual woman of Turkish descent. This sudden preoccupation with heterosexual migrant women is ironic, given the bad reputation of the Association in women's matters. Nevertheless, by metonymically linking gay rights with women's rights, and marketing itself as an expert in 'Muslim' gender questions, the LSVD has successfully secured its share in the Islamophobia industry.

In Britain, the direct-action group Outrage, whose organizer Peter Tatchell has assumed cult-like status and immense media coverage in the post-9/11 gender regime, has played a similar role. Puar and Leslie Feinberg have both documented Tatchell's role in organizing a new global gay movement which aims to tackle homophobia in Southern, especially 'Muslim', countries. That these efforts are frequently not perceived as solidarity was illustrated by an open letter by African LGBTI activists, who criticized Outrage's involvement in Nigerian sexual politics as exploitative and harmful for local activists, and asked Tatchell in no unclear terms to end his 'neo-colonial' activities and 'stay out of Africa'.²⁹ A second contentious action was the widely publicized International Day against Homophobia, organized around the execution of two young men in Iran in summer 2005, in which many of the major international gay rights organisations participated. Both Puar and Feinberg question the careless ways in which Northern activists and opinion makers glossed over the ambiguity of the sodomy verdict, which many argued could have been for rape rather than homosexuality. Both, further, critique the ease with which the new movement supports Western governments in targeting Iran as the latest focus of Western imperialist and military interest. As Feinberg argued in his article:

Are the July 19 political forces really opposed to imperialist military intervention? Listen to what they said in the first week after the executions last summer.

Peter Tatchell, head of OutRage!, stated, 'This is just the latest barbarity by the Islamofascists in Iran ... the entire country is a gigantic prison, with Islamic rule sustained by detention without trial, torture and state-sanctioned murder.' Sounding more Bush than Blair, Tatchell condemned the British Labour (sic) Party for 'pursuing friendly relations with this murderous regime' and urged the 'international community'—the imperialist powers and those willing to line up with them—to treat Iran as a pariah state, break off diplomatic relations, impose trade sanctions and give practical support to the democratic and left opposition inside Iran.'

In essence, Tatchell is calling for economic warfare (sanctions); threat of military action ('pariah state' status); abandonment of diplomatic pressure (over Iran's right to develop nuclear energy); and regime change (destabilizing the government from within). These are tactics that a wing of the capitalist class in the U.S. and Europe would be more than willing to back—if they would prove effective to re-colonize Iran.³⁰

The embrace of aggressive imperialist discourses on the part of Outrage, whose politics were traditionally defined as left-wing, anti-fascist and internationalist, may surprise more than those of the LSVD, a lobbying and advice organisation more akin to the British Stonewall. Both cases, however, highlight how the proponents of gay assimilation accept and even pioneer an understanding of the West as the vanguard and the harbinger of sexual liberation, including by violent means.

Petzen links the shift in Western gay politics away from white-on-white homophobia towards 'Muslim homophobia' with cultural shifts in gay gender identities. In particular, she points to the displacement, both in (anti-)gay stereotypes and in gay settings, of effeminate presentations by masculine, straight-appearing ones. Petzen illustrates this with white gay men in Germany, who have asserted their masculinity by assuming 'missionary positions' toward men of migrant, especially Turkish and Arab, descent.³¹

There have indeed been noticeable changes in dominant gay gender presentations. I will illustrate this with the performance of military masculinity in the gay media and subcultures. In Britain, homosexuals were traditionally banned from the army. This ban harked back to sexologist understandings of homosexuality as effeminacy or 'inversion', as well as a moral threat to 'normal' masculinity. In gay culture, this exclusion from masculinity has been reworked through ironic performances of military masculinity. Dressed in uniforms and big leather boots, the soldier is a staple of gay male pornography and fetish culture. He has a firm place in gay iconography and sexual ritualism beside other heterosexualized hyper-masculinities, such as policemen, firemen, cowboys, and skinheads.³² The self-conscious humour and subversive criticism of these performances can be seen in the music of the Village People, whose songs 'YMCA', 'Macho Men' and 'In the Navy' brilliantly parody both heterosexual masculinities and the erotic and symbolic hold they have on gay male cultures and subjectivities.

This tradition of performing military hyper-masculinity in a context of criminalized, pathologized and feminized male homosexuality can be theorized as mimicry, a subversive performance in an Irigarayan sense. Luce Irigaray distinguished between loyal performances, which repeat the dominant discourse, and subversive performances, which critique or parody it. While Irigaray discusses (non-trans, non-queer) femininity, her analysis also applies to gay men, who have invented traditions of mimicry in order to negotiate their feminization and exclusion from 'real' masculinity and its naturalising institutions.³³

Nevertheless, this context changed radically in 2001, at least in Britain. The lifting of the ban on homosexuality in the army coincided with the wars on Afghanistan and Iraq. *Pink Paper*, the biggest free paper catering to the gay community, celebrated this reform as a dual human rights victory. At home, gays gained inclusion into a homophobic institution; abroad, 'we' were liberating gay people in the countries under attack.³⁴

The cover of issue 709, which carried the revealing title 'Ready for war', featured the face of a young white man.³⁵ His dreamy blue eyes are framed by camouflage clothing and some leaves and twigs. The pin-up style gaze of the blond model, who is also depicted in horizontal stalking position inside of the magazine, evokes the tradition of mimicry in gay pornography and fetishism.

However, I argue that in this moment of (symbolic) recognition, where certain gay men (and women, who classically lack visibility in this male-dominated gay medium) are hailed as citizens, the performance of military masculinity ceases to be subversive. On the contrary, it demarcates the aspiration of (some) gay subjects to sovereignty, and the loyalty they return to a nation which they hope and claim as theirs - a claim which is contradicted by the continuing levels of formal and substantive homophobia. The donning of military clothes and stance by these subjects, in this moment of fantasized citizenship, is a performance of 'real' masculinity, not incidentally embodied by a white, able-bodied man.³⁶

An earlier *Pink Paper* issue from the same month, commenting on the invasion of Afghanistan and the hyper-oppression of gay people there, had also featured a young, attractive face, this time one that was brown, female, and framed by a burqa.³⁷ The veiled female image, her large, dark, whimpered eyes cast upwards at the onlooker, peering out between the folds of black cloth, clearly follows an Orientalist script.³⁸

Again, the 'inclusion' of a, presumably heterosexual, woman of colour in this white-gay-male dominated medium metonymically links 'Muslim homophobia' with 'Muslim sexism' and thereby exploits the long-standing colonial association between Orientalized gender regimes and patriarchal backwardness so aptly analysed by postcolonial feminists. It directly serves the exceptionalist discourse and secures the gay share in the imperial project by asserting the ability of (certain) gay men, as 'real' (white) men, to join the civilising mission and write boys' own tales of their own. Colonialism, once described by Gayatri Spivak as 'white men saving brown women from brown men' is rewritten, in this moment of gay assimilation, as 'white (straight and gay) men saving brown women (and gays) from brown men'.³⁹

The aesthetic appeal and near symmetry of the two images of the 'Muslim' woman and the gay 'soldier' illustrates the distinct sexual timbre of the gay participation in the war.⁴⁰ It shows how the war, and the racisms which have accompanied it in the metropolises, cannot be separated from gay agency. On the contrary, the war and the backlash against multiculturalism have been central to struggles for gay citizenship.

Gay Assimilation v. Queer Transgression?

If dominant gay subcultures have participated in the war, this at first sight appears to bear little relevance for queer theorists and activists, who often identify themselves as critics of gay politics. The assimilated 'gay' is the constitutive outside to the 'queer' project, whose transgression of dominant norms is identified in opposition to the 'gay' demand for inclusion into them. 'Queer' has been defined as the disidentification from multiple normativities around heterosexism, whiteness, and middle classness, of which whiteness has been privileged as a marker of 'gay' essentialism and identity politics.⁴¹ Against this backdrop, it is ironic that the major queer theorists have so far missed the link between gay assimilation and the war which has enabled it.

One example is Matt Bernstein Sycamore's collection of radical queer writings, *That's Revolting - Queer Strategies for Resisting Assimilation*.⁴² While interesting on many levels and obviously anthologized with a view to difference, it only contains a single article about the growing Islamophobia and other racisms in gay and queer communities. It may not be a coincidence that the writer, Priyank Jindal, is a masculine-presenting person of South-Asian descent who well may fall into the category of 'terrorist-look-alikes' himself.

In British alternative queer scenes, too, interest in the war has been extremely limited. Most recently, this could be seen in discussions on Ladidah, the queer anarchist e-list, about fundraising for Iraqi LGBT, which organizes safe houses for LGBT people in Iraq (many of whom are targeted for their non-conforming gender presentation). According to Iraqi LGBT organizer Ali Hili, homophobic and transphobic attacks have increased exponentially in the militarized climate of occupied Iraq. This compares with a pre- or interim-war context where gender and sexual violence was rare.⁴³ The group, while doubtlessly doing important work, is in a classic client-patron relationship with Outrage. Thus, Ali Hili was long described as an Outrage member, and donations to Iraqi LGBT continue to be solicited into the Outrage bank account.

In winter 2007/8, there were a series of fundraisers for Iraqi LGBT in alternative queer venues, including the big London squat party Behind Bars, a queer cafe, and a queer film night.⁴⁴ At least one of the events (Behind Bars) was advertized as supporting LGBT people in Iraq against 'honour crimes'. This

characterization of domestic violence, which is reserved for contexts racialized as Muslim, Orientalizes such violence and reinscribes it as a property of Islam.⁴⁵ It is directly within the exceptionalist discourse critiqued by Puar and remains within a primitive solidarity frame, which reinscribes the problematic temporal distinction between 'already liberated' populations and populations 'to be liberated'. Organizers missed the opportunity to flag up to subaltern queers the possibility of a solidarity which does not force them to, in Rey Chow's terms, mimetically authenticate⁴⁶ themselves as victims of backward cultures in need of liberation through bombs. While party-makers negotiated ways of bypassing Outrage and getting the money directly to Iraqi LGBT, there was no direct critique of Outrage's role in bolstering the exceptionalist discourse and calling for state violence against Muslim countries. None of the contributors to the discussion discussed racism or the war, and no-one challenged a contributor who argued that

outrage! are not the enemy, they have some different views and ways of doing things compared to us, but we are fundamentally on the same side as far as i can see. making it seem like they can't be trusted on this, when in fact they have done way more than us (as a group) to support our allies in iraq, and in fact are the folks who made us aware of the need to fundraise right now for iraqi lgbs, just makes us look silly.⁴⁷

It could be argued that the queer alternative scene simply needs either more education or more diversity, and efforts in the past have included race awareness workshops, which often depended on the labour of queers of colour.⁴⁸ However, the problem with Queer may be even more fundamental. Thus, those at the margins of Queer – especially transgendered people and people of colour – have often problematized the queer fetish for transgression itself. For example, Jay Prosser, from a white transsexual perspective, argued that Butler's account of heteronormativity simultaneously fetishized transpeople for transgressing gender, and set them up for failing non-trans queer expectations of anti-heteronormativity.⁴⁹

Puar goes even further by suggesting that the very idea of transgression is inseparable from the exceptionalist discourse.⁵⁰ The queer project, according to this, is complicit, even if unwittingly, with Western supremacy. It is indeed noteworthy that 'queer' and other alternative practices such as sadomasochism, swinging and even some types of (non-migrant) sex work have become mainstreamed on an unprecedented scale. In the British context, this can be illustrated with the expansion of sex shops and department stores such as Ann Summers and Harmony, the proliferation of sex-advice reality shows on Channel 4 (e.g. Sex Inspectors, in early 2007) and Channel 5 (e.g. How to Have Sex After Marriage, in late 2007), and the inclusion of queer columns in the free newspapers London Paper and Metro ('Gay About Town', 'Gay Girl About Town', and 'Harsh Words' by drag queen Jodie Harsh). It is further reflected in the expansion of on- and offline spaces for practitioners of BDSM (bondage & discipline, domination & submission, sadism & masochism) and other 'alternative' sexual practices such as swinging, an increasingly popular type of non-monogamous, often public sex. There has also been a noticeable trickling 'up' of kinky styles in fashion and popular culture. Examples include the embrace of fetish wear (corsets, boots, even whips) by stars such as Madonna or Rihanna, and the adoption of corsets and steel-heel knee-high leather boots as everyday items of female fashion.⁵¹

Some of these developments can be explained by the capitalist need for expansion, and the need for variation and transgression in consumer culture.⁵² However, even areas traditionally perceived as sex-negative are opening themselves up to sex-radical agendas. There has, for example, been a queering of feminist activism and scholarship, which needs to be contextualized with the history of feminist involvement in neo/colonial projects. One example was the Feminist Fightback conference at the School of Oriental and African Studies on 21 October 2006 in London. The conference organizers had invited several sex-radical, including sex worker rights', interventions but ended on a highly race-conservative note when during the final plenary they called for the 'liberation' of veiled Muslim women.

Sex worker rights' activists are clearly working in a different temporality from gay rights' activists. While homosexuality has been largely decriminalized, the criminalization of sex-work related practices is far from over, and on the increase even, including seeking commercial sex, or migrating or aiding migration for the purposes of selling sex.⁵³ Unlike homosexuality, sex work is still largely excluded from the 'sexual freedom' discourse, and is championed largely by individuals on the radical left who identify with multi-issue politics. Nevertheless, any reforms are likely to occur within a similar genealogy, and sex worker rights' activists, like other sex radicals, will have to actively resist being enlisted into the exceptionalist discourse. Neither queer transgression nor sex worker rights, then, can be discussed outside the sexual exceptionalism which is at the basis of the 'war on terror'.

Outlook: Coalescing whom?

The new discourse on sexual rights v. religious rights ignores how gay citizenship has occurred centrally, and I have argued agentially, in a context of war and racist backlash. Populist calls for coalitions (with their tired tendency to stay single issue) and lazy arguments against or in favour of intersectionality no longer suffice in this context of exceptionalism. As the intersectionality approach is becoming mainstreamed in again mostly white circles,⁵⁴ standpoint politics, too, have failed to translate. Minoritized people have a clear place in exceptionalist politics, including queers and feminists racialized as Muslim, who are given voice only where they are willing to authenticate themselves by mimetically repeating racist notions of Islamic gender/sexuality regimes.⁵⁵

And still, it clearly matters which differences we are forced to carry in and on our bodies. The new interest in phenomenology,⁵⁶ which pays attention to both these differences and their constructedness in social encounters, is hopeful in this respect. How do we perceive injustice, against other bodies, and our own? The old truths of second-generation feminism remain relevant here, such as Audre Lorde's call on dominant people to reach deep within our/themselves, to those painful places, like the asylum or the public toilet, which we/they would rather forget and leave behind.⁵⁷ How do we remain in traumatized bodies without forcing others into our corner in the family of monsters, without succumbing to either coercive mimeticism or to the violent assimilationism of a society which aggressively expels difference while claiming to love it? Finally, it is indeed important to look at the state. As Michel Foucault has long taught us, this must however be combined with a wider examination of governmentality. The gay participation in the 'war on terror' demonstrates the limits of an identity politics which seeks recognition by a system which is as imperialist as it is neoliberal. Consequently, the struggle against state violence must necessarily be combined with a struggle against hegemonic whiteness in gay and queer spaces themselves.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Sara Ahmed, Umut Erel, Jen Petzen, Esra Erdem, Tamsila Tauqir, Adi Kuntsman, Teht Ashmani and Sachi Nehra for generous feedback and/or intellectual, political and emotional sustenance of this work. Thanks are also due to the editors for their patience in waiting for this article.

Notes

1. Butler, Judith (2007), 'Sexual Politics: the Limits of Secularism, the Time of Coalition', British Journal of Sociology Public Lecture 2007, London School of Economics. In my following discussion, I am aware of the dangers of reading atmospheres in crowds. For instance, other individuals may have also been uncomfortable with the joke, and different people may have laughed for different reasons. For a critique of a model of affective contagion, see Ahmed, Sara (forthcoming), 'Multiculturalism and the Promise of Happiness', *New Formations*. [↵]
2. We have discussed elsewhere how in Germany, these demands threatened to become reality in January 2006, with the introduction of the so-called 'Muslim-Test' in Germany nationality law: Haritaworn, Jin, with Tauqir, Tamsila and Erdem, Esra (forthcoming), *Queer Imperialism: The Role of Gender and Sexuality Discourses in the 'War on Terror'*, Miyake, Esperanza and Kuntsman, Adi (eds.), *Out of Place: Queerness and Raciality*, York: Raw Nerve Books. [↵]
3. Haritaworn, Tauqir and Erdem (ibid). [↵]
4. See the long history of anti-racist feminist scholarship on multiple oppression, e.g.: Anthias, Floya and Yuval-Davis, Nira (1983), 'Contextualizing Feminism: Gender, Ethnic and Class Divisions', *Feminist Review* 15: 62-75, Combahee River Collective (1981), 'A Black Feminist Statement', in Moraga, Cherríe and Anzaldúa, Gloria (eds.), *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings By Radical Women of Color*, Berkeley: Third Woman Press, p. 210-218, Mohanty, Chandra Talpade (1991) 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses,' in Mohanty, Chandra Talpade, Russo, Ann and Torres, Lourdes (eds.), *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, p. 61-88. Crenshaw, Kimberlé Williams (1994), 'Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color,' in Albertson Fineman, Martha and Mykitiuk, Rixanne (eds.), *The Public Nature of Private Violence*, New York: Routledge, p. 93-118, Thobani, Sunera (2007), 'White wars: Western feminisms and the 'War on Terror'', *Feminist Theory* 8(2): 169-185. [↵]
5. See Ahmed, Sara (2004), *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. [↵]
6. Note the centrality of kiss-ins in the politics of Act Up and Queer Nation, which are considered foundational to the Queer paradigm. [↵]
7. See Thobani (ibid), Prosser, Jay (1998), *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality*,

- New York: Columbia University Press, Moya, Paula L. (1997) 'Postmodernism, "realism", and the politics of identity: Cherríe Moraga and Chicana feminism', in Mohanty, Chandra Talpade and Alexander, M. Jacqui Alexander (eds.), *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*, New York: Routledge, p. 125-150. [↵]
8. E.g. Petzen, Jennifer (2005): »Wer liegt oben? Türkische und deutsche Maskulinitäten in der schwulen Szene« In Ifade (Ed.): *Insider – Outsider: Bilder, ethnisierte Räume und Partizipation im Migrationsprozess*. Bielefeld: transcript: pp. 161-181, Haritaworn, Tauqir and Erdem (ibid), Puar, Jasbir (2007), *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, Durham: Duke University Press, and Kuntsman, Adi (2008) 'The Soldier and the Terrorist: Sexy Nationalism, Queer Violence', *Sexualities*, 11(1), forthcoming. [↵]
 9. E.g. Mohanty (ibid), Yeğenoğlu, Meyda (1998) *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [↵]
 10. Puar (2007: xiii), Puar, Jasbir (2005), 'Queer Times, Queer Assemblages', *Social Text* 23(3-4): 121-139, Puar, Jasbir and Rai, Amit S. (2002), 'Monster, Terrorist, Fag: The War on Terrorism and the Production of Docile Patriots', *Social Text* 20(3): 117-148. [↵]
 11. See Petzen (ibid). [↵]
 12. Puar and Rai (ibid), Said, Edward (1979), *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage. [↵]
 13. Puar (2007: xxiii). [↵]
 14. Puar and Rai (2002: 124). [↵]
 15. Puar (2005, 2007). Exceptionalism is arguably less central to European self-identities. Nevertheless, colonialism from the start had a sexual script which has traveled intertextually across different parts of 'the West'. As Puar notes: 'While in Said's *Orientalism* the illicit sex found in the Orient was sought out in order to liberate the Occident from its own performance of the repressive hypothesis, in the case of Abu Ghraib, conversely, it is the repression of the Arab prisoners that is highlighted in order to efface the rampant hypersexual excesses of the U.S. prison guards' (Puar 2005: 125-6). [↵]
 16. Puar and Rai (ibid: fn 21). [↵]
 17. Puar (2005). The US military still follows a semi-illegalized policy of 'Don't ask, don't tell'. Even though the British ban on homosexuality was lifted in 2001, discrimination in the armed forces continues, as the recent court case by a lesbian soldier against harassment shows (Brooke, Chris (2007), 'I saw lesbian soldiers' sex romp in the stable block, "embarrassed" Gunner tells tribunal,' [Daily Mail, 15 November, 2007](#) (last accessed 1 February, 2008). [↵]
 18. Patai, Raphael (1976), *The Arab Mind*, New York: Scribner. [↵]
 19. In contrast to this, Sherene Razack has pointed to the long tradition in using sexualized violence against men of colour, and compared the abuse of the Iraqi Prisoners with the lynchings of black men in the American South. In fact, both became media spectacles, circulated as photographs (taken as trophies by the perpetrators themselves). Further parallels in the treatment of 'terrorist-look-alikes' and other men of colour include the use of technologies such as stop and search, as well as police killings. Thus, the media campaign following the death of Jean Charles de Menezes used similar strategies to those justifying black deaths in custody in the 1990s, including planting information that the killed person was a drug addict/dealer and a rapist. Abu Ghraib, in this frame, was not an aberration, but rather the latest instalment in a long history of sexual violence against men of colour. Razack, Sherene (2005), 'Why is Torture Sexualized? An Interlocking Analysis of Prisoner Abuse,' key note lecture at the *Theorising Intersectionality Workshop*, University of Keele, 21/22 May, 2005. On the police racism campaigns, see *Injustice*, Migrant Media film, London 2001. [↵]
 20. Even queer Muslims participated in this discourse, and Puar (2007), drawing on Rey Chow's (ibid) concept of coercive mimeticism, highlights the pressures to authenticate themselves by repeating the dominant culturalist discourse which groups such as Al Fatiha are exposed to. This is similar to our arguments about migrant feminists such as Seyran Ates and Ayaan Hirsi Ali (Haritaworn, Tauqir and Erdem ibid). [↵]
 21. Puar (2007: xiii). [↵]
 22. See Crenshaw (ibid) and Anthias, Floya and Yuval-Davis, Nira (1992), *Racialized Boundaries: Race, Nation, Gender, Colour and Class and the Anti-Racist Struggle*, London: Routledge. [↵]
 23. Puar (2007: xiv) notes the 'rise of a global gay right wing anchored in Europe and attaining credibility very pointedly through Islamophobic rhetoric'. [↵]
 24. Haritaworn, Tauqir and Erdem (ibid). [↵]
 25. Puar (2007: xii). [↵]
 26. Yeğenoğlu (ibid.). [↵]
 27. Mohanty (ibid: 337). [↵]
 28. Petzen (ibid), GLADT (2003), 'Offener Brief an den LSVD', unpublished open letter. [↵]
 29. For celebratory views of Tatchell and Outrage, see Smyth, Cheryl (1996): *Lesbians Talk Queer Notions*. London: Scarlet Press, and Derbyshire, Jonathan (2008), 'Labour in the docks', *Time Out*

- London, February 6-12: 22-24. For anti-racist critiques, see African LGBTI Human Rights Defenders (2007), 'African LGBTI Human Rights Defenders Warn Public Against Participation in Campaigns Concerning LGBT Issues in Africa Led by Peter Tatchell and Outrage!', press release of 31 January, 2007, published in [Monthly Review Zine](#) (last accessed 1 September, 2007). Puar (2007), and Feinberg, Leslie (2006): 'Anti-Iran protest misdirects LGBT struggle' In [Workers World](#) (17.10.2006). [↵]
30. Feinberg (ibid: n.p.). [↵]
 31. Petzen (ibid). [↵]
 32. Further gay hyper-masculinities include leathermen, 'scally lads' and bears. Of course, some of these styles are not unproblematic and contain certain classed, racialized and gendered connotations. My point here is that there exists a long tradition among gay men of mocking and parodying non-trans heterosexual masculinity. [↵]
 33. Irigaray, Luce (1977/1985), *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Ithaca/New York: Cornell University Press. Irigaray's model has been critiqued for its simple subversion/loyalty distinction (I am grateful to Sara Ahmed for reminding me of this). Of course, Butler's influential performativity model and her arguments about drag constitutes a more explicitly queer theory of mimicry: Butler, Judith (1990), *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Gender*, London: Routledge. However, see Prosser (1998) for a critique of this model, which repeats dominant notions of trans identities as inauthentic and less 'real'. [↵]
 34. Being allowed to die for one's country is, of course, the ultimate sign of citizenship in modern nationalist ideology (Anderson 1991). This ideology is in stark tension with the opportunism of military recruiters in Britain, who beside gay people targeted ethnic minorities, and even offered citizenship to certain people willing to join the British army in Afghanistan and Iraq. [↵]
 35. *Pink Paper*, issue 709, 26 October, 2001. [↵]
 36. Beside gay styles, our current culture of military aggression also renders problematic other alternative styles which aestheticize militarism, such as punk. A related phenomenon is the militarization of mainstream fashion, and combats and camouflage hats and shirts are now part of everyday street wear. [↵]
 37. Issue 706, 'Blood and Sand', 5 October. [↵]
 38. Yeğenoğlu, (ibid.) [↵]
 39. Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty (1999), *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, p. 284-311 (additions in brackets mine). The figure of the hyper-oppressed 'Muslim' woman has a further function, in that she is often used as a symbol for a meritocratic, neoliberal West of equal opportunity. See Hopman, Hildegard Suy Lan and Taymoorzadeh, Negar (2007), *Antirassismus heute*, unpublished assignment for 'Intersections: Queer Theory and Anti-racism', Hamburg University. [↵]
 40. See Kuntsman (2008). [↵]
 41. E.g. Seidman, Steven (1996), 'Introduction', in Seidman, Steven (ed.), *Queer Theory/Sociology*, Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, p. 1-29. [↵]
 42. Sycamore (2004) (ed.), *That's Revolting! Queer Strategies for Resisting Assimilation*, New York. [↵]
 43. Talk at Trans London at Gay's the Word bookshop, 14 August, 2007. [↵]
 44. Mainstream LGBT events, too, got involved, such as the Camden LGBT History Month party on 21 February, 2008. [↵]
 45. See Crenshaw (ibid) for a critique of racializing domestic violence. [↵]
 46. Chow proposes the concept of 'coercive mimeticism' to discuss how racialized artists gain visibility only where they volunteer to embody white stereotypes: Chow, Rey (2002), *The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, New York: Columbia University Press. [↵]
 47. Anonymized posting on the Ladidah list. [↵]
 48. See Saeed, Humaira (ed.) (2007), *Race Revolt* Vol. 1, zine published in Manchester. [↵]
 49. Prosser (1998). I have attempted a similar exercise with regard to interracial sexuality: Haritaworn, Jin (2007), 'Queer Mixed Race? Interrogating Homonormativity through Thai Interraciality', in Brown, Gavin, Browne, Kath and Lim, Jason (eds.), *Geographies of Sexualities: Theory, Practices and Politics*, Aldershot: Ashgate, p. 101-112. [↵]
 50. Puar (2007). [↵]
 51. For an example of a popular fetish website, see [alt.com](#). The mainstreaming of kinky sex is in tension with the continuing criminalization of many BDSM practices (see [spannertrust.org](#)). [↵]
 52. See Willis, Susan (1990), *A Primer for Daily Life*, New York: Routledge. [↵]
 53. On the growing hysteria over migrant sex work, which is essentialized, pathologized and illegalized as 'trafficking' or 'sex slavery', see for instance Agustin, Laura (2007), *Sex at the Margins: Migration, Labour Markets and the Rescue Industry*, London: Zed Books, and Doezema, Jo (2001), 'Ouch! Western Feminists' "Wounded Attachment" to the "Third World Prostitute"', *Feminist Review* 67: 16-38. [↵]

54. Erel, Umut, Haritaworn, Jin, Gutiérrez Rodríguez, Encarnación and Klesse, Christian (forthcoming), 'Intersectionality or simultaneity?! Conceptualising multiple oppressions', in Miyake, Esperanza and Kuntsman, Adi (eds.), *Out of Place: Queerness and Raciality*, York: Raw Nerve Books. [↵]
55. Puar (2007), Chow (ibid). [↵]
56. Ahmed, Sara (2006), *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, Durham: Duke University Press, Fanon, Frantz (1967), *Black Skin, White Masks*, New York: Grove. [↵]
57. Lorde, Audre (1984), *Sister/Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, Freedom, CA: Crossing Press. [↵]

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Muslim Women in France: Impossible Subjects?

Posted By [catherine raissiguier](#) on 2 May 2008 @ 12:58 pm in [3-Postcolonial Sexuality \[forthcoming May 08\]](#), [Issues](#) | [No Comments](#)

Introduction

Current discussions of immigration in France are saturated with sensational narratives about gender and sexuality. The wearing of Islamic scarves, polygamy, forced marriages, female genital cutting, and the sexual victimization of young Muslim women, for instance, receive intense and recurring attention from the French media. The cultural labour that these narratives perform, however, has elicited little scholarly scrutiny. In this article, I point out that sex and gender constitute central threads within anti-immigrant discourses that present Africans and Muslims as undesirable immigrants in France. The deployment of sex and gender within discussions of national identity, immigration, and racial/ethnic communities is not a new phenomenon. The fact that women and girls are being conjured up to capture the cultural distance between the French and their post-colonial others, therefore, must be read as a re-deployment of distant and yet singularly familiar discourses about the fatherland (*la patrie*), the nation, and the republic. The image of the overly fecund African mother, for instance, haunts discussions of the 'immigration problem' in France.¹ Of late, the figure of a victimized and/or manipulated girl-woman has appeared regularly in national conversations about Muslim immigrants and their integration within French society. It is the latter figure that I explore in this article.

Whether constructed as agent or victim, whether understood as promoting or resisting 'integration', the migrant woman emerges as a key element in the racialization of immigration and citizenship in France.² In *Le Sol et le Sang: Théories de l'invasion au XXe siècle*, French demographer Hervé Le Bras analyzes the emergence of an ideology of (immigrant) invasion in France in the 20th century. Le Bras points out that the immigrant, in France, presents a Janus face: 'that of the worker and that of the dweller. One hides the other: we only see the worker during periods of economic growth and only see the dweller during economic crises.'³ However, Le Bras fails to notice that the face of the immigrant-dweller, today, is more often than not the face of a woman.

In my work on undocumented immigrants in France, I often argue that women who are immigrants themselves or the daughters of immigrants are discursively hailed and materially locked into a narrow range of roles and positions.⁴ Once located in these slots, they function as tropes for certain migrant communities' failure to integrate into French society. I suggest that these roles and positions are neither natural nor freely chosen and yet provide normative and socially approved scripts for migrant women trying to carve out new spaces and meaningful lives in the locales they now inhabit. I also argue that old notions of African and Muslim women drawn from France's colonial imagination are rearticulated into the current context of post-colonial population movements.

The discursive and material effects of these constructions are many. First and foremost, they conjure up and place the very concepts of the 'domestic' and the 'traditional' (the discursive spaces occupied by the migrant Woman) in contrast with the 'public' and the 'modern' (that occupied by the French Woman). In the process, both terms of these binaries (domestic/public; tradition/modern; immigrant/French) are anchored as common-sense notions and naturalized in everyday parlance. Once these binary structures are in place, it becomes almost impossible to think about social actors outside the dichotomous understandings and frameworks they establish. In turn, these articulations place certain migrant women at the centre of anti-immigrant and racist developments in contemporary France and render them particularly vulnerable to such developments.

Here I argue that – against the backdrop of international economic transformations, the construction of Europe, and increased national anxieties – narratives of the-migrant-woman-as-victim insidiously rely on tropes of innate violence and queerly raced sexualities that construct certain immigrants as impossible subjects. Discursive constructions of foreigners as 'impossible citizens' date back to the beginnings of the French republic. This has been brilliantly demonstrated by Sophie Wahnich in her work on hospitality and

national belonging in the context of the French revolution.⁵ In this article, I also analyze these narratives as traces of France's colonial project.⁶

Ni Putes Ni Soumises

In this article, I examine the media success and the heightened visibility of one immigrant woman, Fadela Amara, and the organization she has spearheaded, *Ni Putes Ni Soumises* (Neither Whore Nor Submissive), to illustrate the construction of impossible subjects in contemporary France. I connect my discussion of Amara and of *Ni Putes Ni Soumises* to that of the French law on *laïcité*, which forbids the wearing of ostentatious religious signs in French public schools, and to a broader analysis of gendered processes of racialization within French immigration politics. Finally, I conclude this analysis by pointing to new forms of citizenship and modalities of belonging that are the very products of the contradictions I explore in this article.⁷

I would never have imagined we could do it. To bring together on March 8, 2003 more than 30,000 people in the streets of Paris, most of them from the suburbs, behind our slogan *Ni Putes Ni Soumises*. I would never even have dared to dream of such success.

Thus opens Fadela Amara's book-length essay *Ni Putes Ni Soumises (Breaking the Silence: French Women's Voices from the Ghetto)*.⁸ Fadela Amara's recognition of the unthinkable quality of the success that her organization and its political platform have encountered in France is also where I want to start. Indeed, the success of *Ni Putes Ni Soumises (NPNS)* is a surprising phenomenon – at least at first sight – in the context of French immigration politics at the beginning of the 21st Century.⁹ Amara, a young French working-class Muslim woman born of Algerian immigrant parents, has now become a household name in France. Even those who might not know who she is certainly have heard of *Ni Putes Ni Soumises*.¹⁰ Though this is an interesting development, Amara is not the first French woman of Muslim heritage to write a book or even to lead a strong grass-roots organization. In fact Amara's organizing success is built on a long tradition of immigrant, women, and youth community activism and must be understood in connection to this tradition.

It has been widely noted that *NPNS* and its leader have sustained exceptional public visibility since the national march organized by Amara in 2003. The march started and ended in Paris (on March 8) in the demonstration referred to in the quotation that opens this section of the paper. According to journalist Chérifa Benabdessadok:

She receives the support of an impressive list of public figures and organizations [...] As far as communication and information are concerned, we can't even count the number of shows (TV and Radio) to which the leaders of the movement have been invited or the number of articles published in the media, of all political leanings, in the national press as well as in the NGO publication circuit.¹¹

Amara was not a particularly well-known figure before 2003; however, she is no newcomer to the French anti-racist political scene. Indeed, Amara has been involved in anti-racist politics since the early 1980s when children of North African immigrants (*Beurs*) organized a series of marches demanding their real integration into French society. The first march (the march for equality and against racism), which they organized in 1983 started in Lyon and ended in Paris in a massive demonstration. Amara recounts that, like her friends, she joined the march when it passed through her home town, Clermont-Ferrand, but did not attend the national demonstration in the capital city.¹² She further explains that she did not join in the planning of the next march (December 1984) because she could not identify with the priorities and the machismo of the male organizers: 'I preferred investing my energy in my own neighborhood, where my women friends and I put together a plan to fix up housing that had fallen in disrepair.'¹³

In 1986 Amara became a member of the French anti-racist organization *SOS Racisme*. She found the organization more welcoming of women activists like herself. Furthermore it provided her an established structure to conduct the kind of local politics she favoured. In 1988, within *SOS Racisme*, she worked on the development of a *Maison de Potes* (a neighborhood solidarity house). In 1989 she participated in the creation of a woman's commission within the *Fédération Nationale des Maisons de Potes* and in 2000 became president of the federation.

It is through her work at the Clermont-Ferrand solidarity house in the 1990s that Amara started to notice a change in the gender relations within her neighborhood and the emergence of new forms of male oppression where young men in these neighborhoods enforced certain codes of morality and forms of behaviours that had been on the wane when Amara herself was an adolescent:

The next step was to extend this male power from the older brothers to all the young men in the projects. Their surveillance was systematically directed against the 'tribe of young women.' Now the honor of each family and of the project was in the hands of these young men. Since the honor consisted in preserving women's virginity, these young men became the collective guardians of this treasure.¹⁴

Amara locates these disturbing changes in her own neighborhood but more generally in the French *banlieues* – these are the same *banlieues* that were the site of social unrest and rioting in the fall of 2005 (and again as I am getting ready to send this article for publication, November 2007).¹⁵ As social injustice increased, Amara suggests, young men enraged at their exclusion and rejection from mainstream French society embraced and became the new enforcers of traditional patriarchal relations within immigrant families. Amara and her followers then locate *NPNS* within a '*feminisme des banlieues*.'¹⁶ They point out the double if not the triple oppression experienced by immigrant women (and especially their daughters) who inhabit these suburbs.

However, they are neither the only nor the first ones to do so. Immigrant women organizing since the 1970s have continuously addressed the particular location of immigrant women (and their daughters) at the intersections of multiple axes of oppression. So, how can we explain *NPNS*' ability to garner so much political support and to sustain the kind of media visibility that they have since their eruption – with their catchy slogan – on the French political scene?

One could argue that the success of Amara and *NPNS* is simply a case of being in the right place at the right time. Indeed, *NPNS* came to visibility at a time when issues related to deep social breakdown (*la fracture sociale*) in the French republic, the role and place of the 'second generation' within immigrant communities, and the emergence of radical Islam organizing in the suburbs, were very much on the political front burner. *NPNS*' basic premise that young women living in the projects located in the *banlieues* are often the victims of violent forms of patriarchal control including gang rapes (the infamous *toumantes*) and physical harassment, and that these incidents are on the rise, has resonated within French discussions of social breakdown, insecurity, immigration, and youth.¹⁷ One could also suggest that *NPNS* benefited from its close connection to *SOS-Racisme* and its related Socialist party political and media apparatus. And it probably did.¹⁸

In this article, however, I want to suggest yet another reading of Amara's success. By looking at the tropes circulating in the *NPNS* political platform, I point out that the *NPNS* narrative is one that – unfortunately – reinforces very problematic understandings of immigration, Islam, and especially of young Muslim men and women in France. Indeed, this narrative opposes 'enlightened' (meaning well-integrated into French society) but victimized women to 'backward' Muslim men. Men who cannot (will not) integrate into French society. These understandings, I argue along with others, scapegoat young Muslim men (and by extension Islam in general) for the current ailments of the republic and obfuscate other reasons for the social breakdown that is really at the core of these discussions.¹⁹

We women who are living in suburban neighborhoods and who come from many origins and faiths, believers and nonbelievers, appeal for our rights to liberty and to emancipation. We are socially oppressed by a society that confines us in ghettos that have become sites of poverty and exclusion. We are crushed by the machismo of our neighborhood men, who in the name of 'tradition' deny our most fundamental rights.

A National Appeal from Neighborhood Women (Trans. Helen Harden Chenut)²⁰

In her introduction to the English translation of *Ni Putes Ni Soumises (Breaking the Silence)*, Helen Harden Chenut writes that the movement is 'aimed at shattering the law of silence within the Muslim community concerning violence perpetrated against women by a minority of young men who assumed the role of morals police and guardian of their family's honor.'²¹ However, several observers in France have already challenged this interpretation. Horia Kebaza, for instance, pertinently questions the cultural reading generated by Amara, summarized by Chenut above, and widely circulated by the French

media.²²

Indeed, Kebaza suggests that if there are specific forms of violence against women that exist and grow within neglected neighborhoods, they are more likely the product of social exclusion than cultural (or religious) belonging. The violent practices observed in such locales are but exaggerated forms of gender inequalities at play in the French society at large, where, she reminds us, one in ten women have experienced some form of domestic violence.²³

To focus our attention on the unequal status of women in the neighbourhoods, and on men who symbolize by themselves masculine domination, presents a double particularity: that of minimizing women's inferior status in our society (illustrated by the various situations of discrimination in the labour force or in the political arena), and that of disqualifying a culture and an identity (arab-Muslim-maghrebi) judged too visible or loud, and way too remote from republican values. [This is the] Ultimate contradictory injunction toward a population whose naturalized foreign status would be irreducible to integration ... creating in the process the very conditions of a 'communitarianism' that [France] condemns in advance.²⁴

This gendered and racialized construction of the arab-Muslim-maghrebi does explain to a certain extent the popular appeal of *NPNS*. This construction is politically useful in many ways. First it obfuscates the material and ideological forms of racial and gender stratifications that lie at the core of the Republic. A collective of intellectuals, academics and activists, *Les Mots Sont Importants* ('Words Matter'), point out the fact that one of the ideological effects of *NPNS* has been a collective forgetting of the structural gender inequalities that are foundational to the French republic. The collective reminds us that, in France, income disparities along gender lines are endemic, women hold the vast majority of *emplois précaires* (those jobs that offer little employment security and no or sub-standard benefits), and represent only 10 to 15% of top economic and political leadership positions. In other words *NPNS*, by focusing on 'ghetto' sexism, helps France ignore Republican sexism.²⁵

The other ideological effect of the media visibility of *NPNS* is the reinscription in public discourse of lingering colonial ideas about hierarchal schemes of cultures and civilizations. These discourses use the figure of the Muslim woman (in this case young women of North African parentage) and of its antithesis, the young Muslim man perpetrator of violence, to assess the cultural competency of a whole community. This deeply gendered narrative effectively racializes the Muslim community in France.

On one hand, barbarians: boys for the most part. On the other, girls: citizens and republican ... One more time, one time too many, young [Muslim] men are being equated without distinction with violence, delinquency, anti-Semitism and terrorism.²⁶

The cumulative effect of sensational sexualized accounts of women being violated, mutilated, and coerced is disastrous. They repulse, titillate, and fuel the racist imagination. They also provoke a retrenchment on patriarchal and heteronormative notions of home, family, and sexuality. While young Muslim men are to be feared because of their delinquent sexuality (and politics), Muslim women must be liberated, and all women are in need of protection. The 'veiled woman,' is a stock figure in these narratives and needs special attention here.²⁷

'L'Affaire du Foulard' and the French Law on *Laïcité*

It might be useful to put Fadela Amara's own trajectory in relation to the emergence of a national narrative about 'the daughter of the North African immigrant' in France. The success of *NPNS*, as I argued earlier, is due, in part, to its ideological reiteration of a familiar (and politically useful) narrative: certain immigrants and their families as unable and/or unwilling to embrace French culture. It must be noted, however, that this notion is counterbalanced by a parallel focus on immigrant women and daughters of immigrants as privileged agents of integration: 'On one hand, barbarians: boys for the most part. On the other, girls: citizens and republican.'²⁸

This has certainly been the case of the media coverage of the *beurettes*.²⁹ The *beurettes* appeared in the media in the mid-1980s in stories suggesting that they, unlike their brothers, were doing well in school and were embarking on trajectories of success and integration.³⁰ The *beurette* then is an educated 'modern' woman, a woman who moves into public space and attests to the actual and potential success

of the republican model of integration. She also points to the failure of her brother and casts him as culturally incompetent: unable (unwilling) to become a French subject notwithstanding the fact that both are often born in France and are indeed French nationals and citizens. While the *beurettes* were central in media coverage of the 'second-generation' of North African/Muslim immigrants in the 1980s, by the 1990s they were slowly being replaced by the figure of the veiled woman.

In 1989 three young Muslim women were expelled from a public high school because they refused to remove their Islamic scarf inside the school. What became known as the 'headscarf incident' and the controversy surrounding it mainly focused on the inability of certain immigrants to 'melt' into French society and the waning integrative power of French republican institutions. These young women and others like them (constructed as either willing or manipulated agents) came to symbolize the notion that some immigrants were unable and/or unwilling to embrace French republican and secular principles.

While addressing in depth the potential or actual resistive strategies these constructions elicit lies beyond the scope of this article, they cannot be underestimated and are worth noting here. In fact, it is the very possibility of certain immigrants' subversive interventions such as nay-saying to hegemonic integration and assimilation scripts that a loud and relentless Republican chorus renders inaudible. In spite of these possibilities, dominant discourses about some immigrants' otherness rooted in their inability or unwillingness to fit in are dangerous and fuel growing anti-Muslim sentiment in France. Indeed, the 'headscarf incident' and its discursive ripples established Islam as one of the main roadblocks to the successful integration of post-colonial immigrants in France. Fifteen years after the initial incident, the issue of the *hijab* is back on the front burner in France. In March 2004 a law was passed to forbid ostentatious signs of religious belonging in schools. The Islamic scarf was undeniably the main target of the new law and has rekindled the debate on France's *laïcité* principle, its republican tradition, and its relationship toward the French Muslim community.

The debates that preceded the passage of the law remained fairly abstract and basically focused on the symbolic impact of religious signs – and most specifically Islamic scarves – within French public space. In 2003 a research team (*la commission Stasi*) commissioned to study the issue declared that ostentatious religious signs were indeed contradictory to the secular principles of the French educational system. *Hijabs*, in particular, represented the rise of radical Islam in France and the oppression of women within Islam in general. Both were deemed unacceptable within the bounds of a Western secular and democratic nation like France. Interestingly enough, the Stasi commission did not bother to interview young women who were wearing the scarf. In a speech she made in 2004, Christine Delphy pointed out a working assumption of the Stasi commission, which reflected a republican consensus on the issue; these women were not worth listening to since they obviously were either coerced or manipulated into wearing such a blatant symbol of their own oppression.³¹

Many feminists in France aligned themselves with the dominant republican line of argument and supported the passage of the law. Taking a strict, principled, and abstract position about women's rights and gender equality, these feminists (like Amara and *NPNS*) are fueling problematic constructions of the Muslim community in France and of Islam in general. By opposing a modern secular space (the republic) they inhabit to the traditional religious space Muslim women who wear the scarf occupy, they also contribute to the false understanding that certain subject positions are produced outside modernity. Nacira Guénif-Souilamas and Eric Massé remind us that, in fact, young women who wear the scarf, young men who perform extreme forms of masculinity in the *banlieues*, along with *beurettes* and other children of immigrants, are all products of modern France.³²

Conclusion

The idea that Muslim women of immigrant parentage are either victims of tradition and religion or vectors of integration circulates widely in France. In both cases, women (as well as gender and sexuality) are conjured up to render problematic the presence of certain immigrants within the French national space. Whether bearers or breakers of tradition, women are called forth precisely to raise the spectre of a 'tradition' and 'culture' that stands in the way of the successful integration of African and Muslim immigrants and their children.

The hyper-mediatization of issues such as the *hijab*, forced marriages, gang rapes, female genital cutting, and honour killings tend to construct these young women as prisoners of religion and the private/familial sphere. Even stories that document young women breaking away from 'culture' and 'tradition' end up reinscribing problematic ideological structures. I am not suggesting here that these painful realities do not

exist in the lives of migrant women (or their daughters) and should not alarm us. What I am pointing out is that dominant narratives in France tend to focus on certain women and certain realities and not others.

Indeed, (African/Muslim) migrant women are being constructed in ways that emphasize and reinforce their victim status and their domestic roles in the family. These constructions locate them primarily in the sphere of the private and the 'traditional.' In a complex and contradictory logic, migrant women emerge as symbols of 'tradition' and backwardness, and at the same time are locked in material realities that reproduce and maintain the very processes that the French imaginary has constructed as radically foreign. In a similar manner young men (especially those of North African descent) are being constructed as dangerous outsiders while being materially locked in dead-end social spaces. French sociologist Eric Macé captures this dual logic when he writes about the 'ingredients' that led to the 2005 social riots in the *banlieues*:

The ingredients I am referring to, in the French context specifically are the highest youth unemployment rates in Europe, racist discrimination and profound urban ghettos, and – since the beginning of the 1990s – the stigmatization of *banlieues* youths. Portrayed as foreign to French society by an increasingly alarming (alarmist) discourse, these youths have been constructed as a menace through the following steps: first they were equated with thieves; then with rapists in the *banlieue* gang-rape crisis; then – in the context of the Islamic scarf in schools – with men who veil their women; and recently with scum that needs to be cleaned up with high-intensity water hoses. A bit much, isn't it?³³

Overall, the invocation of 'queer' gender/sexual practices to racialize whole communities echo a colonial past where discourses of sexuality, racial thinking, and nationalist rhetoric intersected in the construction of the bourgeois/national subject and its others. Such processes of subjectification articulate hierarchies of power and locate individuals and collectivities differentially in relation to the French State and its promise of universal inclusion and integration. They authorize the development of new forms of exclusion and discrimination. Interestingly, they also produce 'impossible' (and here I mean unruly) subjects and political practices that emerge from the very contradictions of the Republican tradition.³⁴

Whether manifested through street riots as we have seen in 2005 and 2007, through *sans-papiers* hunger strikes and site occupations, through 'indigenous feminist' voices, or through Ms. Amara's attempts at shaking the system from the inside, immigrants and their children are bound to disrupt the status-quo of immigration politics.³⁵ Whether these efforts are fruitful in the long run remains to be seen. Paying attention to the messy strategies (including forms of resistance and accommodation) that emerge from 'impossible' subject positions, however, alerts us to an array of political engagements and modalities of belonging that immigrants and their children use to seek justice and claim their place in France today.

By highlighting sexuality and gender and the ways they are invoked to legitimize the 'lesser-than' status of immigrants, I place this argument within a growing body of immigration analyses at the intersection of feminist, post-colonial and queer studies. By focusing on discursive and material practices, I also unravel some of the complex gender, racial, and sexual technologies of power that inform current French politics of immigration.

Notes

1. Here I build on the work of Catherine Quiminal who has written about the necessity to study immigration politics in France through the lens of and in relation to its colonial history. See in particular: 'Le rapport colonial revisité: les luttes des africains et des africaines en France.' In *Sociétés Africaines et Diaspora*. Issue 4. Décembre 1996. pp.15-26. In 'Le rapport colonial revisité,' Quiminal, speaking specifically about the African context, argues that the colonial relationship is one that binds male actors through a hierarchical and unequal relationship through which cheap labour is extracted from the colonized. Colonized women, in this schema, are either simply neglected or relegated to the role of 'fecund mothers' or over-sexualized and evil temptresses. For a discussion of the 'fecund mother,' in contemporary France see [Catherine Raissiguier, 'Troubling Mothers: Immigrant Women from Africa in France.' In JENdA: A Journal of Culture and African Women Studies. Issue 4, 2003.](#) [↩]
2. Racialization is used the way Omi and Winant define it 'to signify the extension of racial meaning to a previously unclassified relationship, social practice or group.' In Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States From the 1960s to the 1980s*. New York, London:

- Routledge, 1986. p. 64. [↵]
3. Hervé Le Bras, *Le Sol et le sang: Théories de l'invasion au XXe siècle*. Paris: Editions de l'aube, 1994. p. 77. [↵]
 4. The children of immigrants from Africa – who often are French themselves – are still considered and referred to as immigrants (*immigrés*). Needless to say, this constitutes a violent discursive denial of their legal and lawful belonging to the French nation. [↵]
 5. I borrow the term 'impossible' from a small group of scholars who use the concept of 'impossibility' to analyze related but different mechanisms of belonging and exclusion. Sophie Wahnich analyzes the discursive construction of foreigners as impossible citizens during the French revolution. See, *L'impossible citoyen: L'étranger dans le discours de la Révolution française*. Paris: Albin Michel, 1997. Mae N. Ngai analyzes immigration policy in the U.S. to uncover the dual and related production of illegal aliens as impossible subjects of (and the construction of the United States as) a modern nation. See, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens And The Making of Modern America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004. By focusing on South Asian politics in the United States, Gayatri Gopinah analyzes the mechanisms that elide the possibility of a South Asian queer female subjectivity within dominant nationalist and diasporic discourses. See, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005. In this article, I use the term to conjure up the complex mechanisms (both material and discursive) that establish impossible subject positions within the French nation. These mechanisms include discursive practices that turn certain immigrants into unthinkable members of the national body as well as material/legal practices that locate them in spaces of impossibility. In addition, I use 'impossible' to suggest the unnerving and 'unruly' forms of political interventions that these mechanisms elicit. See Gopinah (2004) and Monisha Das Gupta, *Unruly Immigrants: Rights, Activism, and Transnational South Asian Politics in the United States*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006). [↵]
 6. See Quiminal Op.Cit. [↵]
 7. Like Ong, I think of citizenship as a cultural process of subjectification 'in the Foucauldian sense of self-making and being-made by power relations', p. 737 in Aihwa Ong, 'Cultural Citizenship as Subject-Making: Immigrants and Cultural Boundaries in the United States,' In *Current Anthropology*. Volume 37, Number 5, December 1996. pp. 737-762. [↵]
 8. Fadela Amara with Sylvia Zappi, *Breaking the Silence: French Women's Voices from the Ghetto (Ni Putes Ni Soumises* Translated with an Introduction by Helen Harden Chenut). Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006). [↵]
 9. *Ni Putes Ni Soumises* refers here to both Amara's book and to the organization that she spearheaded. The movement's name was coined in March 2002 in the National Appeal from Neighborhood Women. [↵]
 10. Adding to her name recognition, Fadela Amara is now part of the Sarkozy government. As State Secretary under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, Amara is in charge of urban and community politics (*secrétaire d'Etat auprès de la ministre du logement et de la Ville, chargée de la Politique de la ville*). Critical analyses of Amara's political trajectory are bound to analyze her nomination as a further illustration of her co-optation by French republicans in general and now the French state in particular. Most interesting though, is that she is serving under the direction of Christine Boutin whose right-wing politics combine anti-feminist, anti-gay and anti-immigration elements. For a discussion of Boutin's role in the anti PaCS campaign in France see my 'Bodily Metaphors, Material Exclusions: The Sexual and Racial Politics of Domestic Partnership in France,' in Arturo Aldama (ed.), *Violence and the Body*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003, pp. 94-112. [↵]
 11. *Elle bénéficie de l'appui d'une liste impressionnante de personnalités et d'organisations [...] Au plan de la communication et de l'information, on ne compte plus le nombre d'émissions auxquelles les dirigeantes du mouvement ont été invitées ni celui des articles publiés par les médias de toutes obédiences, dans la grande presse comme dans les publications associatives*. Chérifa Benabdessadok, 'Ni putes ni soumises: de la marche à l'université d'automne,' p. 65, in *Hommes & Migrations* (1248 – Mars-avril 2004), pp. 64-74. English translation mine. [↵]
 12. Amara explains that she was not able to march in Paris because of her father's disapproval. [↵]
 13. Fadela Amara with Sylvia Zappi, *Breaking the Silence: French Women's Voices from the Ghetto (Ni Putes Ni Soumises* Translated with an Introduction by Helen Harden Chenut. Berkeley: University of California Press: 2006. p. 56. [↵]
 14. *Ibid*, p. 64. [↵]
 15. French *banlieues* are more similar to inner cities than to suburbs in the United States. They are geographically located on the outskirts of larger urban centers. Immigrant families are overrepresented in the *banlieues*, which now stand as blatant signs of *fracture sociale* – the deep structural inequalities (economic, educational, cultural) that are now experienced by people living in France. [↵]

16. Note that Helen Harden Chenut translated this *feminisme de banlieue* into 'ghetto feminism'. [↵]
17. Fadela Amara herself links the beginning of NPNS to the violent murder of Sohane Benziane in 2002 and the publication of Samira Bellil's *Dans l'enfer des tournantes* (2002). The eighteen-year-old Sohane had been set on fire by gang members in a Paris *banlieue* because she refused to conform to the new gender norms of the suburbs. Bellil and the personal testimony about the gang rapes she suffered at age 13 became 'the symbolic center' of the movement (36). [↵]
18. One can only remember the similar rapid rise and ample media exposure of Harlem Désir, one of the founding members of *SOS Racisme*. [↵]
19. See in particular the work of the collectives *Les Mots Sont Importants*, *Les Blédardes*, and various individuals including Sylvie Tissot and Christine Delphy. [↵]
20. *Nous femmes des quartiers de banlieues, issues de toutes origines, croyantes ou non, lançons cet appel pour nos droits à la liberté et à l'émancipation. Oppressées socialement par une société qui nous enferme dans les ghettos où s'accroissent misère et exclusions. Étouffées par le machisme des hommes de nos quartiers, qui au nom d'une «tradition» nient nos droits les plus élémentaires. L'appel des états généraux de la Sorbonne (January 2002)* [↵]
21. p. 2. [↵]
22. See Horia Kebaza, 'Logiques de genre dans des quartiers impopulaires,' In *Hommes & Migrations* (1248 – Mars-avril 2004), pp. 52-63. [↵]
23. Enquête Nationale sur les Violences Faites aux Femmes (ENVEFF) directed by Maryse Jaspard shows that violence against women exists with the same intensity regardless of social class and cultural background (2005). [↵]
24. *Focaliser l'attention sur le statut inégal des femmes dans les quartiers, et sur des hommes symbolisant à eux seuls la domination masculine, comporte une double particularité: celle d'atténuer l'infériorisation des femmes dans notre société (les diverses situations de discrimination sur le marché du travail ou en politique en témoignent), et celle de disqualifier une culture et une identité « arabe-musulman-maghrébine » jugée trop voyante ou tapageuse, et bien trop éloignée des valeurs républicaines. Ultime injonction paradoxale en direction d'une population dont l'étrangeté naturalisée serait de toute façon irréductible à l'intégration ... créant ainsi les conditions d'un « communautarisme » condamné par avance.* Horia Kebaza, 'Logiques de genre dans des quartiers impopulaires,' p. 63. In *Hommes & Migrations* (1248 – Mars-avril 2004), pp. 52-63. English translation mine. [↵]
25. [Les Blédardes and Les Mots sont importants, « Sexisme et homophobie : le traitement médiatique et ses impasses \(Première partie\) »](#) [↵]
26. *D'un côté les barbares, essentiellement les garçons, de l'autre les filles, citoyennes et républicaines ... Une fois de plus, une fois de trop, les jeunes garçons assimilés globalement à la violence, à la délinquance, à l'antisémitisme et au terrorisme.* Chérifa Benabdessadok, 'Ni putes ni soumises: de la marche à l'université d'automne,' p. 67. Op Cit. English translation mine. [↵]
27. For a graphic portrayal of the French fascination with the 'Oriental' veiled woman, see Malek Alloula *The Colonial Harem*, Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1986. For a discussion of the linkage between homophobia and anti-immigrant racism in France see my 'Bodily Metaphors, Material Exclusions.' Op. Cit. [↵]
28. Chérifa Benabdessadok, 'Ni putes ni soumises: de la marche à l'université d'automne,' p. 67. Op Cit. See also Sabah Chaïb, *Facteurs d'insertion et d'exclusion des femmes immigrantes dans le marché du travail en France: Quel état des connaissances?* Document de travail élaboré pour la Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail, Janvier 2001. [↵]
29. *Beur* and its feminine (and diminutive) form *Beurette* are expressions that came out of French *banlieues* culture where youth used a speech form called *verlan* where words are turned around. [↵]
30. See Catherine Raissiguier, *Becoming Women/Becoming Workers: Identity Formation in a French High School*, Albany: SUNY Press, 1994. [↵]
31. [Intervention de Christine Delphy au meeting 'Une école pour toutes et pour tous' Le Trianon, Paris, 4 février 2004.](#) Delphy is one of the few feminists in France to have publicly opposed the law and its related effects on Muslim communities and girls in particular. [↵]
32. Nacira Guénif-Souillamas and Eric Massé, *Les Féministes et le Garçon Arabe*. Paris : Editions de l'Aube : 2004. [↵]
33. *Les ingrédients dont je parle, c'est particulièrement en France, un chômage des jeunes le plus élevé d'Europe, des discriminations racistes et des relégations urbaines aggravées et, depuis le début des années 1990, une stigmatisation des jeunes des banlieues populaires qui les fait apparaître comme des étrangers à la société Française, qui les constitue en menace avec une surenchère dont les étapes sont les suivantes : ils ont d'abord été assimilés à des voleurs, puis avec l'affaire des tournantes, à des violeurs, puis, avec l'affaire du foulard à l'école, à des « voleurs », et dernièrement à de la racaille qu'on nettoie au Kärcher. Ca commence à faire beaucoup.* [Banlieues: des territoires abandonnés \(chat réalisé le 7 novembre 2005\)](#) English

- translation mine. [↵]
34. The agency invoked here is not conceptualized as a simply willed or a chosen position. Rather, borrowing from Judith Butler's work on iteration in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (New York & London: Routledge, 1993), this analysis is attentive to the power relations and reiterative processes (both discursive and material) that produce 'impossible' subjects and subversive political practices. Through repetition, common sense and normative ideas about France, French nationals, and immigrants (assimilable and unassimilable) are produced. '[A]nd yet, it is also by virtue of this reiteration that gaps and fissures are opened up as the constitutive instabilities in such constructions, as that which escapes or exceeds the norm, as that which cannot be wholly defined or fixed by the repetitive labor of the norm." (10) It is in this inevitable instability that new forms of citizenship and new modalities of belonging are produced. [↵]
 35. *Sans-papiers* are undocumented migrants who have been organizing to obtain a change of status. On the *sans-papiers*, see my 'French Immigration Laws: The Sans-Papiers' Perspectives.' In *Women and immigration law in Europe: New variations of feminist themes*. Glass House Publishers, 2007. For a brief introduction to the French *féministes indigènes*, see [Karine Gantin's 'Who are the French 'Indigenous Feminists'?'\(Monday November 19, 2007\)](#) [↵]
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What's So Civil About Marriage? The Racial Pedagogy of Same-Sex Marriage in Canada

Posted By [suzanne lenon](#) on 2 May 2008 @ 12:57 pm in [3-Postcolonial Sexuality \[forthcoming May 08\]](#), [Issues](#) | [No Comments](#)

In June 2005, the Canadian Parliament passed federal legislation that legally changed the definition of civil marriage to include same-sex couples. The successful passage of Bill C-38 followed various legal victories at provincial levels,¹ and was the culmination of a particular form of lesbian and gay activism centered on the law as a site of struggle. The lesbian and gay movement in Canada has always employed a heterogeneity of strategies to achieve social recognition, and has involved the efforts of individuals and organizations committed to achieving change through the legal arena. Apart from material benefits, engagements with the law proceed from the belief that progressive law reform signals to Canadian society as a whole that discriminatory attitudes and behaviours are no longer acceptable.²

Legal victories, however, are more than simply victories. They are also about the bodies present in a courtroom, and about choices and strategies of representation; they are about social, political and economic environments; they are about the conditions and imaginings of possibility. In the Canadian context, previous victories surrounding relationship recognition of same-sex couples have been instrumental in laying the legal groundwork for the achievement of 'equal marriage'.³ The turn to a conjugal imaginary in Canada and elsewhere is a historically embedded development shaped by, among other things, the predominance of a liberal equality rights paradigm, a heightened cultural visibility of lesbians and gay men, and neo-conservative discourses of 'family values'. Perhaps even more centrally, spousal recognition and other forms of 'gay rights' have occurred within a climate of neo-liberal governance that emphasizes individual freedoms and rights, including the right to privacy, the withdrawal of the state from many aspects of care with the ensuing privatization of responsibility for others, and the importance of self-surveillance and self-regulation. There are many scholars who have pointed to the links between contemporary lesbian/gay politics and neoliberal forms of governance, where 'good' sexual citizenship is defined through association with certain intimate norms rather than a specific sexual identity.⁴ Framing oneself as a worthy and respectable subject-citizen deserving of the right to marry, constituting one's life and familial relationships as intelligible and 'just like you' – *and being recognized as such by the law* – presupposes the internalization of a set of norms of self-governance that are in line with neo-liberal approaches to economic and social life. While same-sex desires and practices have long been marked as immoral and unpatriotic, in a limited and specific way they are now recognized as a site of respectable citizenship wedded to a particular form of intimate kinship relations.

In this article I want to scrutinize another 'condition of possibility' for the realization of same-sex marriage in Canada. It is often hailed as a victory not only for gay and lesbian Canadians but also for the progress of law, human rights, and for Canada as a nation. I wish to trouble these developmental narratives of progress by centring same-sex marriage as a site for the production of racialized national identity. Specifically, I examine the discursive terrain of nationhood and nationalism that circulated in Parliamentary debates over Bill C-38 that occurred in September 2003, and between February and July 2005. I also tangentially draw upon articles from queer news media. While these political debates do not represent the sum of official discourse on same-sex marriage, they do encapsulate state perspectives (albeit contested ones) and offer an important condensation of ideas. In reading the Parliamentary Hansards, what is quickly apparent is that political pronouncements signify more than an individual stance 'for' or 'against' civil marriage for same-sex couples; they also operate as a 'transformative metonym'⁵ for *what* 'Canada' as a nation stands for and what it means to *be* 'Canadian'. Indeed, both 'sides' lay claim to the (supposed) centrality of diversity, inclusiveness and equality to Canadian national consciousness and values.

As such, the issue of same-sex marriage is a contemporary example of Canada's (historical) project to establish itself as a liberal, modern, and civil nation. Miriam Smith observes that while the regulation of the patriarchal heterosexual nuclear family is bitterly contested across a range of US political debates, the

debate over same-sex marriage in Canada became increasingly intertwined with national self-definition.⁶ This article extends this claim by arguing that the discursive terrain of nationalism and national identity so central to these debates situates the issue of same-sex marriage as a pedagogical practice of (racialized) civility, one that secures the inscription of whiteness that underpins Canadian national identity.⁷ These debates accordingly constitute a field that has more to do with national body politics than with same-sex marriage per se.

It is important to note that support for or opposition to same-sex marriage did not fall neatly along party lines. There were numerous Liberal MPs who were very outspoken against extending civil marriage to lesbian and gay couples and who voted against Bill C-38. Similarly, there were Conservative MPs who did support Bill C-38. Moreover, by the time of these 2005 Parliamentary debates, the Liberal government itself had radically changed its position. Represented by the Attorney General of Canada, the Liberal government had opposed the 'equal marriage' cases heard at the provincial levels in British Columbia and Ontario. When the Ontario Court of Appeal ruled in June 2003 that the province could immediately begin issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples, the federal government (the Liberals) did not appeal the case further and shifted to officially support the issue. The analysis that follows centres primarily, but not exclusively, on Liberal narratives. As will become evident, however, *all* political parties in the House of Commons mobilized nationalist discourses to support or oppose Bill C-38.

This article first lays out the conceptual framework of 'civility' as a racialized concept underpinning articulations of Canadian nationalism and national identity. Its contours are marked by a moral-ethical element and a temporal notion of progress and modernity. The paper traces the itinerary of these two interwoven and dynamic facets of civility as they make their way through the Parliamentary documents, enabling the 'teaching' of what (trans)national space Canada epitomizes, who 'we' are as Canadians and *who* this 'we' is. The debates over same-sex marriage not only tell a national story of state engagement with 'gay rights'; they also tell a story of nation 'making' through modernity and civility – categories which are racially ordered.

Re-thinking 'Civil' Marriage

Civility, as David Theo Goldberg writes, is a type of representation and expression of individual and state personality. It is "the overarching sensibility of the prevailing social...what we might say gives the society its "personality", its "character", even its "color"⁸ Daniel Coleman's work is instructive here to conceptualize the racialized dynamics of civility in the Canadian context.⁹ Through a detailed examination of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Canadian writing, Coleman traces a particular Canadian genealogy of civility that has consistently been (and continues to be) drawn along lines of whiteness and masculinity. Developed during the nation-building years, this white civility emerges through four key figures: the loyal brother who continues to negotiate a nervous relationship with the United States; the enterprising Scottish orphan whose prudent, good character produces his economic success; the muscular Christian who metes out justice on behalf of oppressed people; and the maturing colonial son who demonstrates his independence from Britain and America by altruism towards his minority beneficiaries. These figures of Canadian white civility have survived numerous challenges to their capacity to present a (continuing) normative ideal for Canadian citizenship and 'belonging', and they continue to have enormous influence in popular understandings of Canadian national identity across the political spectrum.¹⁰

Through its conflation with civility, 'whiteness' has become naturalized as the norm for English Canadian cultural identity.¹¹ 'Whiteness' does not refer only to skin colour (although as Ghassan Hage points out, this is valuable capital in claiming national belonging) but, following Goldberg¹², is a structural condition – 'a state of being, desirable habits and customs, projected patterns of thinking and living, governance and self-governance', an ideal signifier of 'Western' civilization.¹³ Whiteness can be thought of as 'an orientation' that puts certain things in reach, including styles, capacities, aspirations, techniques, and even worlds. Without itself *being something*, it gives bodies and things 'affect' and 'value'.¹⁴ As such, the project of Canadian civility has been able to organize a diverse population around standardizing ideals of whiteness where various racialized, classed and gendered bodies gain or lose social status on the basis of how well they can approximate this norm.¹⁵ Indeed, as Achille Mbembe notes, civility is 'known to be a key feature of citizenship'¹⁶, a practice that 'teaches' citizens to personally and collectively imagine a national 'self' as an intimate quality of identity.

Civility combines a *temporal* notion of progress with a *moral-ethical* concept of peaceful order, and it is

through temporal and spatial registers that civility becomes a means by which race becomes attached not just to bodies but also to forms of conduct.¹⁷ Indeed, as Goldberg notes, race has been a primary ingredient in the making, molding and manifesting of modern civility, figuring presumptively who bears the burdens of social civility and ordering who is within and outside its circle of confinements or web of worldly connections.¹⁸ In this sense, Coleman contends that civility, more than something a person or culture simply has, is an act, a mode of self-definition – specifically, a white cultural practice; civility involves behaviours – morals and manners, sensitivities and sensibilities – that must be learned and performed.¹⁹

Coleman conceptualizes Canadian civility as a ‘problematic’ because of its contradictory and ambivalent nature;²⁰ that is, while civility can be thought of as a ‘positive’ in its attempts to create justice and equality, it simultaneously creates borders and hierarchies. I want to suggest here that same-sex marriage is a (new) project of civility: On one hand, the legal-political struggles for ‘equal marriage’ secure formal equality and successfully challenge the exclusionary heteronormative borders delimiting access to material, legal and symbolic resources for lesbians and gay men. They also provide the occasion for a pedagogy of what it means to ‘be’ Canadian and what Canada stands for in ways that reinstate dominant racial norms and hierarchies.

The ‘time’ of civility: Securing a civil present through the past

Support for same-sex marriage by Parliamentarians was articulated through references to transcendence of the past and to future progress. For example, in the words of then Liberal Prime Minister Paul Martin, ‘If we do not step forward, then we will step back. If we do not protect a right, then we deny it. Together as a nation, together as Canadians, let us step forward.’²¹ The advancement contained within the ‘step forward’ has the ‘community of nations’ as its object and will be discussed further below. Here, I want to probe where ‘we’ would ‘step back’ to and argue that civility, as exemplifying progress and hence futurity, is achieved in considerable part through persistent references to past racial and gendered injustices perpetrated by the Canadian state. Take, for example, this speech by one Liberal MP:

We had the Asian exclusion act. We had the Chinese head tax. We had internment of Ukrainians and others from Austro-Hungary. We had internment of Italians and Germans. We had internment of Japanese Canadians. We had the almost forceful repatriation of Japanese Canadians after the Second World War...We know that we had a policy of ‘none is too many’ for the Jews. We know that colour barrier existed on immigration until 1977. We know that there was cultural genocide against our First Nations. We know what happened with the residential schools. We know about the ban on potlaches and that big houses were outlawed. We know that women were not given the right to vote until 1917, and it was not until 1929 that the English Privy Council recognized women as persons...The reason our *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* was enacted on April 17, 1982 is that it dealt with the recognition of the evolution of this country. It dealt with the recognition of how minorities had not been treated very well. It dealt with making sure that we learned from the lessons of the past.²²

While perhaps not the speech’s intended meaning, it does reveal the deeply implanted tenets of racist ideology, practice and exploitation central to the establishment of Canada as a white racial state. What we all ‘know’, and as this long quote strongly denotes there is a great deal *to* know, is employed to signal awareness of these events but not what purpose they served. Despite the naming of historical racial hierarchy and exclusions, this knowledge is presented in such a way that little is produced in the way of privilege or power for anyone; white complicity is erased from view. Instead, this knowledge of the past is a way to signal a fantasized *present* space and *present* time, where Canada’s pernicious racist history has been progressively overcome and where the rights of ‘minorities’ are now respected.

The discourse of Canada as a ‘nation of minorities’ is key to this presentation and production of a national past and ties directly into a particular rationale for extending civil marriage to lesbians and gay men. Such a change to the definition of marriage is a recognition that, in the words of Liberal MP Hedy Fry, ‘Everyone of us belongs to minority groups.’²³ Granting equality rights to lesbians and gay men through the extension of civil marriage signals Canada’s story of the ‘now’. Similarly, another Liberal MP states that,

Canada is a nation of minorities. We are all part of some minority. If we do not protect all minorities, we cannot protect any minority. If we do not protect all minorities, we cannot

protect people of colour, Anglicans, Catholics, Muslims, people of different genders, and people of different races or nationalities. We could not protect any Canadians because each and every one of us is part of some minority.²⁴

This discourse has several effects. For one, it works to restrict 'the recognizability of heterogeneity';²⁵ that is, while particular racial, national, religious and gendered bodies are called upon to point to the tangible heterogeneity of Canadian society, the idea that we are *all* minorities entails a vacuous homogenizing logic. The subtext of 'everyone of us belongs to minority groups' draws lines of horizontal similarity in oppression and discrimination. Civility here manifests itself in a practice of ethics and morality, not only for and towards lesbians and gay men but also for the 'futura' of Canada. The need to 'protect all minorities' signals anxiousness in the horizontal comradeship that is the 'nation of minorities'. Same-sex marriage then provides a moment to transcend this anxiety and move 'forward' to grab hold of a fictive (and hence always elusive) national space.

It is a fictive space because such a discourse is void of any actual social signifiers, gesturing to a national heterogeneity empty of the historical and contemporary power relations that have been and continue to be central to the making of Canada as a modern, capitalist, racial nation-state.²⁶ It allows for a reading of social differences as neutral whereby the relations of power that create 'each and everyone of us' as minorities drop out of sight; indeed, there is no 'majority'. That 'we' are all part of 'some minority' is a white-washing of conditions which continually produce racially predicated exclusions and hierarchies. It is a way of naming Canada as a white racial nation-state without explicit recourse to its racial terms, where a norm of whiteness is understood as the ideal of national culture and identity.²⁷

Expunging racial reference, this 'racelessness' represents Canadian state rationality regarding race. Yet in these narratives of past racial and gendered injustices there is an explicit naming of race. I want to suggest that attaching these evocations to a discourse of a 'nation of minorities' is a determined making of a national self as innocent, outside the legacies of its own past and present histories of violence to bodies of colour. For example, Canada's 'story' contains many markers of injustice and inequality 'but what is important now is that they are part of our past, not our present.'²⁸ That 'we' have 'learned from the lessons of the past' normalizes a national narrative of Canada as a 'good' and civil space and place. Indeed, as Liberal MP Tony Ianno states, Canada 'has come a long way in its growth...We choose many examples of a way of thinking of the past we would sooner forget. That is not the nation we are now proud of and take pride in.'²⁹ The logic of progress in civility is reflected in state articulations of the unacceptability of discrimination and the rejection of continued exclusions. 'We' know where we have been and what has been done but this is not 'our' present nor can it be 'our' future. Voting for Bill C-38 – supporting equality rights for lesbians and gays – is sutured to a past 'we' would sooner forget in order to mark a progressive, proud national present and hopeful future.

The number of times references to historical instances of injustice and discrimination are invoked in the Parliamentary debates – *the repetition* – is striking and worthy of scrutiny. They exemplify 'the past we would sooner forget' – but 'we' don't. What work does this temporal avowal of 'wrongs' do? It provides a springboard to (re)secure the civility of *this is not who we are today*. This avowal is an elegiac discourse, a way of both *managing* traumatic histories of exploitative, colonial nation building and *securing* a civil present.³⁰ Civility, as Goldberg writes, is a process invested in more than the ending of violence; it is also committed to its veiling.³¹ The naming of the racial violence and hierarchies so central to the making of Canada as a white racial state is one that paradoxically veils ongoing violence and exclusions by sanctioning it to a past time. Declarations of 'wrongfulness' of the past and the exposure of the failure of Canada to live up to its ideals exist *alongside*, rather than undoing, national pride. As Ahmed suggests, it is by bearing witness to past national shame and injustices that enables a nation to live up to the ideals that secure its identity in the present. The recognition of past offenses that have failed the national ideal allows the white nation to be celebrated *in the present*.³² The temporal containment – then, not now – of racial injustice provides a minimum amount of disruption to mythologies of innocence and to the ideology of racelessness that is a hallmark of the Canadian historical tradition.³³ That 'we' have transcended a racist past and are 'all minorities' is a practice of civility achievable through the silent and presumptive elevation of whiteness as the dominant racial norm in Canada.

Moral Subjects: The National We

Civility, as a moral practice, travels in and through assertions of 'who' Canadians are. In the words of various Liberal politicians, Bill C-38 represents 'all that we believe in as Canadians... It is a strong symbol

of the core values that many Canadians hold dear: equality, dignity, tolerance and respect for others.³⁴ It serves as 'a reminder to all Canadians that it is not acceptable to discriminate'³⁵ and, in the words of the then Liberal Prime Minister, it goes to 'the very soul of what it means to be a Canadian.'³⁶ A pedagogy in national identity, support of same-sex marriage represents a moral subject position of justice and equality. This is particularly salient through invocations of the *Charter* as 'the codification of the best of Canadian values and aspirations', defining 'who we are as a people and what we aspire to be.'³⁷ The diffusion of a legal instrument such as the Charter into national consciousness – as representing that which Canada stands for and who Canadians are – acts as a form of 'uniting' otherwise anonymous national subjects into a moral subject position 'as Canadians'.

In this sense, the issue of same-sex marriage is a lesson and an opportunity for all of 'us' – *gay and straight* – to uphold 'Canadian' values and affirm who we 'as Canadians' think we are. It is a moment *par excellence* where gays and lesbians themselves uphold what Canada stands for and who Canadians (apparently) are. In the Parliamentary debates, in queer media, and within legal *facta* submitted to provincial courts on behalf of couples seeking the right to marry, Canada is represented, imagined and mythologized over and over as a just and progressive nation that must not drag its feet lest it lose its moral leadership as an international leader in human rights. In statements by politicians from the New Democratic Party (NDP), lesbian and gay couples seeking to the right to marry have had the courage to call society out of its intolerance and prejudice.³⁸ They are 'trailblazers' who 'fought the battle not just for their own benefit but because they know...that the whole of society would benefit from our being a more tolerant, more inclusive society.'³⁹ Far from being strangers to the nation,⁴⁰ these couples are heroes and leaders showing their country and its citizens the way towards greater justice and equality. Once considered deviant and a threat to national security, (certain) lesbians and gay men are now new figures of civility.⁴¹

Conservative opposition contests the tying together of national self-definition with same-sex marriage. For example, one Conservative MP states that, 'They say we are un-Canadian because we wish to uphold the traditional definition of marriage...and un-Canadian because we understand the ramifications attached to the passing of Bill C-38.'⁴² Another claims that, 'We are a fair people. We support equality for all Canadians', but this cannot be extended to the realm of re-defining marriage.⁴³ Thus, 'the real Canadian way' is to take the middle ground of maintaining the traditional definition of marriage while extending equality rights to lesbians and gay men through civil unions or domestic partnerships.⁴⁴ Equality and state recognition can still be granted to same-sex couples; alternatives to marriage are not a betrayal of civility but exemplify another form of civil practice. Both 'sides' share the terrain of the moral imperatives inherent to civility, seeking justice for the nation's 'minorities'.

Although vigorously contested by a vocal and organized opposition, same-sex marriage represents an acceptable national and even patriotic value. Through these debates, the state orders or interpellates 'proper' social relations, providing the contours of acceptable modes of national being, belonging and possibility.⁴⁵ Same-sex marriage then is a way of orienting national bodies toward the practice of civility – 'we' are civil because we have overcome our unjust past and because 'we' uphold the value of equality *for all*. This is what it means to *be* Canadian, and 'the nation' becomes fleshed out not only as place but also as person.⁴⁶

Same-sex marriage is also a way of orienting bodies around the whiteness of Canadian national identity, this ubiquitous 'we'. This happened primarily through the discourse of multiculturalism, a central way in which racialized bodies were incorporated into public, legal and parliamentary debates over same-sex marriage.⁴⁷ The Parliamentary debates are rife with assertions that same-sex marriage is a threat to the multicultural fabric of Canada, such as 'New Canadians know that their cultural values are likely to come under attack if this law is passed' and know that Bill C-38 'will limit and restrict their freedom to honour their faith and their cultural practices.'⁴⁸ As a strategic manoeuvre, the Conservative Party sought to align 'multicultural' communities as opposing same-sex marriage. It launched a series of advertisements in several 'ethnic' newspapers under the guise that communities' religious and cultural values were threatened by the passage of Bill C-38. The sense of difference and distance established through these invocations of 'culture' are also (and not ironically) evident in various articles appearing in the queer news media in support of same-sex marriage. For example, in an article about a protest organized by Chinese Canadians, the author reports, 'Next to the religious right, ethnic minorities are the most opposed to the advent of this legislation...(M)ore than religion, Chinese cultural doctrine is what brought these people to

Ottawa.' Lamenting 'the busloads of Chinese people' that descended on Parliament Hill, the author goes on to delineate the terms of 'gay life' in China asserting that 'many lesbians and gays continue to live underground, often in isolation, leading a double life.'⁴⁹ Drawing upon a well-worn colonial logic of 'us' and 'them', this article constructs Canada as a privileged space of celebrated *out* queer identity.

I raise this example alongside Conservative deployments of multicultural discourse because both evoke a clear sense of 'difference', where divergent histories and experiences collapse into irreconcilable binaries of tradition and modernity. The cultural labels attached to racialized communities are not neutral but carry Orientalist and racially inscribed connotations of inferiority, positioned as they are in opposition to the progressive and emancipatory realization of same-sex marriage. The implied geographical delineations of being from elsewhere with 'different' cultural practices, which are posited either as *under* threat or as a threat to the liberty of 'Canadian' gays and lesbians, also serve to incorporate racialized people into the debates over same-sex marriage through terms of difference. A 'difference' framework, however, always smuggles in hierarchy; and – in the Canadian context at least – implies an underlying racial hierarchy in which Canadians of European origin are positioned as superior to people of colour.⁵⁰ Through support of same-sex marriage, 'we' come to know ourselves as civil and moral national subjects. Racial 'others' embody distance from this: in queer discourse, because 'they' do not (apparently) uphold 'Canadian' values of inclusivity, tolerance, equality and respect; in Conservative discourse, because racialized communities are set up as *already* distant, and thus in need of protection under the terms of religion. It is this distance that makes prominent the white racial norm of Canadian national identity.⁵¹

Moreover, whiteness is reproduced through acts of alignment *with* the project of civility that is same-sex marriage. A number of individuals and organizations spoke out against racist and neo-colonial assertions of 'cultural difference' and the lines of distance this draws from inclusion in a national 'we'. It was suggested, for example, "that all racial minorities and immigrants are opposed to same sex marriage. This cannot be further from the truth...(T)here are many of us who recognize the right to form a family of our choice as a fundamental one."⁵² In an article appearing in Ottawa's queer newspaper, one queer Chinese man wrote of statements made by the leader of the Conservative Party that 'Stephen Harper's dire warnings have been outright offensive to me. Being Chinese Canadian means being able to celebrate our cultural heritage while embracing Canadian values of diversity and inclusiveness.'⁵³ Aside from the important political intervention made to public discourse, these comments also correctly identify how same-sex marriage has functioned as an ideal of white civility able to organize a varied population around its terms.

Transnational imaginings

'Imagining' the nation always necessitates and even presupposes the imagining of a 'community of nations'.⁵⁴ Not surprisingly, then, same-sex marriage as a site of racial nation making garners tremendous purchase when placed within the transnational sphere. What is held as the particular 'civility' of Canadian national identity, evidenced in support of same-sex marriage, is jettisoned into the transnational 'community of nations' whereby Canada exemplifies a particular (sexual) exceptionalism. In the words of one Liberal MP, for example, the Canadian state 'will send a statement to the world that in Canada gays and lesbians will not be considered second class citizens.'⁵⁵ Moreover, to vote for Bill C-38 means that Canada is 'leading, not following, the movement toward equality for gays and lesbians everywhere.'⁵⁶ Canada is conceived as being at the vanguard of modern societies so that it eclipses even the United States. Statements in the House of Commons as well as the queer media depict national pride in Canada *finally* beating the United States to something. With the passing of the Bill, Liberal politicians argue that 'Canada will be saying that it is ahead of where modern society is going.'⁵⁷ This spirit of modernity, and indeed of civility, is found in the commitment to progress, not only temporally but also morally and politically.

Conservative politicians opposing the legislation also compose their arguments within the gaze of a 'community of nations'. In arguing for civil unions or domestic partnerships as a viable means of recognizing the equality rights of lesbians and gays, comparisons are made to various European countries. For example, Conservative MP Rob Moore states that, 'In the entire industrialized world, this is the approach that modern countries are taking...I do not believe that most Canadians are looking to be more radical than some of the most left leaning governments in the world.'⁵⁸ Similarly, Conservative MP Rona Ambrose states that, '(O)ther nations, and more important, other Western democratic and constitutional nations, have found ways to deal with this issue.'⁵⁹ For those unwilling to accept a change to the definition of civil marriage, the point of international comparison is to argue that marriage poses an

incontrovertible limit to the recognition of lesbian and gay rights.⁶⁰ Thus according to Stephen Harper, then Conservative Leader of the Opposition, 'If same-sex marriage were a fundamental human right, then countries as diverse as the United Kingdom, France, Denmark and Sweden are human rights violators.'⁶¹ Of course, the implication here is that we know them not to be.

Alongside the progress of legal rights for Canadian gays and lesbians, modernity is gestured to by both 'sides' through the legal arena where a certain 'perfection' of the law is resorted to as a marker of more elevated nations.⁶² Both opposition and support for Bill C-38 rely on the mythological assertion that 'we' are part of a community of modern and civilized nations. There is here, then, an epistemology of progress and backwardness, where 'gay rights', and specifically same-sex marriage, become 'the mark of ascending civilization'.⁶³ In a post-9/11 historical context, this logic installs 'gay rights' as the newest manifestation of Western civility.

If the Conservative position has other Western democratic nations in its comparative sights, the 'pro' side contains a broader universal dimension in its articulations of a civil sexual modernity and exceptionalism. Such civility is accompanied by the assumption of a burden to extend its civil (national) qualities. Same-sex marriage allows the opportunity for Canada to know and assert itself as modern – even 'ahead of where modern society is going' – and as providing inspiration and a baseline of progress. In the words of one Liberal Senator, 'across the face of Europe and Asia...human and minority groups struggle daily to climb up their individual slippery slopes to the fertile fields of equality, with which we are blessed.' As such, 'all gaze a watchful eye for sustenance for emerging rights from Canada as an exemplar for leadership and a template of equality in the 21st century.'⁶⁴ Canadian laws reflect equality and respect for minorities and are 'a vital aspect of the values we hold dear and strive to pass on to others in the world who are embattled, who endure tyranny, whose freedoms are curtailed and whose rights are violated.'⁶⁵ In more elaborate terms, a Liberal MP remarks that

In many parts of the world, gays and lesbians have to contend with repressive measures that range from mild to the most extreme...We are a nation of people who can demonstrate to the world that we can shine as the example of tolerance and compassion...We are also a nation that instills hope for the world that so desperately needs it...Let the light of Canada's soul cast its glow across a troubled world and be the beacon of freedom and equality that all nations will dare to compare themselves to as they too strive for higher ideals.⁶⁶

Embattled. Tyranny. No individual freedoms. Slippery Slope. Repression. 'We' know *what we are not and who we are not*. Exemplar leadership. Shining example. Beacon of freedom: the spirit of modernity manifests here in the not so subtle expression of a civilizing imperative. Various scholars have pointed to the notion and use of 'human rights' as a strategy of Western hegemony and neo-colonialism.⁶⁷ As Peter Fitzpatrick argues, one identified standard of the 'community of nations' is the standard of civilization, where a nation achieves its universality in being set against other nations who are fixed and irredeemably particular and heterogeneous. Qualities of the universal and legal, the ordered, the dynamic and progressive are all set against the particular and lawless, the chaotic, static and backward.⁶⁸ Both the temporal and spatial registers evoked in these quotations are at once linear and hierarchical where the nation's 'goodness' consists in its closeness to an exemplary modernity, and its 'badness' consists in the distance from it. Same-sex marriage as a political-legal issue is a 'moment' in the 'story' of Canada that (further) sediments a racial world ordering. Modernity, then, is a term that designates more than a specific temporality; it is also constituted through social relations, and is made to matter through the lines of demarcation that imagine the world in racial terms.⁶⁹

The 'national' project of civility that is same-sex marriage is projected outward into the transnational sphere and is located in modern time. The 'national' self, constructed by both 'sides', is a moral one, hailed as civilized and inhabiting an ordered Western democracy that adheres to individual rights and freedoms, and is called upon to instruct the pre-modern Other. Indeed, Sedef Arat-Koc (2006) argues that Canadian national identity is being reconfigured along 'civilizational lines' (that is, as part of 'the West') in the post-9/11 era.⁷⁰ In her study of Canadian peacekeeping, Sherene Razack traces the insidious racial hierarchy that underpins the fantasy whereby Canadians know themselves as bringing the 'gifts' of order, democracy and civilization to pre-modern 'Others'.⁷¹ In the case of same-sex marriage, we could add a 'liberated' and 'out' sexual expression and identity rooted in neoliberal values of individualism.

To be 'part' of a civilized 'community of nations' is to understand oneself and one's national self as upholding 'minority rights' and hence equality rights for gays and lesbians through the terms of 'equal marriage'. While this article has traced state complicity in the racial politics of 'gay rights' discourse, this is not meant to indicate a position of 'innocence' for Canadian LGBT communities or organizations. Egale Canada (the national LGBT organization), for example, initiated the legal struggle for same-sex marriage in two provinces and also spearheaded a nation-wide campaign on the issue.⁷² Its written arguments to the Ontario and British Columbia court hearings rely heavily on the trans/national discourses discussed in this article as well as on representational practices of respectability racialized as white.⁷³ Thus while struggles for 'gay rights' may often be considered progressive, they must continually be interrogated for the times they are deployed to mark and signify (trans)national lines of civility and Otherness. As Razack writes, we stake out the colour line when we produce ourselves as a nation (and individuals) on the civilized side of things.⁷⁴

Conclusion

Debates over same-sex marriage invite Canadians to know their nation and themselves as a just, fair, tolerant, equality-seeking people. As this article suggests, it is a pedagogy in national 'belonging' that is deeply racialized. The lessons in white civility that same-sex marriage engenders are dependent on the presence of (trans)national racial Others, taken to embody difference and distance. Furthermore, be it referencing other Western nations or casting the gaze more 'globally', same-sex marriage secures a place ('ahead of where modern society is going') for Canada within an imagined – yet very concretely racially ordered – community of civilized nations. In these ways, both 'sides' may not be as far apart as one might think; the pedagogy of white (national) civility is a shared terrain. Same-sex marriage, then, is not simply a politics of sexuality but is also a politics of race.

Because same-sex marriage is a pedagogy in racialized civility and national 'goodness', where as citizens we are taught to avow and then transcend a violent past, where we are called upon – gay and straight alike – to practice a racialized civility, we are implicated in the racial politics embedded in same-sex marriage. I am not sure there is a way 'out' of this, as declarations of 'innocence' only serve to veil hierarchical relations of power more thoroughly. We might begin, as a first step, with this recognition of complicity in order to develop an anti-racist ethics and politics that dislodges the racial hierarchies and articulations of modernity, civility and civilization that are increasingly woven into the terrain of 'gay rights'.

Notes

1. Bill C-38: The *Civil Marriage Act* states that 'Marriage, for civil purposes, is the lawful union of two persons to the exclusion of all others.' Marriage in Canada is governed both federally and provincially. The federal government has jurisdiction over the definition of marriage (that is, who can marry) while the solemnization of marriage is a provincial responsibility (for example, the issuing of marriage licenses). [↵]
2. The enactment of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (the *Charter*) in 1982, and in particular the equality provision of section 15(1), initiated a shift from the deployment of rights as a political resource (to build political identity and mobilize gay/lesbian constituencies, for example) to the pre-eminence of a discourse of individual rights and liberties, where lesbians and gay men are represented as part of the mainstream of Canadian society with the same rights and obligations as other Canadians in respect of their families and relationships. The Charter has been successfully used to challenge heterosexist laws throughout the 1990s and into the twenty-first century. See Miriam Smith (1999). *Lesbian and gay rights in Canada: Social movements and equality seeking, 1971-1995*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. [↵]
3. For example, the 1995 Supreme Court of Canada ruling in *Egan v. Canada* held that sexual orientation was an analogous ground of discrimination under s.15(1) of the *Charter*. While this was a significant victory, *Egan* also represented a loss. The case was a challenge to the exclusion of same-sex couples from the definition of spouse in the *Old Age Security Act*, and the Supreme Court held that this differential treatment did not constitute discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation because same-sex couples could not biologically procreate and, as lesbian/gay equality rights claims were a 'novel concept', that the federal government was not obliged to take immediate action to change the definition of spouse. Four years later, however, the Supreme Court delivered a significantly different ruling. In *M v. H.* (1999), it granted a lesbian the ability to claim spousal support from her former partner by striking down as unconstitutional a definition of 'spouse' in an Ontario family law statute that had been limited to opposite-sex cohabitants. As a result, the Ontario government added the new concept of 'same-sex partner' to the *Family Law Act* (preserving the term 'spouse' for opposite sex partners who are married or in common law

- relationships). Furthermore, in June 2000, Parliament adopted Bill C-23 (the *Modernization of Benefits and Obligations Act*), which amended 68 federal statutes by defining 'common law partners' to include both same-sex and heterosexual unmarried couples, and by extending rights and responsibilities of married spouses to common law partners. The legal success of *M v. H* opened the doors for the same-sex marriage challenges. For critical commentary on both cases, see Susan Boyd and Claire Young (2003). 'From same-sex to no-sex? Trends towards recognition of (same-sex) relationships in Canada.' *Seattle Journal for Social Justice*, 1(3), 757-793; Brenda Cossman (2002). 'Lesbians, gay men and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.' *Osgoode Hall Law Journal*, 40(3-4), 223-248. [↵]
4. For the British context, see Carl Stychin (2003). *Governing sexuality: The changing politics of citizenship and law reform*. Oxford & Portland Oregon: Hart Publishing; Diane Richardson (2005). 'Desiring sameness? The rise of a neoliberal politics of normalization.' *Antipode*, 515-535. For the American context, see Jonathan Goldberg-Hiller (2002). *The limits to union: Same-sex marriage and the politics of civil rights*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press; Shannon Winnubst (2006). *Queering freedom*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press; for the Canadian context see Brenda Cossman (2002). 'Sexing citizenship, privatizing sex.' *Citizenship Studies*, 6(4), 483-506; Susan Boyd and Claire Young (2003). 'From same-sex to no-sex? Trends towards recognition of (same-sex) relationships in Canada.' *Seattle Journal for Social Justice*, 1(3), 757-793. [↵]
 5. Jonathan Goldberg-Hiller (2002). *The limits to union: Same-sex marriage and the politics of civil rights*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, p. 1. [↵]
 6. Miriam Smith (2007). 'Framing same-sex marriage in Canada and the United States: Goodridge, Halpern and the national boundaries of political discourse.' *Social and Legal Studies*, 16(1), 5-26. [↵]
 7. Himani Bannerji (2000). *The dark side of the nation: Essays on multiculturalism, nationalism and gender*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press; Yasmin Jiwani (2006). *Discourses of denial: Mediations of race, gender, and violence*. Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press. [↵]
 8. David Theo Goldberg (2005). "'Killing me softly": Civility/race/violence.' *The Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, 27, p. 349. [↵]
 9. Daniel Coleman (2006). *White civility: The literary project of English Canada*. Toronto: The University of Toronto Press. [↵]
 10. Daniel Coleman (2006). *White civility: The literary project of English Canada*. Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, p. 239. [↵]
 11. Daniel Coleman (2006). *White civility: The literary project of English Canada*. Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, p. 5. See also Himani Bannerji (2000). *The dark side of the nation: Essays on multiculturalism, nationalism and gender*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press, p. 107. [↵]
 12. David Theo Goldberg (2002). *The racial state*. Malden MA & Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, p. 171. [↵]
 13. Ghassan Hage (2000). *White nation: Fantasies of white supremacy in a multicultural society*. New York: Routledge. [↵]
 14. Sara Ahmed (2006). *Queer phenomenology: Orientations, objects, others*. Durham & London: Duke University Press, pp. 125, 129. [↵]
 15. Daniel Coleman (2006). *White civility: The literary project of English Canada*. Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, p. 27. [↵]
 16. Achille Mbembe (2001). *On the postcolony*. Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 93. [↵]
 17. Daniel Coleman (2006). *White civility: The literary project of English Canada*. Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, p.11. [↵]
 18. David Theo Goldberg (2005). "'Killing me softly": Civility/race/violence.' *The Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, 27, p. 357. [↵]
 19. Daniel Coleman (2006). *White civility: The literary project of English Canada*. Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, pp.12, 21; David Theo Goldberg (2005) "'Killing me softly": Civility/race/violence. *The Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, 27, p. 341. [↵]
 20. *White civility: The literary project of English Canada*. Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, p. 10. [↵]
 21. Paul Martin, Prime Minister, *House of Commons Debates*, February 16, 2005, p. 3577. The official titles I ascribe to various parliamentarians and senators are those s/he held at the time of the debates. [↵]
 22. Andrew Telegdi, Liberal MP, *House of Commons Debates*, February 21, 2005, p. 3776. [↵]
 23. Hedy Fry, Liberal MP, *House of Commons Debates*, September 16, 2003, p. 7385. [↵]
 24. Larry Bagnell, Liberal MP, *House of Commons Debates*, June 28, 2005, p. 7910. [↵]
 25. David Theo Goldberg (2002). *The racial state*. Malden MA & Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, p. 16. [↵]
 26. Constance Backhouse (1999). *Colour-coded: A legal history of racism in Canada, 1900-1950*.

- Toronto: University of Toronto Press. See also Yasmin Jiwani (2006). *Discourses of denial: Mediations of race, gender, and violence*. Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press. [↵]
27. David Theo Goldberg (2002). *The racial state*. Malden MA & Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, p. 11. [↵]
 28. Paul Martin, Prime Minister, *House of Commons Debates*, February 16, 2005, p. 3577. [↵]
 29. Tony Ianno, Liberal MP, *House of Commons Debates*, March 24, 2005, p. 4558. [↵]
 30. Daniel Coleman (2006). *White civility: The literary project of English Canada*. Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, p. 8. [↵]
 31. David Theo Goldberg (2005). "Killing me softly": Civility/race/violence.' *The Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, 27, p. 350. [↵]
 32. Sara Ahmed (2004). 'Declarations of whiteness: The non-performativity of anti-racism.' *borderlands e-journal*, 3(2). [↵]
 33. Press Constance Backhouse (1999). *Colour-coded: A legal history of racism in Canada, 1900-1950*. Toronto: University of Toronto. [↵]
 34. Paddy Torsney, Liberal MP, *House of Commons Debates*, June 28, 2005, p. 7938. [↵]
 35. Sarmite Bulte, Liberal MP, *House of Commons Debates*, September 16, 2003, p. 7424. [↵]
 36. Paul Martin, Prime Minister, *House of Commons Debates*, February 16, 2005 p. 3577. [↵]
 37. Irwin Cotler, Liberal Minister of Justice, *House of Commons Debates*, June 28, 2005, p. 7894. [↵]
 38. Bill Siksay, NDP MP, *House of Commons Debates*, February 16, 2005, p. 3589. [↵]
 39. Alexa McDonough, NDP MP, *House of Commons Debates*, March 24, 2005, p. 4548. [↵]
 40. Shane Phelan (2001). *Sexual strangers: Gays, lesbians, and dilemmas of citizenship*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. [↵]
 41. While the state seems to embrace marrying gays, it also continues its policing and regulation of other queer communities, exemplified by [police raids in the past few years on a lesbian bathhouse in Toronto](#) and [a gay bathhouse in Calgary](#); as well as its long-standing seizing and censorship of materials at the US/Canada border destined for [a queer bookstore in Vancouver](#). [↵]
 42. Garry Breitkreuz, Conservative MP, *House of Commons Debates*, May 2, 2005, p. 5495. [↵]
 43. Rob Moore, Conservative MP, *House of Commons Debates*, May 2, 2005, p. 5494. [↵]
 44. Stephen Harper, Leader of the Conservative Party, *House of Commons Debates*, February 16, 2005, p. 3580. [↵]
 45. David Theo Goldberg (2005). "Killing me softly": Civility/race/violence.' *The Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, 27. [↵]
 46. Sara Ahmed (2000). *Strange encounters: Embodied others in post-coloniality*. London & New York: Routledge. [↵]
 47. One other central way was through the use of analogies to historical racial discrimination in the United States. For example, the ban on same-sex marriage is analogous to the ban on inter-racial marriage struck down by the US Supreme Court in *Loving v. Virginia* (1967), or alternatives such as civil unions are akin to segregation. While facilitating a belief in a common ground of oppression between identity movements, racial analogies have their own perils. [↵]
 48. Stephen Harper, Leader of the Conservative Party, *House of Commons Debates*, February 16, 2005, p. 3584. [↵]
 49. [Suki Lee, "The Chinese protest against same-sex marriage: Gays and lesbians live precarious lives in Asia" Capital Xtra!](#), September 11 2003. [↵]
 50. Sherene H. Razack (2004). *Dark threats and white knights: The Somalia Affair and peacekeeping as the new imperialism*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, p. 135. [↵]
 51. A more recent manifestation of representing immigrant communities as homophobic occurred in December 2007. An article published in the *Vancouver Sun* contextualized homophobic comments made by a Sikh leader under the banner that immigrants are changing the moral landscape of Canada, with the implication that 'Canadian values' are under threat by new immigrants. The article produced a huge response from within both LGBT communities and South Asian communities, forcing the Sikh leader to apologize. For critical commentary, see [Fatima Jaffer's article in Xtra West](#); for an anti-racist queer statement by a coalition of groups see [adilinfo.org](#) [↵]
 52. Avvy Go, 'Minorities and same-sex marriage.' *Toronto Star*, September 22, 2004, p. A21. [↵]
 53. [Felix Ng, 'I'm queer, I'm Chinese and my parents love me.' Capital Xtra!](#), 18 April 2005 [↵]
 54. Peter Fitzpatrick (2001). *Modernism and the grounds of law*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [↵]
 55. Michael Savage, Liberal MP, *House of Commons Debates*, June 28, 2005, p. 7947. [↵]
 56. Bill Siksay, NDP MP, *House of Commons Debates*, February 16, 2005, p. 3591. [↵]
 57. Bill Graham, Liberal MP, *House of Commons Debates*, February 21, 2005, p. 3769. [↵]
 58. Rob Moore, Conservative MP, *House of Commons Debates*, May 2, 2005, pp. 5495. [↵]
 59. Rona Ambrose, Conservative MP, *House of Commons Debates*, February 21, 2005, p. 3737. [↵]
 60. Jonathan Goldberg-Hiller (2002). *The limits to union: Same-sex marriage and the politics of civil rights*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, p. 207. [↵]

61. Stephen Harper, Leader of the Conservative Party, *House of Commons Debates*, February 16, 2005, p. 3583. [[↵](#)]
62. Peter Fitzpatrick (2001). *Modernism and the grounds of law*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 131. [[↵](#)]
63. Joseph A. Massad (2007). *Desiring Arabs*. Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, p. 195. [[↵](#)]
64. Senator Grafstein, *Debates of the Senate*, July 19, 2005, p. 1825. [[↵](#)]
65. Paul Martin, Prime Minister, *House of Commons Debates*, February 16, 2005, p. 3577. [[↵](#)]
66. Mario Silva, Liberal MP, *House of Commons Debates*, March 21, 2005, p. 4354. [[↵](#)]
67. For example, Balakrishnan Rajagopal, (2003). *International law from below: Development, social movements, and Third World resistance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Joseph A. Massad (2002). 'Re-Orienting Desire: The Gay International and the Arab World.' *Public Culture* 14(2): 361-385. [[↵](#)]
68. Peter Fitzpatrick (2001). *Modernism and the grounds of law*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 125, 128. [[↵](#)]
69. M. Jacqui Alexander (2005). *Pedagogies of crossing: Meditations on feminism, sexual politics, memory and the sacred*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, p. 193; David Theo Goldberg (2002). *The racial state*. Malden MA & Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, p.108. [[↵](#)]
70. Sedef Arat-Koc (2005). 'The disciplinary boundaries of Canadian identity after September 11: Civilizational identity, multiculturalism, and the challenge of anti-imperialist feminism.' *Social Justice*, 32(4), 32-49. [[↵](#)]
71. Sherene H. Razack (2004). *Dark threats and white knights: The Somalia Affair and peacekeeping as the new imperialism*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. [[↵](#)]
72. See [Canadians for Equal Marriage website](#) [[↵](#)]
73. See Suzanne Lenon (2005). 'Marrying citizens! Raced subjects? Re-thinking the terrain of equal marriage discourse.' *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law*, 17(2), 405-421. It is important to note that the *visual* campaign for equal marriage is predominantly white and middle class. See, for example, the website [samesexmarriage.ca](#) which is *the* site for web information on same-sex marriage in Canada. It is maintained by two white gay men who played a highly active and visible role in lobbying for same-sex marriage, both nationally and internationally. [[↵](#)]
74. Sherene H. Razack (2004). *Dark threats and white knights: The Somalia Affair and peacekeeping as the new imperialism*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, p. 27. [[↵](#)]

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Reading Interrelationality: The Racial Politics of Academic Research

Posted By [damien riggs](#) on 1 May 2008 @ 8:07 pm in [3-Postcolonial Sexuality \[forthcoming May 08\]](#), [Issues](#) | [No Comments](#)

In June 2007, and in the name of Indigenous children, then Australian Prime Minister John Howard announced that he would be moving military troops into the Northern Territory to combat the allegedly high rates of child abuse in remote Indigenous communities. In order to make this invasion possible, Howard passed legislation revoking the permit system, which had previously authorized Indigenous control of access to lands, and asserted government control over Indigenous lands for a period of 5 years. As Rebecca Stringer has argued, claims to be acting in the best interests of Indigenous children were thus a smoke screen for neocolonial violence to be enacted at individual and legislative levels against Indigenous communities.¹ Whilst the November 2007 election saw Howard voted out of power, the legislation controlling the sovereignty of Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory is still very much in place.

At approximately the same time as Howard announced his 'intervention', email lists to which I subscribe saw members of Australian queer parenting communities express concern about mooted legislation that would prevent queer people from undertaking transnational adoptions. Like myself, many of the members of these email lists identify as white queer people, and I could not help but feel concerned when reading these posts that some of the white queer parents or parents-to-be were failing to locate their rights claims in a relationship not only to the denial of Indigenous sovereignty on the part of the white nation, but also the voices of transnational adoptees who are increasingly speaking of the effects of the global commodification of children placed for adoption.

In this commentary I focus on one of the specific implications that I see arising from the often conflicting rights claims of white queers, transnational adoptees and Indigenous communities: namely, the differing ways in which research outcomes are put to use to purportedly 'support' these groups of people. In so doing, I highlight the racial politics of research on families and parenting, and I examine the intersections of privilege and oppression as they play out through both research agendas and in the lives of individual groups of people. My concern is centrally with the ways in which academic research has at times been of benefit to white queers, and certain white queers in particular, and how these benefits arise precisely from the aspects of white knowledge claims that overwrite Indigenous sovereignties, or which fail to acknowledge their location within global economies of privilege and oppression. In this sense, and without undermining the discrimination faced by white queers, I highlight the racial politics of (predominantly) white queer rights claims, and locate them within a relationship to the rights claims of other marginalized groups.

The (Mis)Uses of Research

In a paper discussing the report that precipitated the Northern Territory invasion, Ernest Hunter highlights how much of the research that the authors of the report relied upon focused on child abuse amongst non-Indigenous communities.² As Hunter suggests, this is perhaps understandable as there is so little research (or at least research that is recognized as such by the academy, as I will elaborate later) that focuses on Indigenous communities. Yet it is important to question how it is that research conducted with non-Indigenous communities becomes the norm against which Indigenous communities are measured. Certainly it is nothing new to suggest that research agendas in Australia and abroad have historically functioned to marginalize and pathologize Indigenous people. My concern here, however, goes further than recognizing the ways in which academic research fails to adequately represent Indigenous communities, and extends to ask the question of whether non-Indigenous academic research can ever actually represent Indigenous communities. If we are to understand much academic research as framed by white values, norms and forms of knowledge making, then it is legitimate to ask whether this framework has any relevance to the experiences of Indigenous communities.

Similar questions have been asked by transnational adoptees, who have questioned how research conducted by non-adoptees focusing on the life outcomes of people who are adopted can adequately

capture the experiences of adoptees, particularly when such research is reliant upon the logic of assimilation to assess 'successful life outcomes'. As Kirsten Hoo-Mi Sloth suggests, research on transnational adoption typically takes as its starting place the assumption that a 'successful adoption' results in the adoptee identifying solely with their adoptive parents, and in so doing rejecting or ignoring their birth parents and culture.³ By this logic, any person who is adopted who wishes to learn about their birth families or culture is constructed as a 'failed adoptee'. Yet, as research by transnational adoptees continues to demonstrate, engaging with and exploring histories of adoption plays an important, if not central, role in developing a sense of self that spans families of origin and families of upbringing.

These issues in regards to research on Indigenous communities and transnational adoption point towards some of the fundamental problems that exist when attempting to apply the logic of universalism to the specific experiences of those people who do not automatically fit within or indeed adhere to the worldview promoted by white academic research. Kirsten Hoo-Mi Sloth again suggests in this regard that part of the problem is the search within much academic research for singular answers or identities. In contrast, she suggests that many transnational adoptees inhabit a range of locations and identities that result from their engagement with varying forms of family and differing cultures. Indigo Williams Willing suggests that what is required is the 'representation of the transracial adoption experience by transracial adoptees ... It is time to view transracial adoptees as expert documenters of their own lives, not just as informants for other writers and researchers to use as decoration to authorise their own views'.⁴ In so doing, Williams Willing highlights the voices of transnational adoptees, but reminds us that this should not result in the construction of an essentialized 'transnational adoptee' identity category, but rather that there will be multiple stories told from multiple positions.

Recognition that claims to universality do not hold out has often necessarily been underpinned by a critique of essentialism, and the ways in which it is used to warrant particular identity claims or to justify particular research findings. Yet, as Indigenous scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson suggests, critiques of essentialism are more accurately critiques of the essentialist ways in which white western knowledge claims are misapplied to non-white people and cultures.⁵ This distinction is important, as while it is appropriate for claims to essentialism that operate in the service of colonization to be subjected to scrutiny, it is not appropriate for identity claims by Indigenous people that may be read as essentialist to be subjected to the same scrutiny. As Moreton-Robinson suggests, Indigenous claims to an ontological relationship to country, and the fact of sovereignty being carried by Indigenous people through their embodiment, is not equitable to white claims to essential differences between white and Indigenous people (claims that were used to justify colonization on the basis of the presumed inferiority of Indigenous people). Rather, Indigenous knowledge claims exceed white knowledge claims – the two are incommensurable in their histories and particular contexts.

Drawing attention to the limitations of critiques of essentialism brings me necessarily to research on queer, and more specifically lesbian and gay parenting. There now exists a substantial body of research on lesbian and gay parenting, and this continues to be used to advocate for the rights of queer parents more broadly. Yet, if we are to examine this body of research more closely, it quickly becomes apparent that the vast majority of it focuses on the experiences of white, middle-class, coupled lesbian mothers.⁶ While this particular group of people have historically required considerable support in maintaining custody of their children in the context of heterosexist and homophobic societies, it is nonetheless important to question how the emphasis upon white queer parents within academic research again perpetuates both the norm of whiteness, and the exclusion of a diverse range of parenting practices. Not only does this emphasis upon white middle-class coupled lesbian parents fail to engage with the experiences of non-white queer parents, but it also establishes a research base that, as a result of its almost exclusive focus upon one particular group of queer parents, could potentially be used against other groups of queer parents. In other words, it is not inconceivable that a court of law could use the body of research on white middle-class coupled lesbian mothers to argue against the rights of single white working class lesbian mothers, or coupled gay middle-class Indigenous fathers (for example). As much as this research explicitly supports the parenting of one group of parents, it implicitly fails to sanction the parenting of other groups of parents. In this sense, it is important to examine the ways in which particular bodies of research, whilst being of benefit to some people, may actually stand in the way of the rights of other people.

Finally, and to return to the report that was misused by the Howard government to justify the Northern Territory invasion, it is not only the case that research on non-indigenous families is often misapplied to Indigenous families, but it is also the case that only particular forms of research are considered legitimate. In contrast to the research on lesbian and gay parenting, which on the whole typically adopts a very

normative model of scientific empirical research, research conducted by and for Indigenous communities often challenges this model, and as a result, its findings are often marginalized. My point here is thus that research on Indigenous communities may not necessarily be as scarce as is often presumed. Rather, it is what we count as research that renders invisible the existence of knowledge about Indigenous communities. That one particular report could be so actively misused by the Howard government signifies not only its willful engagement in neocolonialism, but also its prioritizing of particular voices over others. That Indigenous communities were not consulted as a starting place for any 'intervention' signals the fact that it is not only research agendas that are driven by white knowledge claims, but it is also the whiteness of the recipient of the research that shapes which knowledges will be privileged. When white norms and values shape our views on what counts as truthful or morally upstanding, the voices of marginalized groups of people, such as Indigenous communities and transnational adoptees, are further marginalized. That these groups of people continue to resist marginalization and assert the legitimacy of their own claims to knowledge signals the limits of whiteness as hegemony and thus highlights the point at which white claims to truth break down.

Conclusions

In this commentary I have sought to draw out some of the complex interrelationships between Indigenous communities, white queer people, and the children they seek to adopt. In so doing, I have highlighted how the rights claims of white queers are often supported by research framed by particular (white) ways of knowing, and that this stands in direct contrast to research conducted by white academics that has at times been used against Indigenous communities and transnational adoptees (amongst others). While there are of course white researchers who also campaign against the rights of queer people, the legacies of colonization and the commodification of children in a global context means that white queer people are increasingly likely in the Western world to have at least some degree of sanction by the state (at the very least on the basis of their whiteness), while Indigenous people (for example) continue to be subject to regressive, neocolonial legislation.

Placing the rights of the three groups that I focus on in this paper in a relationship to one another is thus an important strategic move. It refuses to see the three groups as separate, and instead emphasizes the contingency of the rights that white queers have (as white Australians) upon the denial of Indigenous sovereignty, and places the desire of some white queers to engage in transnational adoption in a relationship to global economies of exchange in which discourses of 'children's rights' often serve as a smokescreen for the rights of the white nation. Considering how those of us who identify as white queers stand to benefit from neocolonial practices thus does not undermine speaking of the discrimination that we face living in heterosexist and homophobic societies, but rather it places this discrimination in a relationship to the privileges that we hold as white people. Being accountable for this must entail not only the diversification of research agendas so as to include a broader range of people, but also to recognize and examine the racial politics of research agendas, and the ends to which academic research is put in the service of neocolonialisms.

Notes

1. [Stringer, R. \(2007\) 'A nightmare of the neocolonial kind: Politics of suffering in Howard's Northern Territory intervention', *Borderlands e-journal*, 6. Accessed November 15, 2007 \[↵\]](#)
2. Hunter, E. (2007) ' "Little children" and big sticks'. In J. Altman & M. Hinkson (eds.) *Coercive reconciliation: Stabilise, normalise, exit Aboriginal Australia* (pp. 121-131). North Carlton: Arena Publications [↵]
3. Hoo-Mi Sloth, K. (2006) 'Researching adoption: Whose perspective and what issues?', in J. Jeong Trenka, J. Chinyere Oparah & S. Yung Shin (eds.) *Outsiders within: Writing on transnational adoption*. (pp. 253-258). Boston: South End Press [↵]
4. Williams Willing, I. (2006) 'Beyond the Vietnam war adoptions: Representing our transracial lives', in J. Jeong Trenka, J. Chinyere Oparah & S. Yung Shin (eds.) *Outsiders within: Writing on transnational adoption*. (pp. 259-266). Boston: South End Press [↵]
5. Moreton-Robinson, A. (2003) 'I still call Australia home: Indigenous belonging and place in a white postcolonizing society', in Ahmed, S., Castañeda, C., Fortier, A. & Sheller, M. (eds.) *Uprootings/regroundings: Questions of home and migration*. Oxford: Berg [↵]
6. [Riggs, D.W. \(2007\) 'On being "acceptable": State sanction, race privilege, and lesbian and gay parents'. *Reconstruction: Interdisciplinary Cultural Studies Journal*, 7. Retrieved November 29, 2007 \[↵\]](#)

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URL to article: <http://www.darkmatter101.org/site/2008/05/01/reading-interrelationality-the-racial-politics-of-academic-research/>

Queerness as Europeanness: Immigration, Orientalist Visions and Racialized Encounters in Israel/Palestine

Posted By [adi kuntsman](#) on 2 May 2008 @ 12:55 pm in [3-Postcolonial Sexuality \[forthcoming May 08\]](#), [Issues](#) | [No Comments](#)

Over the last 15 years more than a million people have immigrated to Israel from the former Soviet Union, welcomed by the Israeli 'Law of Return' that grants immediate citizenship and financial support to all Jews and their family members. My last research¹ focused on the queers among them, looking at the ways sexuality and nationhood intertwine in queer immigrants' sense of belonging to the country that is officially defined by state policy – and indeed perceived by many immigrants themselves – as their home.

The migration and settlement of Russian-speaking immigrants – queer and straight alike – to Israel is inseparable from the Eurocentric and colonial visions of the Zionist project. The very 'Law of Return', for example, aims to provide Jews from all over the world a safe home. But at the same time it makes Israel into an apartheid state, where the non-Jewish, Palestinian refugees who were driven out of the land in 1948 and not allowed to return. The Palestinian citizens of Israel are discriminated against in all spheres of life, and in particular in the right to land and political organizing. But the Zionist project is not simply Jewish, it is also Eurocentric. From the early days of Jewish settlement in Palestine, and then from the first days of the state of Israel, Jews of non-European origin have been subordinated economically and colonized culturally. The country's elite were the *Ashkenazim* – Jews from Europe. The *Mizrachim* – meaning in Hebrew 'the Orientals', from North Africa and Asia – many of whom arrived in Israel in the 1950s, were robbed of their cultural heritage and language and became second-class citizens.²

The arrival of Jews from the former Soviet Union – and in particular, its *Ashkenazi* majority, those who lived in the 'European' parts of the country, was supposed to strengthen Eurocentric colonial domination. As Jews, the newcomers were expected to 'contribute' to Israel's demographic war over the Palestinians, that is, ensure the Jewish majority. As light-skinned Europeans, many of whom had higher education, the 'Russians', as they were called in Israel, were desirable for the Zionist project of Israeliness as white middle-classness and Europeanness. At the same time the attitude to Russians was ambivalent: as immigrants from the Eastern/communist block, they were seen as not the right kind of Europeans (and as not Western enough)³ and had to be re-educated into proper Westernness and Israeliness.

In the past decade a large body of research has been written on immigrants from the former Soviet Union, including the analysis of immigrants' perception of the *Mizrachim* and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Many studies have also explored gender and sexuality and the ways they condition and shape immigrants' belonging. None of these studies, however, deal with non-heterosexual immigrants, thus approaching nationhood and gender relations as exclusively heterosexual.

In my work I am interested precisely in the relations between immigration, queer sexuality and national identity. Analysis of the relations between queer sexuality and the nation have predominantly focused on the ways in which gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgenders have been excluded from citizenship and national belonging. Or else they focus on the ways they could 'queer' the nation, for example through various practices of citizenship such as marriage, military service, or consumption. Theoretical debates on these new forms of sexual citizenship have mostly focused on whether – and to what extent – queering the nation is transgressive or mainstreaming. 'Queer' in these theories is used to designate non-normative bodies, sexualities and identities that are by definition transgressive and dissenting; while 'queering' is often seen as a transgressive practise of denaturalising and challenging the heterosexual order. Recent developments in queer theory, however, have questioned this idea of 'queering' as necessarily transgressive. Jasbir Puar, for example, in her analysis of queerness and the post 9-11 'war on terror', suggests that 'instead of retaining queerness exclusively as dissenting, resistant, and alternative (all of which queerness importantly is and does)', we need to 'underscore contingency and complicity [of queerness] with dominant formations'.⁴

It is the contingency and complicity of queerness within dominant racial and nationalist formations of Israel/Palestine that I want to address in this paper. I will do so through two ethnographic stories. Both stories describe queer ‘Russians’ visions of belonging – to the local night scene, and to the Israeli nation. In both, as I will show, their belonging is narrated through rejection and/or demonization of Israel’s colonized Others: the *Mizrachim* and the Palestinians. The stories are based on my ethnographic study of Russian-speaking queer organising in Israel. In particular, I conducted participant observations and archival work on the website aguda.org.⁵ The website, created in 2001, served as a vibrant meeting place in cyberspace. It hosted a discussion forum, structured as a bulletin board that was visited by hundreds of immigrants.

I

The first story is about the queer immigrants club, ‘At Roby’s’, that was established in Tel-Aviv at the same time as the website, in the early 2000s. The club was often discussed on the website, and many of its visitors saw it as a unique place of hospitality without obligations, kinship without blood. ‘Being among friends’, ‘being oneself’ and ‘feeling among the kin’ were frequent metaphors used to describe the club. Someone wrote that the club exists because it ‘warms up our [Russian] soul’.

The notion of warming up the soul constitutes the club as a site of what Svetlana Boym calls ‘diasporic intimacy’: a form of connectedness between immigrants, ‘a precarious cosiness of a foreign home’.⁶ Describing the club as a place with / and for the soul, and as a site of immigrants’ belonging works hand in hand with depicting other places as less welcoming. The Israeli clubs are juxtaposed to ‘At Roby’s’ when they are described as cold, soul-less, unwelcoming and in some extreme cases, even horrible. One woman wrote about her visit to one of the biggest Tel Aviv dancing clubs, ‘Shadow’: ‘what a horror...I will never set foot there ever again...haven’t been so horrified for a long while...we fled...went to Roby’s.... to rest our souls...’. When asked by another participant why was she horrified, she elaborated:

I didn’t get a chance to see or hear.... Because of the cacophony of something that pretends to be music... and a DJ... of Moroccan appearance...eeuwww... in short, horrid. Had to leave the place pronto... my health is more important to me.

Here the speaker’s soul is narrated as a victim of the surroundings: the music is a cacophony and the DJ is a monster. In a typical manner for racist speech the dark other, the ‘Moroccan’, is presented as a horrid and disgusting figure – ‘eeuuuw’, ‘horrid’, ‘I haven’t been so horrified for a long time’, ‘fled’, while the speaker becomes a sufferer whose soul needs protection. Disgust, as several feminist scholars point out,⁷ works to produce distance between some bodies and closeness to others. Here, importantly, the emphasis is not just on bodies but also on spaces and on bodies that *become* spaces. The speaker is not simply disgusted or horrified by the Moroccan-looking DJ: the whole space appears as disgusting to her through the sounds that the DJ produces.

The DJ of ‘Moroccan appearance’ is a figure that requires some closer examination. In the Orientalist discourse of many Russian immigrants ‘the Moroccan’ comes to stand for all Jews of Asian and North-African descent, the *Mizrachim*. Moroccans are a frequent figure of Russian-speaking immigrants racist lamenting on their life ‘in the Orient’ – the Middle East, lamenting that works to constitute Russian immigrants’ own cultural and racial superiority as ‘Europeans’. Reference to ‘the Moroccans’, ‘these Moroccans’, ‘there are only Moroccans there’ is often expressed in a derogatory tone, often accompanied with other expressions of disgust. The ‘Moroccan-looking’ DJ is therefore not necessarily of Moroccan and even *Mizrachi* descent, but he is figured as non-European. His Oriental appearance is metonymically linked to the sounds – a cacophony that pretends to be music. The DJ and his music make the place repelling and horrid. The ‘Russian’s club and its welcoming the soul is constituted in racialized opposition to the horrors of the Orient.

II

The second story is about images of Palestinian queers on the website. In general, Palestinians were tellingly absent in the many narrations of Israel as place, country and society. In discussions on politics Palestinians were often depicted as patriarchal, heteronormative and homophobic, and of course, as terrorists. Heterosexualising – and demonising – the Palestinians and queering Israel (for example, when immigrants describe their arrival in Israel as a discovery of queer sexuality or as finding a GLBT community) worked in tandem to mark ‘Palestinian queer’ as an impossible subject. There were two occasions in my fieldwork where such subjects appeared, causing waves of anxiety, hostility and hatred.

Their arrival – in Israel and into cyberspace – was figured as a threat.

The first occasion was a case of a Palestinian gay man, fearing persecution in the West Bank and seeking asylum in Israel. The case was widely discussed in the Israeli media, and was also debated on the immigrants' website. Most participants said that the man was not really gay, but was probably pretending to be so in order to sneak into Israel. 'And what if he is a terrorist', wrote one person. 'And even if he is not lying about his sexuality, what are the chances that he will be forced to become a terrorist to ransom the family's shame, if his sexuality is discovered?' wrote another. The debate about the queer asylum seeker soon turned into a performance of Orientalist knowledge about the Arabs and Muslims. One person, the community's self-proclaimed intellectual, cited Freud's theory of the death drive and declared Islam as a deadly force that destroys world civilisation. Another one wrote that the Palestinian gay man should not be expelled because Arabs are 'cute boys with almond asses'.

The second occasion was a new female participant – or at least a person writing in the guise of female gender – who called herself 'Daughter of Palestine'. From the moment of her appearance on the website people questioned her identity. She is not a real Palestinian, said some; she pretends to be an Arab, wrote others. Some had tried to out her through questioning; others suggested possible explanations to her name and her appearance in the Russian-Israeli queer forum, in a 'lesbian' section. Some told her that her name was a provocation and she had to change it. Her appearance also brought up sexual fantasies about sex with an Arab woman. 'I would never lay an Arab [woman], that's for sure,' wrote one participant, 'they all wear *burkas* and pretend they are saints'. Another one responded:

Maybe they do what they can, but if you fondle them gently, and introduce a little tongue, you will discover what oriental passion is, and the *burka* will be forgotten at once; you just look at their suffering, at their fear of being different and you spit at their backs, but they are just a poor breed afraid of being cursed and rejected by everyone. You should have compassion for their miserable Arab fate.

This exchange was structured around two discourses of Arab female sexuality: on the one hand it is seen as repressed and therefore unattractive for a lesbian; on the other hand Arab women appear as passionate. Jaspir Puar in her discussion of discourses of Muslim sexuality around Abu-Ghraib notes the shift in the image of the Orient:

The Orient, once conceived in Foucault's *ars erotica* and Said's deconstructive work as the place of original release, unfettered sin, and acts with no attendant identities or consequences, now symbolizes the space of repression *and* perversion, and the site of freedom has been relocated to Western identity.⁸

In the Orientalized fantasies about the Palestinian gay man (the cute boy with the almond ass) and the Arab woman (always behind the *burka*) the two images are present at the same time. Oriental sexuality is *both* repressed (making queer desires impossible) *and* inherently passionate. But importantly, the depiction of 'Arab sexuality' is always structured within Orientalist knowledge, positioning the speakers – the Russian-speaking queer immigrants – as those who both *know* and *have the power over* the Oriental other. The discussions on Palestinians were always framed within the regime of suspicion (the asylum seeker lies about being gay; 'Daughter of Palestine' is a provocation), which contrasted with the unquestioned right of Jews to be in Israel, and with the self-positioning of the Russian immigrants as what Ghassan Hage calls 'worrying nationalists'⁹ who passionately guard the nation's boundaries and always worry about unwelcome intruders.

Concluding remarks

The stories presented here should be read within the context of the queer immigrants' own struggle to belong. In these stories, the queer immigrants' spaces of belonging (the community's club, the imagined national space and the space of the on-line forum) were constituted as 'our places' through Islamophobic and Orientalist images of demonized *Mizrachim* and Palestinians. There were significant differences, of course, in the way *Mizrachim* and Palestinians were presented. The anti-*Mizrachi* racism was strongly opposed by many participants on the website (some of the people protested against expressions of hatred towards the *Mizrachim* by saying 'but they are Jews, too!'). The anti-Palestinian hatred, on the other hand, was rarely challenged. What is more, those few who did try to do so were themselves attacked by other participants. The legitimacy of racist speech, in other words, resembled the national boundaries that divide between the internal colonized Other and the external enemy. But despite the

differences, the two forms of Orientalism have a lot in common. Both divide between what Ella Shohat calls the first world (the European *Ashkenazi* elite) and the third world, the *Mizrachi* Jews and Palestinians.¹⁰

But what is it about Orientalism and Islamophobia that is so appealing for immigrants? In a study about the Russian-language media in Israel, Dmitry Shumsky¹¹ noted that on their arrival in Israel Russian immigrants are marginalized by Israeli society, and in order to negotiate their place in the Israeli social hierarchy, immigrant writers and journalists employ an Orientalist perspective towards Arabs and Jews of Eastern origin. Immigrants' Orientalism has its own cultural roots: using Said's *Orientalism*, Shumsky points out the historically ambivalent position of Russia as 'Oriental' in the eyes of the West, and 'Western' and orientalizing towards its own others in the East. Arriving in Israel from the former Soviet Union, the immigrants also occupy an ambivalent position, as Europeans 'but not quite'. Orientalist discourse of the immigrants serves at the same time as a tool for reading the new society, and as symbolic capital in the struggle for location in the local classed, racial and ethnic hierarchy. Anti-*Mizrachi* and anti-Palestinian racism aims to locate the newcomers within the Jewish-*Ashkenazi* elite. An anti-Arab and anti-Muslim stand frequently displayed in Russian-Israeli media and literature also links the immigrants to the globalized 'West' fighting the 'evil of Muslim terrorism'.

Shumsky's analysis reveals that the idea of Europeaness as superiority (and as colonial identity) can become symbolic capital in the Zionist economy of Europeaness (as well as in the global world order). But what about sexuality?

As many studies of Israeli GLBT organising show, the dominant Israeli queer culture is complicit with racial and colonial formations. The mainstream GLBT politics in Israel are almost exclusively Jewish-*Ashkenazi* and middle class; Israeli queer's claims of citizenship are based on patriotism and militarism;¹² and many gay night clubs apply racial(ized) selection at the entrance, a 'face control' of sorts where some *Mizrachi* men are denied entrance. The growing queer presence in Israel, and GLBTs claims to rights and visibility are undoubtedly important. But such a presence, often oriented to the 'West', and usually uncritical of its own racial and class privileges, figures the queer as white, European, and 'progressive', juxtaposing it to all those who are marked as 'traditional' and backward'.¹³ The Israeli queer scene, in other words, is saturated with the notion of European superiority; queerness *becomes* Europeaness. And just as in the case of the Russia-speaking media, immigrant queers seem to adopt Europeaness as symbolic capital in negotiating their place in Israeli society and the GLBT scene.

I want to return to Puar's call to explore the complicity of queerness within dominant formations. As my discussion has shown, establishing queer migrant places does not necessarily challenge Israel's racial and national order. On the contrary, racism and Orientalism become tools in immigrants' positioning; turning into a capital and an orienting point and into a tempting promise of belonging in the queer economies of Europeaness.

Notes

1. *Figurations of Violence and Belonging: Sexuality, Immigration and Nationalism in Israel/Palestine and in Cyberspace*, doctoral dissertation, Lancaster University, 2007 [↩]
2. Shohat, E. 1997 'Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Jewish Victims', in McClintock, A., Mufti, A. and Shohat, E. (eds.), *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 39-68 [↩]
3. For example, the 'Russian' immigrant community was seen as politically 'immature' due to years of living under Communist rule because their patterns of voting resembled those of lower-class *Mizrachim*, rather than the middle-class *Ashkenazim*. Similarly, the 'Russian' women were marked as 'reproductively irresponsible' because of their reliance on abortion rather than other contraceptive methods used by middle-class *Ashkenazi* Israeli women (see, for example, Amir, D. and Benjamin, O. (1997) 'Defining encounters: who are women entitled to join the Israeli collective?', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 20 (5/6), 639-650). This, too, was explained by the 'backwardness' of life in the Soviet Union [↩]
4. Puar, J. 2005 'Queer Times, Queer Assemblages', What's Queer about Queer Studies Now? Special Issue of *Social text*, Vol. 23:3-4 84-85, pp. 121-2 [↩]
5. Since the completion of my fieldwork in 2004 the site has changed its name, target audience and domain location [↩]
6. Boym S.2001 'On Diasporic Intimacy', in *The Future of Nostalgia*, Basic Books, p. 254 [↩]

7. Ahmed, S. (2004) *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press [↵]
8. Puar 2005: 125 [↵]
9. Hage, G. 2003 *Against Paranoid Nationalism: Searching for hope in a shrinking society*. Sydney: Pluto Press [↵]
10. Shohat, 1997 [↵]
11. Shumsky, D. 2004 'Post-Zionist Orientalism? Orientalist Discourse and Islamophobia among the Russian-Speaking Intelligentsia in Israel', *Social Identities*, 10:1, 83-99 [↵]
12. Kadish, R. (2001) 'My Zionism is Bigger than Your Zionism: Israeli Lesbians, Gay Men, Gay Rights and National Identity'. PhD Dissertation Chapter, University of Berkeley, California; Yosef, R. (2005) 'The National Closet: Gay Israel in Yossi and Jagger', *GLQ, A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 11 (2), 283-300 [↵]
13. Yosef, R. (2004) *Beyond Flesh: Queer Masculinities and Nationalism in Israeli Cinema*, Rutgers University Press [↵]

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Miniskirts and Kangas: the Use of Culture in Constituting Postcolonial Sexuality

Posted By [nolwazi mkhwanazi](#) on 2 May 2008 @ 12:54 pm in [3-Postcolonial Sexuality \[forthcoming May 08\]](#), [Issues](#) | [No Comments](#)

On the 6th March 2006, South African Deputy President, Jacob Zuma pleaded not guilty to raping a 31 year old family friend, Khwezi, at his home on the 2nd of November 2005. During the highly publicised trial that followed, Zuma claimed that he and the complainant had consensual sex. Zuma told the court that in adhering to Zulu cultural norms, he had been obliged to have sexual intercourse with the complainant because she was sexually aroused. Had he walked away from the complainant when she was in this state, Zuma said, in Zulu culture his actions would have been tantamount to rape. As the trial progressed, Zuma's supporters, male and female, grew in numbers. When the verdict was delivered - that the state had not proven beyond a reasonable doubt that Zuma raped Khwezi - Zuma's supporters, who had gathered in their thousands, cheered and sang 'Awuleth umshini wami' (bring me my machine gun).

In South Africa the Zuma rape trial sparked a public debate about the notion of culture and constitutional rights - such as women's rights and rights on the basis of sexual orientation - of citizens in post-apartheid South Africa. Men and women equally supported Zuma's return to 'traditional' values that contradict the government's investment in women's rights and the legislative commitment on gender transformation as embodied in the post-apartheid constitution. The media simplistically portrayed this discussion as being about tradition versus modernity. Those who appealed to culture were portrayed as 'traditionalists' and those who appealed to constitutional rights as 'modern'. The Zuma rape trial presents a unique vantage point to examine the ways in which the notion of culture is invoked to lend authority to a particular definition of gender and sexuality in post-apartheid South Africa.

Let me begin by saying that the trial was not about whether Zuma and Khwezi had sexual intercourse, that was a given. What was at stake was whether Zuma had raped Khwezi. In his defence, Zuma strove to make the case that he and Khwezi had consensual sexual intercourse. He did this by invoking the notion of culture. As Steven Robins speculates: 'Zuma's lawyer, Kemp J. Kemp, no doubt advised him that this approach [the appeal to culture] was strategic and effective in making the case that sex had indeed been consensual'.¹ Moreover, this strategy allowed Zuma not only to make the case about consensual sex, but it also allowed him to garner support for himself by exploiting the tensions between amaZulu and amaXhosa regarding the next ANC presidency. More significantly, this strategy enabled Zuma to make particular statements about Zulu culture and consequently, about Zulu sexuality.

During the trial Zuma performed 'Zuluness'. He spoke only in isiZulu using Zulu idioms. For example, he referred to his accuser's private parts as *isibhaya sika bab'wakhe* - her father's *kraal* - and referred to a condom as *ijazi ka mkhwenyana* - the groom/husband's coat. The use of these idioms marked him as a 'real' Zulu man, or a '100% Zulu boy'.² According to Robins, Zuma's situated performance of Zuluness was effective because in South Africa 'reified conceptions of African culture carry considerable clout in the court and on the streets'.³ The performance of Zuluness enabled Zuma to effectively make the case that his everyday actions were influenced by his Zuluness. Zuma presented himself as a cultural automaton - following the rules of his cultural heritage.

In claiming that by having sexual intercourse with Khwezi, he acted in accordance with Zulu cultural norms, Zuma insinuated that the charge of rape was a result of miscommunication or a misunderstanding between himself and Khwezi. During the trial, Zuma testified that on 2 November 2005 after he had given Khwezi a massage they had sexual intercourse. Zuma claimed that Khwezi had given him sexual signals which included wearing a knee length skirt and wearing no underwear under her *kanga* (wrap). Zuma's justification for having sex with Khwezi was that he could not walk away from a sexually aroused woman, because in Zulu culture leaving a woman in a state of arousal is tantamount to rape. If Zuma the 100% Zulu boy acted in accordance with cultural norms, then by accusing him of rape, Khwezi was then not a 'real' Zulu woman. If Khwezi had been a 'real' Zulu woman, it is implied in Zuma's statements, she would not have accused him of rape and furthermore, she would have remained silent and submitted to his advances.

Zuma's statements during the trial are based on a particular understanding of sexuality which Zuma through his performance of situated ethnicity puts forward as Zulu norms. His strategy of redefining rape - as what a man does not do to a sexually aroused woman - reinforced an idea of manhood as being about sexual prowess and being in control of one's own sexuality. Womanhood, it was implied, is to submit to the male's advances and to remain silent. Zuma testified that when he asked if he could ejaculate inside the complainant, the complainant did not respond and so he did so. Having admitted during the trial that he had not used a condom, even though he knew Khwezi was HIV positive, Zuma (the then-president of the South African National AIDS Commission) argued that he took a shower immediately afterwards to minimize his chances of becoming infected.⁴

Throughout the trial Zuma's wives remained glaringly silent. Laura Miti, an independent columnist, draws attention to this: '[w]hat do they have to say about a husband who confesses to having unprotected sex with an HIV positive woman outside of his polygamous marriage and who testifies that he will not leave a sexually aroused woman wanting?' she asks.⁵ Zuma's wives' silence spoke volumes. Indeed, the complainant's mistake, which earned her the wrath of Zuma's followers, was that she did not remain silent. Before either the accused or the complainant's testimony was considered, it became clear that Khwezi had broken a norm. She had accused a Zulu man of rape. Indeed, from the first day of the trial Zuma's supporters hailed abuse at Khwezi carrying posters with the words: 'How much did they pay you, *nondindwa* (bitch)?' and set alight to pictures of her whilst chanting 'burn the bitch'. As the trial progressed the defence mounted a campaign of discrediting the complainant's credibility. They painted her as emotionally and psychologically unstable and presented Zuma as a model Zulu, a shining example of a man who is in touch with and supported by the masses.

Zuma's defence of culture and use of tradition as a resource played into a political battle within the African National Congress (ANC) concerning the next ANC president. Pro-Zuma supporters viewed the trial as an orchestrated conspiracy to discredit Zuma and thus jeopardize his chances of becoming the next ANC President. The lines were drawn in terms of ethnicity - Zuma representing Zulus and the anti-Zuma camp supporting Xhosa leadership as so far represented by Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki. In such circumstances Zuma's tactic in strongly aligning himself with culture was a productive political strategy. At every level, those who supported Zuma during the trial, including those who believed his pronouncements about Zulu culture, did so out of political allegiance. The direct link between the rape trial and the ANC leadership battle was made at the ANC conference in Polokwane in December 2007 where both Zuma and Mbeki were nominated for the position of President. As an immediate reaction to Zuma's victory, high profile ANC members sang 'Awuleth umshini wami'. The connotation of the machine gun and the penis has been pointed out by a number of scholars.⁶ As the new ANC President, Zuma is now in the best position to become the third President of post-apartheid South Africa in 2009.

Zuma's statements during the trial, however, did not go entirely uncontested. They outraged many South African citizens, especially feminist activists, gay and lesbian activists, and AIDS activists. Zuma's statements made mockery not only of the bodies that he headed but also of the gender and sexual rights enshrined in the South African constitution.⁷ Many people, some of whom identified themselves as Zulu, challenged the idea that Zulu culture dictates that an aroused woman needs to be sexually satisfied. They drew attention to the idea that culture is not static nor is it homogenous. In other words, that what is defined as Zulu culture constantly changes and that there are multiple understandings of what constitutes Zulu culture which are themselves contested.

So although post-apartheid South Africa silenced the discourses of tradition and culture, to a large extent the legal rape case against Zuma highlighted that there is still a great tendency to return to so-called traditional and cultural values in order to restore a particular gender regime. This gender regime constructs men as being in the dominant and public position within society; it continually allows violence against women and imposes 'traditional' systems of controlling women in the post-colonial nation-state. In fact, it seems as if women's rights as inscribed into the constitution are now associated with Mandela's and Mbeki's presidency while Zuma is linked to the discourse of culture and tradition in relation to the question of what women wear.

The issue of women's clothing has also arisen in two other incidents subsequent to the Zuma trial, where men have again violated women's bodies. In July 2007 25 year old Zandile Mpanza was attacked by four men in Durban as a result of her non-compliance with a ban which stipulates that women are not allowed to wear trousers in Umlazi's T-section. She was stripped naked and forced to walk through the streets. Her assailants destroyed her home and belongings and she was forced to move out of the

township.

In February 2008, 25 year old Nwabisa Ngcukana was sexually assaulted by taxi drivers at the Noord Street taxi rank in the Johannesburg Central Business District (CBD) for wearing a miniskirt. In this incident which occurred on the 17th of February 2008, some taxi drivers poured alcohol over Nwabisa's face and yelled obscenities at her, while others inserted their fingers into her vagina. The taxi drivers said that they were teaching her a lesson. A crowd gathered and cheered. A few days after the incident 600 commuters marched to the Johannesburg CBD in protest. The protesters were met by a group of taxi drivers who screamed at them that women who wear miniskirts need to be taught a lesson. Confronted by protesters dressed in miniskirts, the taxi drivers 'striped naked in retaliation' and sang the song made famous by Zuma supporters, 'Awuleth umshini wami' This reference to the rape trial not only demonstrates a widespread belief in men's entitlement to women's bodies, but also a sense of their impunity.

Interestingly, in the Noord street incident, women again played a crucial role in justifying the behaviour of the male perpetrators. In this case older women hawkers were the ones who invoked culture as a justification of the actions of the taxi drivers, stating that miniskirts are against culture. The arguments were that young women need to be taught a lesson about how to conduct themselves in a sexually and morally acceptable way. This argument draws attention to intergenerational and socio-economic antagonisms. By defending the very public assault of young women like Nwabisa, women hawkers are attempting to assert their power to define appropriate ideas of womanhood in post-apartheid South Africa where their roles as mothers, elders and moral educators are increasingly being threatened.

In this instance, however, the use of culture as a defence did not hold up. This may have to do with the fact that it was not made clear which 'culture' was being referred to. Furthermore, the National House of Traditional Leaders openly condemned the actions of the taxi drivers stating that the incident has nothing to do with culture since short skirts were often worn in traditional ceremonies. Referring back to Robins' statement about the power that reified concepts of culture carry on the street and courts in South Africa, this particular incident signals a shift away from culture being an acceptable justification for behaviour that violates an individual's constitutional rights. While it remains distressing to see that there are continued efforts to define heterosexual masculinity in relation to the sexual violation of women's bodies, the outright rejection of culture as a defence in the Noord street incident points to a changing attitude to the antagonistic pull between defending women's rights and cultural rights. The actions of the protesters visibly drew attention to how women feel about the conditions under which they are expected to live.

Notes

1. Robins, S. 2006. Sexual rights and sexual cultures: reflections on the 'Zuma Affair' and 'new masculinities' in South Africa. *Horizontes Antropológicos* 12 (26):164. [□]
2. During the trial his supporters wore t-shirts emblazoned with the slogan 100% Zulu boy to show their support for Zuma and to endorse his self-representation as a 'real' Zulu. [□]
3. Robins, S. 2006. Sexual rights and sexual cultures: reflections on the 'Zuma Affair' and 'new masculinities' in South Africa. *Horizontes Antropológicos* 12 (26):165. [□]
4. This statement obviously was a serious setback to the work of AIDS activists throughout the country. However, it also gave material for a range of satire – Zapiro, the cartoonist for the weekly *Mail&Guardian*, for example, draws Zuma with a shower sprinkler attached to his head ever since. Needless to say that Zuma filed a lawsuit against him. [□]
5. *Daily Dispatch* 13.05.2006 [□]
6. See, for example, the work of Klaus Theweleit 1987. *Male fantasies*. Cambridge : Polity. [□]
7. At the time of the trial, Zuma was president of the Moral Regeneration Campaign and of the South African National AIDS Commission. [□]

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Is'khathi - A Photo-biographical Project

Posted By [zanele muholi](#) on 2 May 2008 @ 12:53 pm in [3-Postcolonial Sexuality \[May 08\]](#), [Issues](#) | [No Comments](#)

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Zanele Muholi is a photographer and activist whose work explores issues of black women's sexuality in post-apartheid South Africa. Muholi's images raise issues such as hate crime, HIV/Aids, gender dissidence, performativity and passing. Muholi documents some of the key issues within the lesbian community in Johannesburg and by doing so de-romanticizes sexual pleasure by transgressing normative perceptions of (hetero)sexuality: she achieves this by introducing objects and practices such as strap-ons, breast-wrapping and dental dams into her photographs (see, for example, Muholi's book and exhibition [Only Half the Picture](#)).

At the same time Muholi demonstrates an awareness and responsibility in her attempt to reclaim the body. Her pictures not only tell the story of the subject but also Muholi's story as the photographer. Muholi knows the women she is visualizing and that she portrays. The women are her friends, her colleagues or women she meets within her work as an activist: 'These are not only subjects, these are my people, this describes the person I am.'¹ Her work represents the postcolonial idea of self-definition, while at the same time targeting the assumption that homosexuality cannot act as a signifier for a decolonized subject. The photographs emerge as a political act, as an act of becoming. The subjects of the photography, and Muholi herself, work in opposition to the determinations of the colonial project. They reappear as subjects not objects or the so-called objectified Other. By doing so Muholi challenges the sex/gender regime that underwrote colonialism and apartheid and opens spaces in which people are able to constitute themselves. **DM.**

Zanele Muholi (with Sabine Neidhardt)

'dead bodies do not bleed'- bell hooks²

Is'khathi is a Zulu expression that is translated as 'time of the month' or 'period in time', with the added connotation that there is something secretive in/about this 'period in time'. It is also about the politics of time. The project focuses on our bleeding, on menstrual blood. It consists of 7/18 photographs — portraits — of my own and my partner's April menses captured in a colour digital format.

Figure 1: *Amahluli* - clot(ted)

Figure 2: *Ibala* - bloodspot

Figure 3: *iveza* - reveal(ing)

Figure 4: *Impukane* - fly

Figure 5: *Uubende* - thick blood

Figure 6: *Isibonelo* - evidence

Figure 7: *Isililo* - outcry

With this blood series, I wanted to highlight that one cannot talk about the body, about a body politic, without addressing the biological functioning of the body. One cannot theorize the aesthetic of the body across space, culture, and time without talking about the social and gendered aspects of the body, its internal components and functions, especially menstruation. bell hooks makes a similar point in her discussion of the use of blood in photographer Andres Serrano's work *Heaven and Hell*. Serrano depicts the body of a white female nude, hands tied behind her back, blood dripping from her. hooks reads Serrano's work as '[piercing] the screen of patriarchal denial, [demanding] that we acknowledge what we are really seeing when we look at the female nude in Western art.'³ There is no pre-modern, modern, or post-modern aesthetic of the body to theorize without speaking of what is the life force within. Menstrual blood is life and hooks is right when she says 'dead bodies do not bleed.'⁴

Is'khathi is about natural biological functions, of blood flowing with life through our butch/femme/trans cracks with ease, without hindrance — unless of course our flow is contained and hidden from view by various *man-made* technologies such as pads, tampons, cups, gauze, toilet paper, cloths, cotton, rayon, contraceptive pills, and so on. I want to intervene in our own complicity as women and transmen in allowing our bleeding to be contained. We need an aesthetic of transgression in order to confront what is now a global culture's contradictory relationship to blood, to genders, and to sexualities. The series means to raise important questions about the socio-political landscape of menstruation by situating the cultural politics of blood within the structures of heteropatriarchies and the market. It also opens dialogue on the culture/s of menstruation and how different cultures have shifted their relationship to bleeding historically and globally.

Between the 15th and 17th centuries, the birth of modernity in Europe with its 'rational', enlightened thinking positioned the corporeal female body within the realm of nature and therefore the 'irrational', while all things male were placed into the realm of culture and the rational. Before the European South Atlantic slave trade, the rise of capitalism, and the period of colonialism that followed it, the bleeding female body was understood as a source of power and strength, and menstruation was celebrated in Europe as elsewhere. For instance, in pre-modern pagan European cultures, and in pre-modern Tamil Nadu (present day South India), the aesthetic of the bleeding female form was revered and celebrated.⁵ However, once the gender/ sex binary was born and spread across the globe via the slave trade and colonialism, a fundamental shift from woman-positive, matriarchal cultures to patriarchal and heterosexual cultures is traceable, and the bleeding female body becomes a source of contamination, an unhygienic body that must be relegated to private spaces. Modernity and Westernization took the bleeding female body out of the public arena of collective celebration and ritual, and banished it not only to visual and intellectual obscurity, but also to collective cultural secrecy.

Along with this banishment of menstruating bodies also comes a commodification of the *secrecy* around bleeding. Resources are invested, technology is developed, and profits are earned to ensure that the invisibility and secrecy of menses is maintained within our capitalist, patriarchal cultures. In other words, the less we acknowledge, talk about, or collectively visualize feminine monthly bleeding, the more profitable this biological and vital function of human life becomes. My aim is to disrupt this disempowering dynamic that affects women and transmen alike.

Is'khathi

Every second, minute, hour, day, week, month women and transmen are bleeding in this world. We map our terrains with periods. Menstruation is a key component of human existence, and it is all around us in the every day and every night of our living. It is a permanent feature that contributes to our formation of being and always present in the environment.

Menstruation is part of the process of evolution for all mammals. The viewer is presented with a series of patches of menstrual bloodspot and clots in various spaces from bathtub to rough earth and dirt ground. In **Figure 1: *Amahluli*** and **Figure 6: *Isibonelo*** there is menstrual blood in the white bathtub. For any bleeding being, this phase highlights the existence of a nature which knows how to heal and renew itself.

One type of 'robing' used in this series is gauze, normally used to dress a bleeding wound, as in **Figure 7: *Isililo***. Another photo is of a used tampon, abandoned on an open ground, a fly feasting on its nourishment, see **Figure 4: *Impukane***. The idea with both shots is to link the absence of menstrual blood in public with the idiom we are all taught: 'do not air your dirty laundry in public'.

The earth is filled with cracks: volcanoes spew lava through cracks in the earth; ground water rises

through cracks in the earth; seedlings sprout roots below the earth and crack the earth to grow. The image of a tampon on cracked earth recalls that passage of a crack (vagina) that releases life force—menstrual blood. I imagine a tree shedding its bark to renew its life, the skin falling to the ground nourishing the soil and adding life to it, much like the uterus shedding its walls in the female body's attempt to cleanse the womb in preparation for possible fertilization. The blood and clots flow without any hindrance through the vaginal crack, unless a certain type of 'robe' is used to clog the passage ways and absorb the heavy flow.

In **Figure 5: *Ububende***, my blood is diluted with water and presented on an off white ceramic dinner plate, alongside a jelly-like substance which happens to be a thick blood clot from my second day of April menses. The visual form resembles a foetus floating in amniotic fluid inside a woman's womb—signifying life and growth, the circular plate suggesting the circulation of blood in the body which is necessary for life. The use of the ceramic dinner plate is also a statement of the irony that the kitchen, which is traditionally seen as a woman's place to feed and nourish her family/community is off-limits to menstruating women in many cultures such as the Kambalathu Naicker community in the interior of Tamil Nadu. A menstruating woman is not allowed to enter a kitchen or any place where people gather for fear that she will contaminate the village. In my own Zulu culture, only postmenopausal women and virgins are allowed in the kitchen when *Umqomboti* — African beer — is made so that the beer will not spoil.

Two photos are absent: the bloodied and torn pad which is symbolic of the tearing, searing pain many women experience with the onset of menstruation; and the photo of thighs and knees pressed together, positioned sideways, blood flowing out from underneath, suggesting the loneliness women feel when left to their pain. **Figure 2: *Ibala*** and **Figure 3: *Iveza*** form part of this sub-series regarding pain.

This pain is culturally represented in our Western patriarchal culture as illegitimate, as more of a state of emotion than actual real pain. Within our popular culture, the menstruating woman becomes at best a source of amusement and a joke — she acts irrationally and like a fool. At worst she is depicted as merely a bitch and deserves neither sympathy nor respect. In contrast, the Khoisan of the Kalahari offer deep respect to a menstruant, allowing her to spend her bleeding days in a special hut. She is seen as so powerful that she has only to snap her fingers to bring down lightning on any disrespectful male.

Missing is also the photo of two tampons resting in a pool of blood with clot, signifying the intimate connection of menstruating at the same time that can sometimes evolve between women. It is about the synchronization between my partner and I when we reached our April menses on the same day—much like two people making love and reaching orgasm simultaneously.

This is a work in progress which began in 2003. My intention is to emphasize that corporeal bodies depend on periods for procreation and survival. Like the hierarchy of needs for the human species to survive — the need for food, water, land/shelter — the human reproductive process requires blood, especially menstrual blood, to ensure our existence.

Click on thumbnails to see larger images.

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Click [here](#) to see more work by Zanele Muholi.

Notes

1. *Enraged by a picture* (2005). Directed by Zanele Muholi [Film] South Africa: Out in Africa Films [↩]
2. bell hooks (1995) 'The Radiance of Red: Blood Works', *Art on My Mind visual politics*. New York: New Press, p. 213. [↗]
3. bell hooks (1995) 'The Radiance of Red: Blood Works', *Art on My Mind visual politics*. New York: New Press, p. 216. [↗]
4. bell hooks (1995) 'The Radiance of Red: Blood Works', *Art on My Mind visual politics*. New York: New Press, p. 213. [↗]
5. See Lewis-Williams, J.D. (1981) *Believing and Seeing. Symbolic meanings in Southern San rock*

paintings, Academic Press; Power, C. & I. Watts (1997), 'The woman with the zebra's penis. Gender, mutability and performance', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 3 (N.S.): pp. 537-560; Dianne E. Jenett, (2005), 'Menstruating Women, Menstruating Goddesses: Sites of Sacred Power in Kerala, (South India) Sangam Era (100-500 CE) to the Present' *Menstruation: History and Culture from Antiquity to Modernity*, edited by Andrew Shail, Houndmills, England: Palgrave Macmillan Ltd. [[↩](#)]

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Q&A with Jasbir Puar

Posted By [jasbir puar](#), [ben pitcher](#) and [henriette gunkel](#) on 2 May 2008 @ 12:52 pm in [3-Postcolonial Sexuality \[forthcoming May 08\]](#), [Issues](#) | [No Comments](#)

DM: What is it about this particular historical moment that makes discourses of gay rights such an important resource for US/Western imperial projects? How do you account for the rapidity with which gay rights have been retrospectively mobilized as emblematic of Western freedoms?

JP: This depends on what we qualify as rapidity and how we demarcate the parameters of this particular historical moment. In my recently published book, [Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times](#), I sketch the rise of the utility of gay rights discourses to US/Western imperial projects in legislative and consumption realms that coincides with the production of various visible subjects. These are, I contend, the results of the 'successes' of incorporation, of the cultivation of subjects of liberal multiculturalism that have played off each other to cohere a pernicious binary that has emerged — not recently, but during the last 40 years of the post-civil rights era — in U.S. legislative, activist, and scholarly realms: the homosexual other is white, the racial other is straight. Heteronormative ideals pivotal to nation-state formation are now supplemented by homonormativities — what I term homonationalism. I point to western liberal feminist practices that function as both precursors and historical continuities to homonational formations. Islamophobic strands in queer organizing that I detail start appearing in the 1990's, while welfare reform, neo-liberal privatization, market accommodation, anti-immigrant legislation, and counterterrorism initiatives contribute to the fractioning of race and class alliances and the proliferation of homonationalisms.

DM: The War on Terror has very rapidly obliged us to recognize the regressive capacities of a hitherto 'progressive' politics of sexuality. This is an observation that we might generalize in respect of other, until now unquestionably 'progressive' forms of social and cultural politics. Given the way in which any particular practice has the capacity to bear a qualitatively different meaning at different levels of analysis (the local, the national, the global), and within different conceptual frameworks (based, for example, on the positionality of social actors) how does a meaningful postcolonial politics avoid overdetermination at any of these points of articulation?

JP: The war on terror is one temporal marker but it is not originary nor foundational. The book is and is not a 'post 9/11 book' insofar as it traces earlier historical trajectories that have been differently illuminated for some through the events of September 11th — trajectories already well-understood to others. But within the formulation of your query the answer is already proffered: From what locations do forms of social and cultural politics appear unquestionably progressive? I was visiting friends at LUMS (Lahore University of Management Sciences, Pakistan) in February 2008 and was struck, as many of us often are when attempting to translate our work into different localities, by the paradox of being aligned politically yet deeply separated by the pragmatic impact of these politics. Many discussions were had regarding the numerous examples that highlight how 'western' LGBTIQ attention to and intervention in certain situations, for example the Cairo-52, the execution of purportedly homosexual men in Iran, and most recently a case in Pakistan involving a transgender man and his female partner, often have detrimental consequences for those locally involved, demonstrating the fragile and tenuous links between diaspora and homeland, global and local. I make certain theoretical interventions to highlight the problems with these forms of self-proclaimed progressive organizing and politics; yet the very presence of the book itself articulates and reconsolidates queer theory as a Euro-Anglo phenomenon, and as such resurrects to some degree the epistemic violence it seeks to counter. It was clear to me that I was negotiating not a homophobic resistance to queer theory nor sexuality studies (forms of which proliferate in South Asian scholarship), rather reluctance to embrace a project so embedded in U.S. dominant forms of academic production.

Thus the failure of overdetermination is itself overdetermined — the book does not porously traverse scale nor can it or should it. It is inextricable from the western epistemologies it seeks to dismantle, constitutive of and constituted by the neoliberal economic and cultural flows within which it is embedded. But this paradox, then, also engenders surprising confluences, like meeting scholars at both LUMS and

JNU (Jawaharlal Nehru University) in Delhi, India, who have read, for example, the 'Monster-Terrorist-Fag' essay that I co-authored with Amit Rai in 2002. Reading audiences and reception, to some extent predictable and yet simultaneously unruly, cannot be mapped or assumed in advance.

DM: In much of the work now being done on the subject of race and sexuality, there is the suggestion that the very practice of institutionalizing or mainstreaming queer itself functions in such a way as to occult the nationalistic/civilizational (racist) components of queer practice: it is as if non-heteronormative positions are somehow so dazzling that they can blind us to their divisive tendencies. Can you comment on this sense in which the queering of dominant formations appears to go hand in hand with a racial myopia?

JP: The ascendancy of queer is not just coincidentally occurring in relation to certain racial politics but is contingent upon them. We also know that any single-axis identity politics is invariably going to coagulate around the most conservative, normative construction of that identity, foreclosing the complexities of class, citizenship status, gender, nation, and perhaps most importantly in the context of very recent events, religion. One example is the implications of the 2003 Lawrence decision that decriminalized sodomy between consenting adults on the federal level in the U.S. While a plethora of queer and feminist scholars deftly and cogently critique the limits of the ruling in terms of its protection of privacy, intimacy, normative kinship forms, and property over queer sex — in other words, the domestication of queer sex — they predominantly do so by assessing the impact of the decision on LGBTIQ subjects. But the implications of Lawrence extend far beyond its obvious sexual referents. I reread the case through its import for surveillance, racial profiling, detention, and deportation, looking at its impact on terrorist populations and the reorganization of Muslim sexualities and kinship patterns. I think this kind of rereading, what Siobhan Somerville calls a 'sideways reading', is a potent tactic for destabilizing a homophobia vs. racism binary.

In the last chapter, "'The Turban is Not a Hat": Queer Diaspora and Practices of Profiling' I interrogate the disjuncture between queer and anti-racist organizing by looking at the plight of turbaned Sikh men targeted in 9/11 'backlash' violence. In some ways that chapter is the most generative one, I think, in that it puts the most pressure on what constitutes a legitimate literal sexual referent for and of queer theory, analysis, and activism. At the same time it begs the question — is the problem perhaps the desire to formalize a proper object of analysis, a properly queer body, in the first instance?

DM: Is the critical capacity of queer politics dependent on its status as an oppositional discourse? Does social acceptance mean critical failure? What are the implications here for queer as a feature of popular or democratic political struggle?

JP: I would argue that the critical capacity of queer politics and queerness lies not in its status as an oppositional discourse but in precisely the antithesis of this. The more crucial question in my view is not how or whether queer remains oppositional, but rather what is gained, lost, and kept in the claims to oppositionality. I am less focused on conservative homonormative political formations — they are in a sense easy (albeit absolutely necessary) targets — and more fascinated by what claims to oppositionality insidiously conceal in terms of subterranean conservative proclivities.

One imperative that I think *Terrorist Assemblages* takes up is a deconstruction of the notions of 'social acceptance' and 'oppositional' — these positions are always inchoate — putting under duress the tendency of queer theories to lionize resistance and transgression, or conversely to lambaste complicity. I approach a range of subject positionings and discourses — homonormative, queer liberal, and queer diasporic — to underscore that they all claim oppositional and resistant stances, in relation to similar entities — heteronorms in particular — but also in relation to each other. Uncritically lauding queer transnational and diasporic articulations of opposition works to mask the national, class, regional, religious based identities that are being continually recast through the miasma of oppositionality. For this reason I concentrate on conviviality rather than oppositionality, resistance, subversion, or transgression — these are all facets of queer exceptionalisms that unwittingly (and sometimes deliberately) dovetail with numerous narratives of exceptionalism and progress in modernity. It is precisely through these claims of exceptionalism — and a resultant celebratory queerness — that grounds for political change become stultified.

As cultural workers invested in social justice, we are so beholden to locating resistance and tracking its paths. I wonder what would happen, what new creative thinking and activism would emerge if we would put that mandate aside, just for a moment. What does queerness conduct? What kinds of contradictory

desires, social forms, identities, possibilities and foreclosures does it give rise to? Rather than what does it mean, what does it do?

DM: Can you elaborate on your suggestion in 'Queer Times, Queer Assemblages' that we move 'from intersectionality to assemblage' as a form of critical practice? What implications does this have for gay and lesbian activism? To what extent do the problems we are experiencing derive in part from the historical relationship between anti-racism and gay rights as social movements?

JP: For me the most productive and salient methodological and conceptual tension in the book is that between intersectionality and assemblage - in fact, the first half of the book deploys and defends intersectional queer readings while the second half symptomatically rails against the limits of the intersectional representational critique that I advocate. It's an unintended, but thus curious and instructive, tension. Let me first qualify that my concern is not about the formative black feminist theorizing of intersectionality, which generated groundbreaking interventions into feminist scholarship, but rather about the reception and deployment of this body of literature that tends to reify intersectionality into forms of standpoint epistemology. Particularly in women's studies classes, I have often noted students hailing intersectionality as shorthand to diagnose difference rather than being able to articulate it as a conceptual frame arising out of particular historical and activist contexts. In feminist human rights arenas the concept is also being globalized, sometimes problematically, whereby the terrain of a U.S.-centric frame is transposed onto other regional and national locations without sufficient attention to differing epistemological category formations.

The critical practice of assemblage is a reading practice, first and foremost, meaning that the implications for gay and lesbian activism is not that it needs to create assemblages but rather that contemporary and historical organizing practices need to be read as always already assemblages, and this re-reading may then open up new avenues of thinking, speaking, organizing, doing politics — lines of flight, affective eruptions, affect, energies, forces, temporalities, contagions, contingencies, and the inexplicable.

Because Deleuzian-inspired assemblages prioritize encounter and movement over positioning and location, one can never know in advance 'how' to organize. A main component of assemblage is that it resists the call to announce a complicity-versus-resistance binary, recognizing that complicities are multifarious and just as unstable as resistances, and our efforts (including my own) to redress the fetish of resistance by emphasizing complicity have indeed led to a reification of the polarity of the two terms. Categories — race, gender, sexuality — are considered as events, actions, and encounters between bodies, rather than as simply entities and attributes of subjects. But assemblages, as theorized by numerous philosophers, are not inhospitable to intersectionality. Positioning is temporally double, understood both as a retroactive fitting, a tagging of where the body once was as it continues about its perpetual motility, and as propelling forward of forces of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, acts of enunciation amidst lines of flight.

The book is an assemblage itself, an encounter between queer theory and assemblage, an example of assemblage and the kind of movement that assemblage can foment. So for me, thinking through assemblages also means inviting unplanned and irruptive ontological shifts — we cannot do our work the same way as before. I think the contradictions in the book signal this process, of assembling and being assembled and re-assembled.

Finally, assemblages are open to their own self-annihilation. Political critique must be open to the possibility that it might disrupt and alter the exigencies of its own possibility such that it is no longer needed. This approach would be a queer rejection of the biopolitical mandate to reproduce, cutting through narratives of queer exceptionalism. The challenge then is how to craft political praxis that does not mandate a continual reinvestment in its form and content. Don't we ultimately want a world within which queer and anti-racist theory and activism no longer need to exist?

DM: While the relationship between sexuality and race is not a new theoretical problematic, the war on terror has clearly shifted this issue further towards the centre of academic scholarship. This is arguably reflected in the recent work of Judith Butler. In respect of your theorization of race and sexuality, where are some lines of convergence and divergence between your work?

JP: Butler's work has been profoundly influential for my own and I use her thinking in T.A. extensively, though not specifically for theorizing relations of race, sexuality, and globalization. In her current work I do

not think she is actually offering a theorization of the concomitant workings of racialization and sexualization, rather tarrying with the paradigms of the 'human' and the 'inhuman', and still doing so predominantly through the lens of gender. This is not to say that the specter of racialization is not implicit in her writing, but I would aver that her primary frame of reference is still a subject whose 'gender trouble' is the foundational moment of differentiation. The other distinction I would point to is her commitment to conventional subjects and methodologies of philosophy, whereby my approach is rooted in an interdisciplinary cultural studies that foregrounds solid engagement with transnational feminist studies, critical race theory, and postcolonial studies. My object of analysis is public discourse, and as such, I foster an archive — archival accountability, however partial, biased, and incomplete — that excavates, through a very deliberately broad citational praxis, the complexity of public debate fostered in activist, artistic, mainstream gay press, and alternative press realms. Of course, archives are created, not found. Part of my intent is to provide a landscape of the unfolding archives for others to build upon and interrogate.

DM: Many of the contributors to this edition of *darkmatter* acknowledge the centrality of your recent work to understanding the politics of race and sexuality in the current conjuncture. Can you give us a sketch of what you are working on at the moment?

JP: In *Terrorist Assemblages* I propose a rapprochement of Foucauldian biopolitics and Achille Mbembe's critique of it through what I call a 'bio-necro collaboration', one that conceptually acknowledges biopower's direct activity to death, while remaining bound to the optimization of life, and necropolitics' nonchalance towards death even as it seeks out killing as a primary aim. I allege that it is precisely within the interstices of life and death that we find the differences between queer subjects who are being folded (back) into life and the racialized queernesses that emerge through the naming of populations, thus fueling the oscillation between the disciplining of subjects and control of populations. The result of the successes of queer incorporation into the domains of consumer markets and social recognition in the post-civil rights, late twentieth-century era, these various entries by queers into the biopolitics optimization of life mark a shift, as homosexual bodies have been historically understood as endlessly cathected to death, from being figures of death (i.e., the AIDS pandemic) to becoming tied to ideas of life and productivity (i.e., gay marriage and reproductive kinship). I want to deconstruct the poles of bio- and necro- politics much further, thinking about bodies and events that really confound and make much more fluid and contradictory these foldings into and out of living and dying. Surveillance technologies and related bioinformatic economies — DNA encoding and species preservation, stem-cell research, digitization, biometrics, life logging capacity, GPS, whose role includes increasing the contact zones and points of interface between bodies and their beyond — force all sorts of questions about bodies and their materialities. Eugene Thacker, Kaushik Sunder Rajan, and others theorizing bio-ethics have asked, what is a body in informational terms? Where does a body begin and where does it end? If we consider DNA encoding to be life — information as life itself — what is a life, when does it begin and end, and who owns it? If the value of a body is increasingly sought not only in its capacity to labor but in the information that it yields, a revaluing of otherwise worthless bodies left for dying, and species can live through DNA, what does it mean to be debilitated or extinct?

These are of course older historical questions about the changing contours of what counts as a body reanimated by emergent technologies. I am particularly interested in approaching these questions from the vantage point of queer theory to put duress on assumptions about what queer bodies are, and to see what queer methods entail when we let go of the discrete organic queer body as its literal referent. Queer disability studies has taken up these issues, but bodies, queer bodies, are still bounded by their material outlines or their relation to its 'mutation' or deviance from the presumed organic wholeness of the body, as opposed to bodies as assemblages. It is also a field that suffers from what Robert McRuer terms 'disability culturalism' that privileges representational politics, along with, Julie Livingston points out, a dearth of theorizing beyond Euro-Anglo liberal individual subject formation, indicating to me a need to think more broadly about debility, assemblage, bodies, and bio-necro politics. What happens to congenital disabilities, for example, if they are understood not only in ideological terms as pathologies but as informational errors in DNA coding that can be corrected, that is, where the disabled body is productive rather than entirely excised from regenerative capacity? What counts as queer and gender non-normative bodies in bio-informatic and statistical terms? How does Sarah Lochlann Jain's suggestion that we are all 'living in prognosis' — that is, living (and dying) in relation to statistical probability of populations vis-à-vis health, illness, disability, debility, infirmity, and disease — give us a more dynamic and temporally flexible frame for comprehending our multivalent and ever-shifting relations to life and death?

Most recently, however, I indulged my secret obsession and riffed on my favorite soap opera, *General*

Hospital, with cultural theorist Jennifer Doyle, who is also a long-time fan. Check it out on the [Oh! Industry](#) website.

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The Empire of Love: Review of Elizabeth Povinelli

Posted By [silvia posocco](#) on 1 May 2008 @ 7:04 pm in [3-Postcolonial Sexuality \[forthcoming May 08\]](#), [Issues](#) | [No Comments](#)

A review of Povinelli, Elizabeth (2006) *The Empire of Love: Toward a Theory of Intimacy, Genealogy and Carnality*, Durham and London: Duke University Press.

The Empire of Love is concerned with the analysis of intimacy, sociality and the body in settler colonies, specifically the United States and Australia. It aims to theorize how forms of liberal governance operate through discourses of individual agency and freedom – ‘autology’ – and social constraint – ‘genealogy’. At the heart of the book is an explicit effort to link theoretically two seemingly incommensurate socialities, namely the social worlds of an indigenous community in the Northern Territory of Australia, Belyuen, and a multi-sited queer community of radical faeries¹ in the United States. The book examines modes of love, intimacy and sociality as they operate in their respective contexts, with a view to explicitly trace connections between, and movements across, the multiple and complex modes of relatedness organised along kinship ties in Belyuen, and through the sociality and relationality among strangers in the networks of radical faeries communes in the US. These sites are ‘material anchors’² for social worlds which, according to Povinelli, are at once incommensurate and connected, as are ‘the racial and sexual discourses that apprehend them’.³ At stake in this analysis, therefore, is not only the issue of incommensurability between what appear to be manifestations of radical alterity – and, thus, fundamentally different forms of organising intimacy which are reciprocally Other – but also the racialised and sexualised modes of knowledge through which these socialities are figured, understood and governed.

The key argument in the book is that ‘autology’ and ‘genealogy’ are dominant forms of discipline in liberalism. Povinelli uses these terms in conjunction with ‘freedom’ and ‘constraint’, but does not quite collapse the pairs. ‘Autology’ refers to multiple discourses and practices which invoke the autonomous and self-determining subject, and which are therefore linked to, but not exhausted in, liberalism’s emphasis on ‘freedom’ more narrowly conceived as a political philosophy. ‘Genealogy’, on the other hand, is taken to refer to discourses which stress social constraint and determination in processes of subject constitution and construe the subject as bound by ‘various kinds of inheritances’.⁴ Autology and genealogy are two co-existing and intersecting forms of discipline which are constitutive of postcolonial governance. The book is concerned with tracing how these two sets of discourses and associated modes of discipline play out in the lives and deaths of subjects inhabiting the contemporary biosocialities and regimes of governance of these settler colonies. This is an ambitious project which proposes that one takes seriously specific postcolonial historicities, as they sediment in individual bodies *and* affective relations. Bodies and relations emerge through Povinelli’s account as historical sediments bearing the marks of their relational ‘enfleshment’. In turn, the intensely felt proximity engendered through social practices of kinning and relatedness suggests that these too should not be taken at face value, and rather should be linked to a critical analysis of liberal governance in postcoloniality.

The key embodied motif of chapter one, ‘Rotten Worlds’, is a sore developed by Povinelli in the aftermath of a spell of fieldwork in the Australian Northern Territory. Accounts of anthropologists’ ailments experienced during fieldwork are a well-established narrative device in anthropological writing. They often illustrate how the embodied and affective states linked to debilitating acclimatisation, cultural alienation and social distance experienced by the anthropologist in the field can be a way of becoming socialised into the ‘host’ culture. The anthropologist’s illness, with the social and cultural labour of recognition, diagnosis and care that it incites, is often figured as a key event through which a sense of empathy, proximity and/or intelligibility is attained between the anthropologist and his or her interlocutors. Anthropological accounts of the experience of illness during fieldwork therefore often operate as devices through which the inception of social proximity and cross-cultural intelligibility are invoked.

So, what of the sore on Povinelli’s back? Could it be caused by anthrax? Is it contagious? Should it be

treated with HIV/AIDS drugs? Is the source Maliya, the *durlg* (ancestral site)? Or is it staphylococcus? What ethics of concealment and disclosure does a body with a sore exact? Focusing on these diverse ways of making sense of the sore, and considering the forms of knowledge and the lived socialities associated with the 'modes of addressivity' through which the sore is conjured up, the sore provides an opportunity to analyse and theorise the carnal politics of racist indifference, embattled solidarity, ethically fraught cruising, paranoid sex-panic, grief-stricken kinship and the inequalities of postcoloniality which enmesh the flesh and reposition the author's afflicted body at each encounter. Povinelli focuses on the multiple biosocialities of the sore to consider the forms of *enfleshment* engendered through different modes of address. This suggests astute critical reflections on the place of the sore within the global distribution of life and death and the discourses of 'autology' and 'genealogy' at play in the complex carnalities of liberalism. This account resonates very directly with Achille Mbembe's discussion of 'necropolitics', where he asks, '[w]hat place is given to life, death, and the human body (in particular the wounded and slain body)? How are they inscribed in the order of power?'⁵ Povinelli addresses this necropolitical dimension through the repositioning of the body within a theoretical and ethnographic exploration of the operations of postcolonial liberalism. The sore is therefore a very powerful and effective device for the analysis of how the operations of liberal governance in postcoloniality may hold differential consequences for bodies, subjects and communities differentially addressed by discourses of autology and genealogy. Further, the sore materialises and embodies liberal forms of addressivity of both racism and sexuality.

Chapter two, 'Spiritual Freedom, Cultural Copyright', explores the addressivities of autology and genealogy in the stranger sociality of the radical faeries. This is the network of individuals and communities founded by Harry Hay in the United States in the 1950s and characterised by a distinctive kind of *bricoleur* spirituality which drew heavily on Native American spiritual practice. Harry Hay claimed to have received spiritual endorsement from a Native American spiritual leader. A gay-rights advocate, Hay argued for homosexuality as a cross-cultural reality, a position supported by his research into *berdaches*, those historical figures whose representation is inextricably bound up with the anthropological literature and popular readings of the ethnographic record which have presented them as 'traditional' figures of both homosexuality and gender transitivity (of male to female social identity and self-identification).⁶ The Native American spirituality embraced by Harry Hay is one of a very heterogeneous set of radical faeries' beliefs and practices which combine elements of indigenous religiosity with sexual permissiveness. In Povinelli's account, the cultural creativity of radical faeries' fashioning of bodies, identities, relations, communities and traditions well exemplifies the operations of discourses of freedom and the constitution of the autological subject in liberal settler colonies. However, the autonomous self-fashioning of the radical faeries is complicated by charges of cultural appropriation and theft, as indigenous advocates denounce their culturally cannibalising practices, simultaneously casting the indigenous subject in the realm of genealogy. Here, Povinelli argues, one can discern how the radical faeries, as the subjects of the discourse of freedom, must appear as wholly free and unfettered by 'culture', whilst indigenous subjects, imprisoned as they are in the bind of discourses of genealogy, must figure as culture-bound and culturally determined, even in the pursuit of self-determination, as in indigenous claims for reparation, restitution and exemption only admissible on cultural grounds.

Chapter three, 'The Intimate Event and Genealogical Society', considers how normative ideas concerning love and intimacy operate in liberalism and Empire through a series of juridical and theoretical readings. The chapter reviews different perspectives on the history of liberal love and its Others, with a view to restage questions concerning trajectories of European Enlightenment and modernity firmly in relation to histories of coloniality, as in much postcolonial theory.⁷ The focus here is the 'intimate event', that is, a cluster of fantasies variously concerned with anti-miscegenation, inter-racial marriage, bigamy and sodomy which are shown to be both 'disrupted and secured by the logic of the exception'.⁸ Whilst these fantasies lack a proper referent, they are nevertheless shown to instantiate and subtly realign the centrality of the intimate in liberalism, notably through the governance of the intimate heteronormative couple and the self-sovereignty of the subject whose intimacy is thereby produced and regulated. The 'intimate event' might be completely naturalised and made to appear common sense, but is in fact a shifting nexus between 'micro-practices of love' and 'macro-practices of state governance... capital production, circulation and consumption',⁹ which attains coherence and stability through specific operations, namely by delimiting what the specific domain of intimacy ought to be, conceiving of intimacy as explicitly normative, and construing forms of social organisation other than those regulated by the intimate event as different and immoral.¹⁰ Through the mechanism of exception, the intimate event is therefore implicated in the production of difference. Further, what the juridical and theoretical readings reveal is that 'liberalism', 'autology', 'genealogy' and 'the intimate event' itself, are not easily defined or circumscribed. Rather, they are 'moving targets'¹¹ where the operations of power are exposed in their

citational and disciplining dimensions.

The three key chapters in the book are stylistically different, with rich and evocative ethnographic accounts in the first and second chapters. In contrast, the last chapter is much less descriptive in style, with only minimal information provided on the key juridical cases discussed, and skeletal contextualisation of key theoretical arguments such as Giorgio Agamben's work on sovereignty, state of exception and bare life,¹² Mbembe's analytical focus on necropolitics,¹³ contemporary debates on the politics of the performative¹⁴ and publics and counterpublics.¹⁵ This sparing and terse prose may offer no concessions to the reader. Nevertheless, it matches very well the author's determination and clarity of vision in proposing a fundamental reconfiguration of the terrain for thinking about sexuality as not coterminous with identity. Sustaining this theoretical and analytical effort throughout, Povinelli contributes to the critique of identitarian paradigms already well entrenched in queer theory. Further, this analysis meticulously circumvents tropes of commensurability, in the diffusionist as much as in the translational inflections popular in contemporary cross-cultural and transnational approaches to the study of sexuality. Contemporary diffusionist accounts commonly conceive of sexual formations as relatively stable and assume their diffusion cross-culturally¹⁶ and trans-historically. Translational accounts, on the other hand, stress the explicitly local character of sexual formations. They point to the social, cultural and historical specificity of local understandings and interpretations of what 'sexuality' might mean in any given context.¹⁷ Further, critical perspectives on translation focus on the disjuncture between differently culturally located sexual meanings, understandings and epistemologies, as well as on the histories and consequences of specific sexual translations.¹⁸ *The Empire of Love* is not, strictly speaking, an exercise in translation or a meditation on translation's limits, failures and implications. Rather, the book offers a set of ethnographically informed theoretical reflections on the 'social matrix' in and through which sexuality emerges, and intimate socialities acquire coherence and substance. 'Sexuality' is extended and expanded as a result, against 'a certain literalism of the referent',¹⁹ and in directions other than those proposed by contemporary identitarian, diffusionist and translational accounts. Here sexuality is a field of power where discourses of 'autology' and 'genealogy' continually reconfigure the sphere of the intimate to determine – and govern – disparate, incommensurate and yet connected socialities, and en flesh bodies biopolitically and necropolitically, as gendered, racialised and sexualised historical sediments.

The Empire of Love is a remarkable book which is theoretically ambitious as it is compelling. It makes a very significant critical contribution to thinking sexuality in the operations of liberal governance, to open up and reinvigorate this field of analysis and theoretical intervention.

Notes

1. for more information on the radical faeries see for example [this site](#) [↗]
2. Povinelli, Elizabeth (2006) *The Empire of Love: Toward a Theory of Intimacy, Genealogy and Carnality*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, p. 46. [↗]
3. Povinelli, Elizabeth (2006) *The Empire of Love: Toward a Theory of Intimacy, Genealogy and Carnality*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, p. 2. [↗]
4. Povinelli, Elizabeth (2006) *The Empire of Love: Toward a Theory of Intimacy, Genealogy and Carnality*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, p.4. [↗]
5. Mbembe, Achille (2003) 'Necropolitics', *Public Culture*, 15(1):11-40, p. 12. [↗]
6. For critical readings of this, see Epple, Carolyn (1998) 'Coming to Terms with Navajo *Nádleehí*: a Critique of Berdache, "Gay", "Alternate Gender", and "Two-spirit"', *American Ethnologist*, 25 (2):267-290; see also Towle, Evan B. and Lynn M. Morgan (2002) 'Romancing the Transgender Native: Rethinking the Use of the "Third Gender" Concept', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 8(4):469-497. [↗]
7. See, for example, Mignolo, Walter (2000) 'The Many Faces of Cosmo-polis: Border Thinking and Critical Cosmopolitanism', *Public Culture*, 12(3):721:48. [↗]
8. Povinelli, Elizabeth (2006) *The Empire of Love: Toward a Theory of Intimacy, Genealogy and Carnality*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 193. [↗]
9. Povinelli, Elizabeth (2006) *The Empire of Love: Toward a Theory of Intimacy, Genealogy and Carnality*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, p. 191. [↗]
10. Povinelli, Elizabeth (2006) *The Empire of Love: Toward a Theory of Intimacy, Genealogy and Carnality*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 198-9. [↗]
11. Povinelli, Elizabeth (2006) *The Empire of Love: Toward a Theory of Intimacy, Genealogy and Carnality*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, p. 181. [↗]
12. Agamben, Giorgio (1998) *Homo Sacer: Sovereignty and Bare Life*, Stanford: Stanford University

- Press; Agamben, Giorgio (2005) *State of Exception*, Chicago: Chicago University Press. [↗]
13. Mbembe, Achille (2003) 'Necropolitics', *Public Culture*, 15(1):11-40. [↗]
 14. Butler, Judith (1997) *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, London and New York: Routledge. [↗]
 15. Warner, Michael (2002) 'Publics and Counterpublics', *Public Culture*, Vol. 14(1):49-90. [↗]
 16. See, for example, Altman, Dennis (2001) *Global Sex*, Chicago: Chicago University Press. [↗]
 17. See, for example, Blackwood, Evelyn (1998) 'Tombois of West Sumatra: Constructing Masculinity and Erotic Desire', *Cultural Anthropology*, 13(4):491-521; Gagnon, John H. and Richard G. Parker (1992) *Conceiving Sexuality: Approaches to Sex Research in a Postmodern World*, New York and London: Routledge; Lancaster, Roger (1992) 'Subject Honor, Object Shame', in *Life is Hard: Machismo, Danger and the Intimacy of Power in Nicaragua*, Berkeley: University of California Press. [↗]
 18. See Hemmings, Clare (2007) 'What's in a name? Bisexuality, Transnational Sexuality Studies and Western Colonial Legacies', *International Journal of Human Rights*, 11 (1&2):13-32. [↗]
 19. Povinelli, Elizabeth (2007) 'Disturbing Sexuality', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 106(3):565-576, p. 575. [↗]

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