

Editorial:

## Veiling Differences -- Mediating Race, Gender, and Nation

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As the title implies, this issue of the *Global Media Journal -- Canadian Edition* (GMJ -- CE) focuses on the notion of differences, namely how these are constructed, homogenized, amplified, muted or negotiated in the prevailing social, political and cultural climate of Canadian society. At the same time, we wish to interrogate the manufacturing of particular images, paying close attention to their witting and unwitting uses in veiling hegemonic structures. The idea of veiling is something that we wish to subvert, and through a kind of *détournement* (Debord, 1983), we aim to turn the gaze of dominance from those subjected to veiling discourses to those who intentionally veil these differences. More explicitly, we are using the concepts of the veil and veiling as metaphoric devices to communicate not only that which is covered and hidden from the public gaze, but also, in a semiotic sense, that which conveys the gendered dynamics inherent to Canadian society, whereby the state assumes a masculinized role of protector while minorities are seen as feminized subjects who should, in the interests of a patriarchal bargain, contrive to be, if not inculcate themselves as, docile subjects (Foucault, 1978; 1995). This pastoral power (Foucault, 1982) manifests itself both through civilities and through brute strength, as evident in the power of state security apparatuses (Odartey-Wellington, in this issue; Smolash, 2009). The colour line makes explicit the division between those who are accepted as part of the nation and those who can be easily ejected from the body politic (Razack, 2008). The logics of inferiorization, differentiation, assimilation and rejection are part and parcel of the project of empire.

Yet empire is also sustained by the techniques of divide and rule as much as it is contingent on the application of the rule of the law or the banishment of some into zones of exception (Agamben, 1998). If empire constitutes the larger project—the “strategy”, in Foucauldian terms—then what are the “dispositions, maneuvers, tactics, techniques” and “functionings” (Foucault, 1978: 26) that reveal how power is exercised? The mainstream media form and inform a public sphere where such techniques and tactics are rendered apparent. However, bearing in mind Nancy Fraser’s (1990) critique of the Habermasian ideal of the public sphere, such a sphere as engendered by mainstream media organizations still carries a significant

influence, especially with regard to policy makers and legislators. That aside, the mainstream mass media contribute to the formation of the social order in terms of communicating systems of classification and categories of social life (Hall, 1979; 1997). This is not to suggest that the media are one-way conduits of information or that they operate outside the social order. Rather, the emphasis, as Hall argues, is on the preferred meanings, the dominant messages that are repeatedly communicated through legitimized channels of discourse.

The Canadian “mediascape” (Appadurai, 1990) is characterized by a heavy concentration of corporate ownership and convergence (Shade & Lithgow, 2009; 2010). The media sphere is thus circumscribed in the interests of owners, share-holders and corporations. In the contemporary climate, the state and the corporate sector are inter-related through common interests and networks of power; hence, the interests of this powerful bloc undoubtedly influence and shape dominant media coverage (Hackett et al., 2000). The “regimes of truth” circulated by the media are neither homogenous nor uniform. Nevertheless, as the contemporary bards of the day (Hartley, 1982), media matters, to echo John Fiske’s book title (1996).

The papers in this issue chart the terrain of media representations of Muslims in Canada. However, rather than dealing with stereotypical representations per se, these papers speak to the resonance of these media images—a resonance that draws from and activates historically archived and inscribed stereotypes. Moreover, each of the papers demonstrates the different tactical ways in which the mainstream media reinforce binaries and exert, through the soft power of the media (Nye & Owens, 1996), particular ways of seeing the Other. In a sense, the mediated landscape, forms and informs the “actuarial gaze”—the “visual organization and institutionalization of threat perception and prophylaxis, which cross cuts politics, public health, public safety, policing, urban planning and media practice” (Feldman, 2005: 206). Here, we are dealing with condensed and iconic images of a constructed threat as nurtured, cultivated and communicated through the media. That which is defined as a contagion emanating from a particular disease finds its carriers in specifically targeted individuals and groups who are simultaneously often confined to fixed geographic locations and subjected to heightened surveillance. However, the treatment of a threat construction is legitimized and rationalized in particular ways. It is the discourses of difference to which we need to attend, whether these are expressed through benevolence, demonization, trivialization and/or ejection, or whether they are articulated in quotidian or extraordinary ways.

Particularly, the papers tackle the different aspects of Islamophobia covered by these veiled layers of meaning: from discourses of dehumanization that utilize animal metaphors to construct the enemy other (Steuter & Wills) to the mobilization of these discourses to rationalize the arrest, confinement and deportation of those constructed as threats to the nation (Odartey-Wellington). While Erin Steuter and Deborah Wills demonstrate the use of metaphoric language and discourses of dehumanization in the Canadian media’s framing of the “War on Terror”, Felix Odartey-Wellington’s analysis focuses on Operation Thread, a state action involving a coordinated multi-agency strike against and arrest and seizure of a large number of South Asian men living in Toronto. Again, as with Steuter and Wills, Odartey-Wellington’s analysis focuses on the print media. Steuter and Wills emphasize the colluding hegemonies that effect and reflect common discourses of dehumanization in a number of print media, whereas Odartey-Wellington focuses on the similarities and differences in the coverage of Operation Thread in Canada’s two national dailies: *The Globe and Mail* and the *National Post*.

Michelle Aguayo’s contribution focuses on a different site of power—that of Hollywood films. Her analysis of *The Kingdom* also brings to the fore the gendered dynamics inherent to the

project of empire. Here, she interrogates the character of the white woman investigator, played by star actor Jennifer Garner in the role of Janet Mayes, a forensic examiner. Aguayo's analysis of the film and, more particularly, of Garner as the central white woman who stands in opposition to the others—veiled Muslim women and savagely patriarchal Muslim men—lends further weight to Razack's argument that the imaginative landscape, post-9/11, is populated by three central characters: the "dangerous Muslim man", the "imperiled Muslim woman", and the "civilized White European" (Razack, 2008: 8). Aguayo's analysis of *The Kingdom* reveals the binaries that are at play in the constructions of "good" Muslims and "bad" Muslims. The "good" Muslims are the ones that side with Western powers and facilitate the investigation of the bombings that are core events in the film. "Bad" Muslims, on the other hand, are the jihadists—those irrational others who intent on waging war against benevolent Western occupiers (see also Mamdani, 2004).

This binary of the good/bad Muslim forms the crux of the analysis presented in Krista Riley's contribution to this issue. Riley takes apart the binary focusing on the underpinning relations of power that frame "good" and "bad" in stark opposition. This relation of power, she points out, is premised on the accumulation of national capital, predicated on the desire to "belong to the nation". Drawing on Ghassan Hage's (1998) analysis, Riley concludes that "good Muslims" achieve the accumulation of national capital through heightened expressions of ultra-patriotic loyalty, which are juxtaposed with the fundamentalism and extremism of the "bad Muslims". This juxtaposition is mediated in several ways in the *National Post*, Riley's site of analysis. "Good" Muslims are threatened by "bad" Muslims, and while "good" Muslims are progressive and seek to alleviate the status of all oppressed Muslim women, "bad" Muslims are traditionalist. Once again, we see how women's bodies occupy the terrain on which the battles are fought, both rhetorically and materially.

The rhetorical use of women's bodies as the site of multiple and competing discourses forms and informs Meena Sharify-Funk's contribution to this issue. Focusing on the *Shari'ah* debate as it played out in the national and regional papers, Sharify-Funk's analysis offers a rich and nuanced examination of the issue, its delimited boundaries in the media discourse and media organizations' proclivities towards presenting complex issues through a uni-dimensional and conflictual perspective. The *Shari'ah* debate, she argues, became a "debate" between two opposing organizations and a handful of advocates rather than an issue that needed to be understood in all its complexity.

The final paper in this issue is situated outside the mainstream media within the sphere of community ethnic media. The analysis is reflective of the tactic of self-representation as opposed to the mainstream media's techniques of other representations. Marie-France René and Rachad Antonious focus on *Atlas.Mtl*, an ethnic community newspaper serving the Maghrebi diaspora in Montreal. They argue that while the newspaper offers coverage concerning the inequalities faced by its readership, it tends, on the whole, to embrace a non-conflictual and conciliatory position vis-à-vis hegemonic values. With respect to the notion of "fitting in", the newspaper reflects a liberal, secular, moderate identity that allows it to negotiate between the views of the dominant Quebec society while still attending to the specific needs of its readership. Further, the paper interprets the larger debate between Islamicism and secular Arab nationalism extant within Arab countries through the prism of diasporic realities.

Complementing these papers, this issue of GMJ -- CE has a review section that includes four book reviews. Sarah Khan reviews *Diaspora by Design: Muslim Immigrants in Canada and Beyond* (2009), Alykhanthi Lynhiavuvu reviews *Immigration, diversité et sécurité: Les*

*associations arabo-musulmanes face à l'État au Canada et au Québec* (2009), Alan David Wong reviews *Belonging and Banishment: Being Muslim in Canada* (2008), and Asma Bala reviews *Canadian Islamic Schools: Unraveling the Politics of Faith, Gender, Knowledge, and Identity* (2008).

Taken together, these contributions highlight the positioning of Muslims in Canada as reflected and refracted in the mainstream media and as articulated in community-based ethnic media. On the one hand, while the dominant discourses seek to position Muslim minorities and issues between a “rock and a hard place”—namely at the polar ends of a mutually exclusive binary of “good” and “bad” Muslims—Riley and Sharify-Funk’s articles analytically reposition the issues, demonstrating the striations that exist between these binaries. These striations point to the various negotiations that all Muslims face in fitting into the nation and acquiring a sense of belonging while also remaining true to their particular interpretations of Islam. Such a sense of belonging, premised as it is on the accumulation of a national capital underpinned by the neoliberal colonialism of a white settler society, remains tenuous at best. It is a constant and fluid process marking the lives and identities of diasporic Muslim communities.

Nevertheless, in returning to Foucault’s conceptual framework of tactics and strategy, it seems apparent that while tactical interventions (through ethnic community media and self-representation through intervention in the mediated public sphere) offer one form of agency, this agency is constrained by the larger structure. Structure or strategy absorbs difference where it is useable, advantageous and commodifiable. Where this cannot be accomplished and structural integrity is threatened, the threats themselves are subject to excision and expulsion. Notwithstanding such a grim projection, we need to be mindful of the latitudes that exist and the spaces ‘in-between’ that, in combination with the sheer heterogeneity of the category “Muslim”, allow for increasingly hybridized and compelling counter-tactics of self-definition (as in, for example, the poetry of Suheir Hammad).

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