

Terrorist Threats: Dreaming Beyond the Violence of Anti-Muslim Racism

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Abstract

My dissertation draws on cultural and political theory as well as visual arts, literature, and music to examine how Western empire is constructed through Orientalist knowledge and also contested through decolonial, feminist, and anti-racist aesthetics. “Terrorist Threats” relies on a multidimensional approach to studying the Global War on Terror and its attendant figure targeted for death and destruction: the Muslim. Following the scholarship of Sherene H. Razack, Sohail Daulatzai, and Junaid Rana, I examine how the colonial construction of the Muslim as a racialized object within modernity, in particular, has been deployed to taxonomically classify a broad range of intersectional categories: Black, Brown, indigenous, immigrant, Latinx, Arab, Sikh, Hindu, and Islam. That is, the “Muslim” in the context of white supremacy and global imperialism exceeds the rigidity of a faith-based category. In fact, my project contends that the figure of the Muslim becomes a fungible category to signify a racialized object that philosophically and/or phenotypically embodies a political position other than liberal secular humanism. Thus, throughout my project, I explore how several South Asian and Muslim diasporic artists engage in insurgent cultural production to combat white supremacy. This allows me to interrogate how colonial knowledge, on the one hand, propagates anti-Muslim racism and, on the other hand, disciplines, controls, and compels the diaspora to internalize this knowledge as a way to perform the role of the good/desirable immigrant.

Throughout “Terrorist Threats,” I highlight how South Asian and Muslim diasporic artists rethink and reshape Orientalist knowledge production and the role of Western secular ideas of self-determination, sovereignty, citizenship, and the Human within colonial modernity. The analysis offers a praxis of reading, seeing, and listening to visual and sonic archives that articulate decolonial knowledge and aesthetics, which becomes what I call “terrorist threats.” My project’s transnational focus seeks to produce decolonial imaginaries whereby different political solidarities and praxes can be forged — beyond and across geopolitical and biopolitical borders.

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Prologue

While working on my dissertation in a café in Mid-City, Los Angeles, on a warm, sunny spring afternoon in 2017, I felt a tap on my shoulder. I looked over to the side. There sat an older white man peering at my laptop screen. “What are you writing?” he asked. “My dissertation,” I responded. I could hear the skepticism in his voice: “Looks interesting, what is your dissertation on?” Immediately, I thought to myself, “Why is this white man surveilling my laptop and my writing?” However, in an effort to be polite, I told him my dissertation is on race, Muslims, and the Global War on Terror. What he told me next — “That’s interesting. They’re the last ones left.” — has not sat right with me since. My mind went in a spin. More curious than frustrated, I asked, “What do you mean?” He replied, “Muslims are the final frontier of modern civilization. They’re the last ones to be conquered. They’re the last ones to become secular. They’re the last ones to become political beings.” At the time, I did not know how to respond. I was shaken by not only his comments but also the fact that my being and my writing were being surveilled, and I had not even noticed and would not have, had he not engaged me. It was as if he were a drone set out to intervene and disrupt my life. Nonetheless, that moment informed my dissertation; I had never considered the violence Muslims have faced as a result of the Global War on Terror in the language that man used: The final frontier in the expansion of secular knowledge and institutions.¹

¹ Samuel P. Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?” *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (1993): 22-49. Huntington’s thesis asserted that because the West and Islam were always bound to be in conflict because the latter is a fundamental threat to the political order of the West. This thesis has gone on to shape the discourse and practices of the US Global War on Terror.

Introduction

They ever ask you, “Where you from?” Like, “Where you really from?” ... My tribe is a quest to a land that was lost to us. And its name is dignity, so where I'm from is not your problem, bruv.

– Riz Ahmed, “*Where You From?*”

I feel, therefore I can be free.

– Audre Lorde

During his 2016 presidential campaign, Donald Trump stated: “I think Islam hates us.”¹ Far from original, fear toward Muslims in Western political discourse is historically, as Edward Said argued, rooted in Orientalist knowledge production that proliferated during the colonial era. Over time, it has given way to a national security state that has implemented numerous legal, social, and cultural policies targeting the figure of the Muslim for various forms of racial violence. More recently, in June 2018, the United States Supreme Court upheld President Trump’s Muslim Ban with a 5-4 vote. Chief Justice Roberts argued that “religious hostility” did not influence the executive order, which restricts immigration from seven Muslim-majority countries. To Roberts and the other judges who voted likewise, the ban was, in fact, “premised on legitimate purposes: preventing entry of nationals who cannot be adequately vetted and inducing other nations to improve their practices.”² On the other hand, Justice Sandra Sotomayor and Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg both dissented with the majority opinion. They argued that the executive order was based on “religious animus and that the President’s stated concerns

¹ Theodore Schleifer. "Donald Trump: 'I Think Islam Hates Us!'" CNN. March 10, 2016. Accessed September 20, 2018. <https://www.cnn.com/2016/03/09/politics/donald-trump-islam-hates-us/>.

² *Trump v. Hawaii*, 585 U.S. __ (2018).

about vetting protocols and national security were but pretexts for discriminating against Muslims;”³ thus violating the principle of religious freedom in the First Amendment.

Nevertheless, describing the President’s anti-Muslim sentiment as simply a form of animosity, instead of structural racism, evades the history of anti-Muslim racism and white supremacy that has “seeped into the forefront of the American imagination.”⁴ The kind of anti-Muslim hostility referenced by Sotomayor and Ginsberg delineates a fear of Islam and Muslims as an individual problem, not part and parcel of how modernity has come to be organized. That is, their dissenting opinion falls short of addressing how anti-Muslim animosity is not just a misunderstanding of Islam but rather an issue produced by a modern structure of racial knowledge embedded in both fascist and liberal thought.

However, while the anti-Muslim racism of Trump and other conservatives exemplifies this Orientalist “Us vs. Them” strategy, liberals have also expressed anti-Muslim sentiments, although in subtler ways. Notably, a few months after Trump’s interview, London’s first Muslim mayor, Sadiq Khan, appeared in an interview on the American television business channel CNBC. Echoing the racial panic driving the question “Why do they hate us?” in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, he commented on-air, “We have to recognize that what these terrorists hate about us is our way of life. We respect each other. We embrace each other. We celebrate each other.”⁵ Khan’s self-Orientalizing discourse reproduces a similar “Us vs. Them” logic that valorizes the West

³ Ibid.

⁴ Sohail Daulatzai, and Junaid Rana. “Introduction.” In *With Stones in Our Hands: Writings on Muslims, Racism, and Empire* (University of Minnesota Press, 2018): xiii.

⁵Christine Wang. "London Mayor: Terrorists Hate Our Way of Life." CNBC. September 19, 2016. Accessed September 20, 2018. <https://www.cnbc.com/2016/09/19/london-mayor-terrorists-hate-our-way-of-life.html>.

as a site of multiculturalism and diversity distinct from the rest of the world, particularly the global South. In fact, his statement falls precisely in line with Mahmoud Mamdani's "good Muslim, bad Muslim" thesis: that Muslims are "now under obligation to prove their credentials by joining in a war against 'bad Muslims.'"⁶

Indeed, Sotomayor, Ginsberg, and many on the Left seem to believe that adopting liberal values of inclusion, tolerance, and diversity not only defines a "good/desirable Muslim" but could also reduce anti-Muslim racism. After all, the West celebrates these "modern" Muslims. This form of recognition has prompted critical ethnic studies scholars to explore how the incorporation of racialized histories and subjectivities into the modern state and global capital continues to operate within the settler colonial and Orientalist logic of white supremacy.⁷ Consequently, this produces an imperial culture and racial epistemology wherein a 'good' Muslim, such as Sadiq Khan, can subtly espouse animosity toward 'bad' Muslims, in particular, and the global South, more broadly, as well as portray them as not only racially inferior to the West but also expendable in service to the latter's self-preservation.

In short, Sadiq Khan and Donald Trump, despite the geographical and racial differences, seemingly agree that the Muslim terrorist poses a fundamental threat to Western existence. The attempt to protect the West and its political theology of progress

⁶ Mahmoud Mamdani. *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and The Roots of Terror* (New York: Three Leaves Press, 2005): 15.

⁷ Glen Sean Coulthard. 2014. *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press; Roderick A. Ferguson. 2012. *The Reorder of Things: The University and its Pedagogies of Minority Difference*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press; Jodi Melamed. 2011. *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism*. University of Minnesota Press; Mimi Thi Nguyen. 2012. *The Gift of Freedom: War, Debt, and Other Refugee Passages*. Durham: Duke University Press.

is a shared and transnational commitment — one that targets the Muslim terrorist as the universal enemy of the political. However, among those in the West who embrace modern political institutions, the issue is their understanding of institutions that advance freedom and democracy obfuscates, if not already being predicated on, histories of conquest, colonialism, and slavery.

My dissertation, “Terrorist Threats: Dreaming Beyond the Violence of Anti-Muslim Racism intervenes in this imperial discourse and practice of the Global War on Terror. It draws on cultural and political theory as well as visual arts, literature, and music to reveal how Euro-American empire is constructed through colonial knowledge, yet contested through decolonial, feminist, and anti-racist art and culture.⁸ This dissertation posits that violence of coloniality has historically given rise to multiple forms of rebellions, insurrections, and insurgencies. My dissertation draws upon this long history to explicate our current post-9/11 political moment. I argue that the current Global War on Terror is not a war against a new kind of "evil" as George W. Bush would describe but a war whose racial, gendered, and sexual logic could be traced back to 1492. More specifically, my research reveals that the underlying logic of the post-1960s security threats of the criminal, drug dealer, or the illegal immigrant are not ideologically and politically removed from the post-9/11 terrorist. In fact, I argue that these various racialized subjects in their geographical and/or temporal distance are much more entangled in their formations. This entanglement is central to the war on terror's racial

⁸ Gayatri Gopinath, 2006. *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures*. Durham: Duke University Press; Katherine McKittrick. 2015. *Sylvia Wynter on Being Human as Praxis*. Durham: Duke University Press; Denise Ferreira Da Silva. 2007. *Toward a Global Idea of Race*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press;

and moral panic that has engendered the formation of a U.S. security state.⁹ As such, my research reveals that the artists I examine—Abdul Abdullah, Rajkamal Kahlon, the Swet Shop Boys, and M.I.A.—combat the anti-Muslim racism as a result of the Global War on Terror by tying to the complex history of slavery and settler colonialism.

In positing the violence of coloniality, my dissertation takes into account the ways in which the Eurocentric regimes of authority produced a modern/colonial world system that continues to shape our ethics and politics of living, being, and relating with difference. For instance, in the early period of the formation of the United States, the enslaved African and the native savage both became the tools of capital accumulation through the former's labor and the latter's land dispossession. The enslaved African was both property and labor whereas the native savage was, and perhaps continues to be in different iterations, the frontier that needs to be conquered and civilized. The formation of the U.S. state, in particular, through these genocidal institutions of slavery and indigenous land dispossession have solidified the conception of U.S. nationalism.

Since the abolition of slavery and the territorial expansion to Western frontier, the U.S. has not ceased in its statecraft. The world has witnessed numerous civilizing missions by the U.S. in Latin America, Southeast Asia, and more recently South Asia, the Middle East, North and East Africa. Although these missions took place at different moments of U.S. history, there has been a common thread that ties them all together: The national defense of a “homeland” from the danger of those outside who are criminal,

⁹ Inderpal Grewal, *Saving the Security State: Exceptional Citizens in Twenty-First Century America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

uncivilized, and wild, and thus undeserving of life.¹⁰ The security threat has always lingered as a haunting presence throughout the history of U.S. colonial modernity. However, since the rise of the U.S. as a superpower in the 1950s, those who control the historical narrative of the nation have always given the threat a different name. The communist, the black criminal, the illegal alien, or the Muslim terrorist are all different racial formations loaded with political and ideological currency that if purchased could make the consumer feel a little more American. That is, the value of U.S. nationalism is predicated on the disposability of those considered not only invaluable, but also a surplus threat, an overdetermination. The neoliberal marketplace determines who lives and who dies.

This dissertation aims to challenge the modern neoliberal citizens understanding and perception of who and what constitutes a threat to their security and freedom. Some scholars have argued that since the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s much of the work for liberation that was seemingly accomplished has led to a politics of representation, recognition, and incorporation into networks of power that have mutated and shifted to secure the safety of the state and capital. The phenotype of white supremacy has multiplied as initiatives for diversity and inclusion have reproduced the status quo. In other words, the resolutions to the colonial drama only set the stage for new actors. The colonizers merely abandoned their outposts, leaving their discourses and institutions in place. The formerly colonized, enslaved and dispossessed merely inherited a world that was made through their own subjugation, suffering, and loss. My dissertation

¹⁰ David Theo Goldberg, *The Racial State* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2002).

attends to the ways in which the incorporation of these subjects into a global political arena marked by Euro-American law, capital, freedom, and democracy reproduce the hierarchies of difference that were inaugurated when Columbus set in motion the world's restructuring in 1492. In drawing upon this long history of racial-colonial modernity, my goal is to gesture towards an ethics of relationality where the liberation of black and brown people is palpable and attainable not through the nation-state or liberal reform but in our coalitional knowledge and practices that refute and resist violence and subjugation.

What's more, two central concerns drive my dissertation's multidimensional approach to studying the Global War on Terror and its object targeted for death and destruction — the Muslim. The first concern involves exploring the West's deployment of imperial discourses of democracy, freedom, and multiculturalism as a way to produce the "modern" Muslims. I argue that this expansion of imperial power is based on knowledge that proliferated during the colonial era.¹¹ In other words, the racialization of Muslims and South Asians as potential sites of terror has expanded and deepened the modern West's prerogative to imagine themselves as not only capable of extending liberal salvation to those cast out of law, politics, and society but also draws upon an established racial-colonial power/knowledge infrastructure that defines who is human and thereby deserving of life. My project asks the following: How does colonial knowledge construct and give value to the Western Self through the degradation of the non-Western Other, i.e., the Muslim? Second, how does this knowledge discipline immigrants into being docile, heteronormative, and liberal subjects who can also administer and

¹¹ Edward Said. 2003. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books.

participate in the structures of white supremacy? Third, how does anti-Muslim racism operate in and through this knowledge as a way to discipline, control, and compel figures like Sadiq Khan, and others in the diaspora, to perform the role of the good/desirable Muslim. In considering such lines of inquiry, I interrogate and challenge the ways in which Western forces have recruited formerly colonized subjects to form and maintain a neoliberal multicultural empire that continues to operate within the logics of white supremacy.

Next, the second driving concern of my research lies in investigating the aforementioned questions through the cultural production of various South Asian and Muslim diasporic artists. I argue that these artists not only combat anti-Muslim racism within the context of the Global War on Terror, but also situate the non-Western, Muslim Other as social and cultural actors whose own ways of being and knowing may potentially destabilize the architecture of colonial modernity. I highlight how South Asian and Muslim diasporic artists rethink and reshape colonial knowledge production as well as the role of Western secular ideas of self-determination, sovereignty, citizenship, and the Human within colonial modernity. The analysis offers a praxis of reading, seeing, and listening to visual and sonic archives that articulate decolonial knowledge and aesthetics, which becomes what I call “terrorist threats.” My dissertation discusses how South Asian and Muslim diasporic artists who forge these “terrorist threats” articulate an insurgent decolonial politico-aesthetic to combat the knowledge of colonial modernity.

Indeed, decolonial scholars and artists have played a key role in dismantling coloniality, or the colonial matrix of power. They have demonstrated that the decolonial

option is not simply continuing a tradition of protest but also “[demanding] a delinking of oneself from the knowledge systems we take for granted (and can profit from) and practicing epistemic disobedience.”¹² This form of disobedience emerges from the oppressive and violent logic of coloniality that has produced a rhetoric of salvation and progress disguised in the clothes of modernity.

Just as importantly, my inquiry additionally uncovers how the racialization of the Muslim produces a figure that exceeds the rigidity of a faith-based identity. In fact, it has become a fungible taxonomy deployed to classify a broad range of intersectional identities embodying a political position other than secular liberal humanism:¹³

Buried not too deep in this conversation of disparate philosophy is often the idea of biological difference—for example, the arguments that religious people are hardwired to think a certain way, “that their culture is different from ours” or that “they hate our way of life and will destroy us.” Embedded in these rationales is a combination of biological and cultural reasoning that is central to racialization and a versatile and flexible process in fixating on a racial object. This is to say that the racialized Muslim is not a fixed racial object but becomes one and is profiled as a racialized threat as potentiality. Anti-Muslim racism, then, is about a kind of racialized becoming that is always in flux and is different from other forms of racism that have become part of a racial common sense. Anti-Muslim racism is the incarnation of a shifting conceptual apparatus that comprises racism as a technique and white supremacy as a systemic end.¹⁴

In other words, anti-Muslim racism comprises the coalescing of centuries old knowledge systems that see both racial and religious difference as determinants of who is considered

¹² Walter Mignolo, “Sylvia Wynter: What Does It Mean To Be Human?” in *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, ed. by Katherine McKittrick (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015): 107.

¹³ Sohail Daulatzai. 2012. *Black Star, Crescent Moon: The Muslim International and Black Freedom Beyond America*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press; Amaney Jamal., and Nadine Christine Naber. 2008. *Race and Arab Americans Before and After 9/11: From Invisible Citizens to Visible Subjects*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press; Junaid Rana. 2011. *Terrifying Muslims: Race and Labor in the South Asian Diaspora*. Durham: Duke University Press; Sherene Razack. 2008. *Casting Out: Race and the Eviction of Muslims from Western Law and Politics*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

¹⁴ Sohail Daulatzai, and Junaid Rana. “Introduction.” In *With Stones in Our Hands: Writings on Muslims, Racism, and Empire* (University of Minnesota Press, 2018): xv-xvi.

Muslim. Moreover, it not only targets Muslim-identifying subjects but also reduces them to a racist archetype that refuses both complexity and possibility. Therefore, it is important to examine the historical formation and entanglement of religion and race as categories that produce anti-Muslim racism.

My work bridges transnational American studies and critical Muslim studies to intervene in the ways in which anti-Muslim racism reinvigorates the white supremacist and racial capitalist logics that continue to permit political violence on behalf of the U.S. nation-state. The transnational focus seeks to produce decolonial imaginaries whereby different political solidarities and praxes can be forged — beyond and across geopolitical and biopolitical borders — as a way to dream of a decolonial future untethered to the political, economic, and ecological violence incited by colonial modernity. The threat of critical knowledge becoming insurgent is what the West calls “terror;” however, to those subjected to the violence of white supremacy, this critical knowledge is liberation.

Anti-Muslim Racism and the Global War on Terror

Colonialism was essentially a project of “secularization of human existence,” and race was the concept that brought this formation into being.¹⁵ This cannot stand alone though without further analysis of the relationship between race and secularism as well as a consideration of religion — the antecedent to race — as what gave way to the secularization of Europe’s others during the colonial enterprise. Unfortunately, many scholars who study race begin their inquiry into modern racism without accounting for the role of religion in the historical formation of the modern/colonial world. This is

¹⁵ Sylvia Wynter. "Beyond the Word of Man: Glissant and the New Discourse of the Antilles". *World Literature Today*. 63, 4 (1989): 639.

largely due to the insertion and subsequent domination of secular knowledge and institutions as a result of colonialism. However, the discussion of religion in the formation of modern racism is not only necessary but also critical to understanding how the Muslim subject also becomes a racial subject within the imperial practices and discourses of the Global War on Terror.

During the Renaissance period between the 14th and 16th centuries, the West considered Christianity to be a universal theology, a doctrine of force to transform and convert non-Christian societies. It also became an anthropological category of sorts. As decolonial scholar Walter Mignolo explains, that paradigm of knowledge production allowed for the expansion of coloniality:

Christian European's conception of and image of the world *were only their own conception and image of the world, and not the representation of a geohistorical ontology of the world*. This is what coloniality of knowledge means, and how coloniality of knowledge orients both geopolitical designs and body-political subjectivities (e.g., our senses, our emotions, our cosmo-vivencias). Obviously, Western Christian Europeans had the right to build their own image of the world, like anybody else who had done so before them. But it was an aberration to pretend and act accordingly as if *their specific image of the world and their own sense of totality was the same for any- and everybody else on the planet*. The strong belief that their knowledge covered the totality of the known brought about the need to devalue, diminish, and shut off any other totality that might endanger an epistemic totalitarianism in the making.¹⁶

For instance, according to Sylvia Wynter, Columbus' voyage across the Atlantic set in motion a "root expansion of thought" to "provide all humanity with 'a new image of the earth and a new conception of the cosmos.'"¹⁷ This colonial knowledge system rooted in

¹⁶ Walter Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh. *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018): 195.

¹⁷ Sylvia Wynter. "1492: A New World View." In *Race, Discourse, and the Origin of the Americas: A New World View*, ed. Vera Lawrence Hyatt and Rex Nettleford (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995): 264.

Christian theology provided a way to establish an ontological understanding of humanness. Therefore, the natives of the New World were classified as soulless as they lacked the knowledge of the Christian God. Similarly, for other Christian colonizers, the ontological difference of natives became part and parcel of how they made sense of the world. As colonization continued, it did not just lead to the conversion of natives into Christians but also established political, economic, and social hierarchies that would dominate those under its power. The Church fulfilled this mission until the seventeenth century when the Enlightenment and secular knowledge and institutions replaced Christian theology.

However, this amalgamation of religion and race in the construction of an Other did not necessarily develop in the New World. In fact, scholar Junaid Rana has argued, “The story of the race concept emerges out of the religious exclusions practiced in the fourteenth and fifteenth century” as part of the centuries’ long imperial project of *Reconquista*.¹⁸ Prior to Columbus’ arrival in the New World, the processes leading to the conversion of indigenous peoples in the Americas had been developed and implemented on Muslims and Jews of the Iberian Peninsula:

The prospect of conversion or death for Jews and Muslims was itself the act of shifting the religious into racial conceptions. For the explorers, it is important to note that Muslims and Jews constituted an early category of religious–racial other to transpose onto indigenous groups of the New World in the form of racial thought.¹⁹

Though conversion does not entail a physical death, it nevertheless meant abandoning one’s Islamic, Judaic, or other form of indigenous religious self to be considered a fully-

¹⁸ Junaid Rana. "The Story of Islamophobia". *Souls*. 9 no.2 (2007): 152.

¹⁹ Ibid.

fledged human and thus involved a death of sorts. The forerunner to the aforementioned coloniality of knowledge, *Reconquista* similarly involved the production of a racial knowledge drawing upon notions of culture and biology to differentiate the civilized Christian and the savage Muslim of the Iberian Peninsula. To put it differently, even though a Muslim may have converted to the Christian faith, their blood could never be Christian enough, and as a result they were always, already and forever Muslim, which meant being considered subhuman due to their cultural and biological ancestry.

Moving forward to the Enlightenment in the 18th century, Christian theology gave way to secular shifts in thought. The emergence of secularism coincided with the construction of racial knowledge around non-European and non-Christian populations. In contrast to the early history of colonialism wherein native peoples were classified as lacking a soul, the post-Enlightenment colonial enterprise classified them as lacking the capacity to reason. Civility and rationality were considered inherent to the European man. As a result, sovereignty now rested in his hands and no longer in God. Oludamini Ogunnaike, a religious scholar, succinctly and sharply summarizes the major changes as such:

Whereas in the Middle Ages, humanity was judged by participation in or proximity to a transcendent spiritual, Divine ideal (Christ or God), the secularization process of the early Modern Period and the Enlightenment resulted in humanity being judged by proximity to the immanent ideal of rational, enlightened European man. The elevation of man to the top rung of the Chain of Being (or alternatively, his elimination of all that stood above him) is the philosophical foundation of the modern anthropocentric perspective, in which rational man, in and of himself, is the measure of all things, and an end unto himself.²⁰

²⁰ Ogunnaike Oludamini. "From Heathen to Sub-Human: A Genealogy of the Influence of the Decline of Religion on the Rise of Modern Racism". *Open Theology* no. 2 (2016): 297.

The birth of an Enlightened European man during the secularization of Christian theological knowledge fundamentally reshaped the world.

Philosopher Charles Taylor, in writing about his highly ambitious book, *A Secular Age* (2007), shared key insights into the making of the modern secular subject:

Almost everyone can agree that one of the big differences between us and our ancestors of five hundred years ago is that they lived in an “enchanted” world, and we do not; at the very least, we live in a *much less* “enchanted” world. We might think of this as our having “lost” a number of beliefs and the practices which they made possible. But more, the enchanted world was one in which these forces could cross a porous boundary and shape our lives, psychic and physical. One of the big differences between us and them is that we live with a much firmer sense of the boundary between self and other. We are “buffered” selves. We have changed.²¹

For Taylor, the modern “buffered” self has replaced the pre-modern porous self — a being “enchanted” by a world of spirits, demons, and extra-human forces. The disenchantment produced “a world in which the only locus of thoughts, feelings, spiritual élan is what we call minds; the only minds in the cosmos are those of humans; and minds are bounded, so that the thoughts, feelings, etc., are situated ‘within’ them.”²² In other words, secularism brought about a modern buffered subject that exists separately from external forces, whereby the mind has become the locus of knowledge, reason, and power. Therefore, my interest in the secular severance from external forces leads to a few critical questions: What or who is subjugated in the making of the modern individual? What order of knowledge has come to dominate and shape the world? And how does this knowledge explain our understanding of each other and the natural world?

²¹ Charles Taylor. “Buffered and Porous Selves.” *The Immanent Frame*, SSRC, 2 Sept. 2008, tif.ssrc.org/2008/09/02/buffered-and-porous-selves/.

²² Charles Taylor. *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007): 29-30.

In racializing non-Europeans as naturally different, Europeans and their descendants have developed the terms that would create the language and knowledge to govern the political, economic, and epistemic domains of the modern world. That language has continued to be dominated by coloniality, a matrix that has not only ordered global and local economies, politics, and knowledge, but also reshaped the sensibilities and perceptions of people who have come under its sway, namely those from the global South. This socio-historical process refers to a condition that names a complex structure entangling every domain of our lives. In contrast, colonialism tends to be understood as an episode of the past or a bygone era of European domination over the global South. Thus, coloniality denotes the *longue durée* of colonialism and its persistent effects in spite of the independence movements of the mid-nineteenth century throughout the global South. After all, these countries did not achieve complete independence from colonial power structures, which were written across racial, class, religious, gendered, and sexual lines and persist in managing and controlling everyday life.²³

In dominating the world through a common language — a common sense — certain European subjects and their descendants enjoyed the patriarchal authority to determine life or death for others. Thus, becoming a modern secular liberal individual ultimately fulfills the universalist vision of the West. It is a particular genre of the human — European man — that has imposed itself on the world in drawing upon a common language shaped by a racial, sexual, and anthropocentric grammar. This grammar became

²³ Roberto Hernández. *Coloniality of the US / Mexico Border: Power, Violence, and the Decolonial Imperative* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2020): 10.

a commonsensical way of spelling out the colonial and imperial difference of those from the global South.

Coloniality has most visibly reared its head within the last century. For instance, the ideological battle between capitalism and communism during the Cold War represented a battle of post-Enlightenment ideologies. However, following the fall of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s, political science scholar, Francis Fukuyama, famously announced that the world is not just witnessing the end of the Cold War, but the end of history itself. That is, the fall of the Berlin Wall marked a profound moment in global history wherein all ideological disputes had concluded. Democracy and neoliberal governance upheld socialism as the dominant political architecture of organizing the world. Amiss in Fukuyama's argument though are the architectures through which this form of governance gained power and authority, namely the colonial domination and subordination of the people, spaces, and knowledges of Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Almost 30 years later, the U.S. finds itself in another war — the “Global War on Terror” — in which the enemy, the Muslim terrorist, is said to not be bounded to any specific sovereign nation-state nor governed by secular liberalism. As a result, the “terrorist” is racialized to be irrational, savage, and anti-Western and thus necessitates being annihilated.

In terms of identity politics, the post-Civil Rights era witnessed its domestication by the rise of a liberal multiculturalist nation-state and inclusionary adjustments of capital. This shift did not only take place in America; the mid-century saw a wave of anti-colonial movements redefining politics and the concept of the political. In Carl Schmitt's

formulation, the political is characterized through a friend/enemy distinction.²⁴ Schmitt, whose writings have been very influential in reflecting on the formation of the modern state and sovereignty, argues that the realm of the political rests with the state. That is, the sovereign power of the modern state defines itself as a political entity, one that may choose to assert its biopolitical right to eliminate any and all forms of enmity. Thus, war and warfare become an exhibition of the political, whereby the destruction of the enemy is the utmost priority of those who seek to preserve the modern political state. While many leaders in Black freedom struggles were either assassinated and/or coopted into the logic of the U.S. nation-state, many around and in the global South also saw their plight for freedom and decolonization thwarted and dismantled. The West's shift from anti-communism to anti-terror was primarily distinguished through the "moralization of the friend/enemy distinction" wherein the terrorist 'becomes an incarnation of evil or irrationality and beyond the bounds of properly human.'²⁵ For liberals, the end of the Cold War marked the end of the ideological battle between capitalism and communism, and any contemporary conflict can only be explained as apolitical because it lacks the ideological character that is, as explained in Chapter 3, translatable and audible to the West. Thus, for the global South, or what scholar Sohail Daulatzai names the "Muslim International," calls for decolonization and liberation fell under the racializing logic of

²⁴ Carl Schmitt. *The Concept of the Political*. Translated by George Schwab. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.

²⁵ Salman Sayyid. "The Dynamics of a Postcolonial War". *Defence Studies*. 13, no. 3 (2013): 289.

“terrorism” while the threat of “Muslim terrorist [helped shape] U.S. national identity in the post-Civil Rights era.”²⁶

Within the context of the Global War on Terror, I argue that this Muslim subject has come to inhabit this affectable position wherein the dispossession of life and land serves as an “ontological ground through which U.S. settler colonialism enacts itself as settler imperialism.”²⁷ This form of thinking racializes Muslims as feral non-beings whose psyche and theology explain their potentiality to commit acts of terror. As a result, the only prognosis to this terrorist threat is either the elimination or secular conversion (read: assimilation) of Muslims into a political society. In other words, the racialization of the Muslims aids in the construction of a Western sociality and spatiality whereby the death of the Muslim through permanent war secures life for the West. In so doing, the figure of the Muslim is positioned in a racial state of expendability — a feral terrain of absolute abjection — that calls upon the police power and war power of the West to execute its sovereign right of self-preservation by any means necessary. Thus, it “[permits] the suspension of the law, by the law, in the name of the law.”²⁸ The Muslim is cast out of the world of humans into a zone outside of the law.²⁹ Law aids and abets this crime as law becomes criminal in and of itself. The enactment of law and legality in the name of security and peace ultimately leads to a form of race-thinking written into the

²⁶ Sohail Daulatzai. *Black Star, Crescent Moon: Black Freedom Beyond America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012): 171.

²⁷ Jodi Byrd. *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011): xix.

²⁸ Eli Jelly-Schapiro. *Security and Terror: American Culture and the Long History of Colonial Modernity* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018): 5.

²⁹ See Sherene Razack. 2011. *Casting Out: The Eviction of Muslims from Western Law and Politics*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

fabric of law, such that the enactment of legal measures is a necropolitical calculation of killing some for the self-preservation of others. Many scholars have named this process the state of exception and/or the state of emergency wherein racial expendability through policing and war becomes the modus operandi of subduing a particular Muslim threat.

The production of a state of exception within modernity is not arbitrary but actually structurally integral to the function of the modern political and legal systems that govern modern states. In other words, race becomes the modality marking the border between civility and incivility or life and death. The state of exception is anything but an exception. In fact, it is more normative in terms of its ordinary and everyday practices. To put it differently, for the racialized Muslim subject, the state of exception exists not as an exception from the everyday violence Muslims are subjected to, but an “addition, partial displacement, and intensification” of that ordinary violence. Scholar Wael Hallaq describes this expression of sovereign power not as “outside the law” as Carl Schmitt and Giorgio Agamben define the “state of exception,” but rather an integral and constitutive element of the function of modern sovereign power. Thus, in naming this exercise of sovereign power as a “state of extraordinary violence,” Hallaq provides a different rubric to assess racial-colonial violence. This calculative process of death that I explain further in Chapter 4, in fact, is contingent on the production of sovereign knowledge and its domination over those in the state of nature. The state of extraordinary violence is then the expression of sovereign power in its most normative setting, or as Wael Hallaq states, “The extraordinary is the moment of truth in the ordinary.”³⁰

³⁰ Wael Hallaq. *Restating Orientalism: A Critique of Modern Knowledge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018): 211.

Terrorist Threats: The Wild Aesthetics of the Decolonial International

My dissertation emerges out of the many contradictions I have experienced during my life, especially post-9/11. For instance, I remember remarking how Muslims would say, “We’re good Muslims,” and Hindus would say, “We’re not Muslims.” Consequently, my initial interest lay in examining how 9/11 fractured South Asians across religious and nationalist lines, but my research brought up some critical questions rooted in the colonial history and epistemology unfolding in the lives of many South Asians. In fact, investigating the modern/colonial construction of the Muslim body led me to a site of inquiry where those racialized as Muslim can dismantle the coloniality of power dividing our communities. Thereafter, I wanted to construct a dissertation based on the ways in which South Asian and Muslim artists were crafting a response to the imperial discourses and practices taking shape during the Global War on Terror. I argue that these artists construct a terrorist threat that embodies a complex knowledge that offers a possibility of dismantling the coloniality of power seeking to eliminate the Muslim.

The artists in question coalesce around the figure of the Muslim to articulate a decolonial aesthetic that refuses its incorporation into modern/colonial knowledge systems, such as neoliberal multiculturalism. I am naming it to be a “terrorist threat” as it gestures toward a radical rebuilding of modern society and its attendant economic, social, political, and cultural institutions. This threat follows Aimé Césaire’s *Discourse on Colonialism* (1950), which scholar Robin D.G. Kelley describes as “poetic knowledge” revolting against the realities of colonialism. It harnesses the potentiality to combat and undo power. “I feel, therefore I can be free,” as Audre Lorde reminds us of the decolonial potential of

poetic aesthetics to express feelings and desires for freedom.³¹ As such, this dissertation centers aesthetic as a form of decolonial knowledge — a method to transform ourselves through serious consideration of subjugated ways of knowing and being.

Decoloniality imagines and charts a future that is political and epistemically delinked from the West. To do so requires living, being, doing, and even sensing the world in non-European and non-White ways. Such an endeavor cannot draw upon the knowledge of aesthetics fundamentally tied to reason and rationality. In many ways, the lived experiences of the racialized Muslim subject in the core of the colonial matrix of power has already had their sensibilities rendered meaningless and/or irrational. However, what is considered irrational can produce a knowledge, one that subtends the racist, sexist, and anthropocentric common sense of the secular liberal human. The aesthetics examined in this dissertation are vital to decoloniality to the extent that those who produce these cultural objects are responding to a world system that has structured how we feel, think, know, and live. They are the terrorist threat that haunt, disrupt, and reorient our secular liberal sensibilities toward an elsewhere — an other world. As Gloria Anzaldúa says, “Nothing happens in the ‘real’ world unless it first happens in the images in our heads.”

“Terrorist Threats” situates the non-Western, Muslim Other as a social and political actor whose own ways of being and knowing may potentially destabilize Euro-American modernity. In so doing, Chapter one, “Performing A Poetics of Refusal: The Global Entanglements and Ruptures of Racial-Colonial Violence in Abdul Abdullah’s *Primavera* and *Siege*,” examines the visual art of Australian artist Abdul Abdullah who

³¹ Audre Lorde. “Poetry is Not a Luxury.” In *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Berkeley Crossing Press, 2007.

embraces a ‘Muslim monstrous aesthetic’ as a way to resist and refuse the incorporation of racial difference into Western politics and law. I examine Abdullah’s visual art from two of his respected art installations, *Primavera* (2015) and *Siege* (2013), to address how the figure of the Muslim haunts the modern/colonial world. From *Primavera*, Abdullah’s self-portrait titled “Caliban” — a character from Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* and a specter that has come to haunt colonial modernity — provides a starting point to reimagining a Western classic. I argue, Caliban comes to contain multiple identities and histories.³² Indeed, he has become the dispossessed native subject, the enslaved African subject, and most significant for my work, a representation of the global racialized subject: the Muslim Other.

Next, Abdullah’s series of images entitled *Siege* combine visual and written language to offer a glimpse into the insurgent politics of protest. The decolonial insurgent poetics offer a glimpse into the collective possibilities of those seen as monsters, animals, and savages. This is not a political-aesthetic only limited to the Muslim subjectivity, but rather calls upon a decolonial international that sees racial-colonial violence as a global phenomenon. I argue that *Siege* visually and poetically imagines a global decolonial insurgency that connects various racialized groups who refuse to disappear and/or be eviscerated.

In Chapter two, “Diasporic Suturing: Rajkamal Kahlon and the Disarticulation of Man,” I focus on the visual art of Berlin-based South Asian diasporic artist Rajkamal Kahlon. Drawing on colonial archival texts, ethnographic photography, and history, her

³² Ibid., 42-43.

work challenges the ways in which modernity and its white supremacist interface tell and retell stories of human difference. She sketches and sculpts visual critiques of the West's phantasmal representation of the racial Other. In so doing, the resultant art sutures and rehabilitates the colonized body that has been injured and subjugated through the universalist proclamations of Eurocentric knowledge. For my research, I consider two of Kahlon's solo installations to argue that her feminist art challenges modern/colonial forms of knowledge that have influenced practices of seeing and witnessing political violence. In the first installation entitled *People of Afghanistan* (2016), she demonstrates the ways in which modern/colonial systems of knowledge have produced objects of death and destruction within the Global War on Terror. In this first installation, I focus on the ways in which Kahlon overlays, or sutures, distant historiographies to illuminate the expansion of the U.S. homeland security state within the post-9/11 Global War on Terror. In the second installation entitled *Blowback* (2013), Kahlon animates these "objects" to not only retaliate against such colonial constructions and imperial subjugation but also speculate about a future not-yet-here. In suturing these two exhibitions, I argue that Kahlon's art offers us a feminist methodology of "diasporic suturing." I employ this method myself to disorient the readers spatial and temporal coordinates of when and where the Global War on Terror is unfolding. Through these two exhibitions, I suture my way, as Kahlon does in her work, across multiple temporalities to examine the visibility of Muslim bodies as a way to not only address the longer history of anti-Muslim racism but to also illuminate how state technologies of surveillance are tied to colonial knowledge production, and vice versa.

Then, Chapter three, “The Brown Atlantic: Swet Shop Boys and the Ungovernability of Diasporic Noise,” looks to music to disrupt the domesticating logic that targets and manipulates the South Asian and Muslim diaspora into becoming docile, heteronormative, and secular liberal subjects who also administer and participate in the structures of white supremacy. The musical duo, which consists of British Pakistani artist Riz Ahmed and Indian American artist Himanshu Suri, produces an ungovernable racial noise that unsettles the model minority myth as well as the “good Muslim, bad Muslim” thesis. Their music combats the colonial and imperial logic that those racialized as “terrorists” must follow, embrace, and embody the nationalism of the modern state in order to recuperate social value and access a biopolitical life. This chapter asks: What are the conditions that produce the possibility of forging transnational political imaginaries? How may South Asians and Muslims in the U.K. and the U.S. challenge their subjectivities in relation to their respective modern nation-state? In doing so, I want to explore how the Swet Shop Boys produce knowledges to radically reimagine a world in which they create spaces and sounds of solidarity with other subjugated groups. Furthermore, I am interested in how the Swet Shop Boys together have the power to create new sound waves and discourses that yield the potential to challenge South Asians who embrace the racial politics of the model minority myth and the war on terror. This chapter articulates a transnational Afro-South Asian-Muslim solidarity equipped to provide the Black, South Asian, and the Muslim diaspora in the West discursive strategies to debunk the model minority myth and to form cross-racial alliances with other subjugated groups.

In the final chapter, “Policing Insurgents: Race, Empire, and the State of Extraordinary Violence in Los Angeles,” I consider M.I.A.’s interpretation of the how genocidal logic of the modern racial state has constructed the figure of the Muslim terrorist as a threat to the West positions it in a racial state of expendability that necessitates imperial war and occupation. Through M.I.A.’s *Born Free* (2010), a music video set in the city of Los Angeles—a city known for its history of violent policing in communities of color—I read, listened to, and watched M.I.A. articulate the ways in which imperial power has targeted the figure of the Muslim terrorist as an expendable racial object. Based off Peter Watkins film *Punishment Park* (1971), which is also set in Los Angeles, *Born Free* depicts the genocide of young red-haired boys somewhere surrounding the city of Los Angeles. I draw upon Peter Watkins film to contextualize not only how it inspired M.I.A. and her director Romain Gavras to produce *Born Free* but to also explore how the politics and culture of the Global War on Terror are tied to that of the Cold War. As such, my analysis, like her music video, centers Los Angeles as a critical site of investigating two main questions: In what ways does the modern state produce and reproduce discourses and practices of expendability? And for what purposes? With these guiding my inquiry, my analysis likens the music video to practice in dreaming of a decolonial future that gestures towards a world without genocidal measures of the modern nation-state. Finally, I conclude this chapter with a meditation of Zack de la Rocha’s solo EP *One Day as a Lion*.

Chapter 1: Performing a Poetics of Refusal: The Global Entanglements and Ruptures of Racial Colonial Violence in Abdul Abdullah's *Primavera* and *Siege*

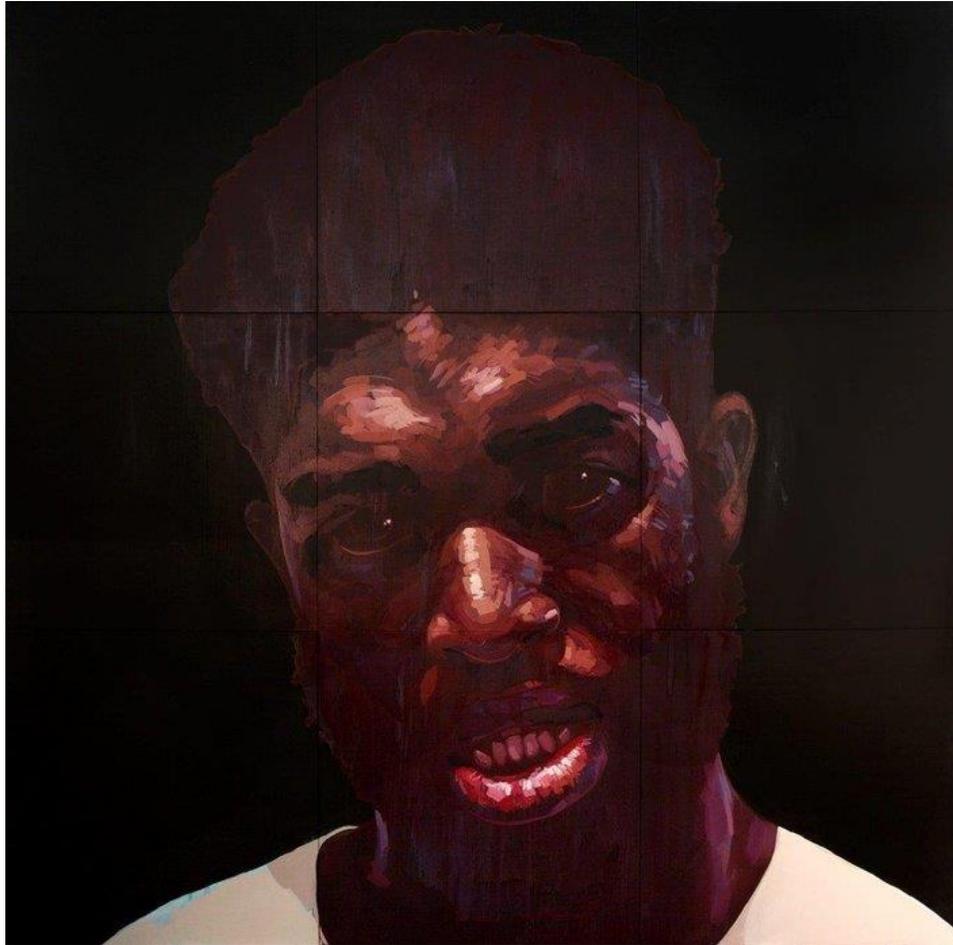


Figure 1.1: Abdul Abdullah, *Caliban*, 2015. Oil on board. 270 x 270 cm. Museum of Contemporary Art, Australia.

Beware that, when fighting monsters, you yourself do not become a monster... for when you gaze long into the abyss. The abyss gazes also into you. – Friedrich Nietzsche

While Shakespeare was writing western humanism into being, he was also writing its others into the zone of nonbeing. Over the past several decades, scholars have most notably taken up Shakespeare's *The Tempest* as a text emblematic of colonial encounter and native resistance. In particular, the figure of Caliban stands out as both the colonial Other and the resisting colonial subject. Shakespeare's representation of difference – the writing of Caliban into a zone of (racialized) nonbeing – could be argued to be one of the most popular literary texts to have a formative influence on the constitution of the modern subject. That is, the representation of Caliban's difference as undesirable, Shakespeare produces a racial knowledge that fosters the discursive and material formations of self-other binary. The self being the modern individual spatially and temporally located on the interior of civilization, and the other located on its exterior.

Many scholars and artists have debated the play not only since the rise of anticolonial thought and discourse during the 1960s, but long before that. The first noted critique of the play emerged in the year 1900 by Uruguayan philosopher José Enrique Rodó. Many others have since offered their own (re)interpretations of the play.¹ In particular, postcolonial readings of *The Tempest* gained popularity as scholars began to interpret the play, specifically the story of Caliban, to be about enslavement and colonialism. These (re)interpretations have had great value, particularly for Caribbean social, cultural, and political formations. As Shona N. Jackson argues, Caliban not only “[performs] a certain kind of work for early modern European subject in Shakespeare’s play, but he also performs a certain kind of labor for Creole subjectivity in twentieth-

¹ I will not be unpacking the genealogy of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* in this chapter.

century adaptations of it.”² I am not only interested in this work Caliban performs for making of the modern subject, but also the kind of work Caliban does for Muslim subjectivity given the rise of the Global War on Terror.

Through a discussion of Caliban in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* and the later adaptations, this chapter addresses specter of Caliban in western modernity. In doing so, I argue, following the work of scholar Jodi Byrd who writes, “*The Tempest* can be understood with regards to the multiple historical and cultural contexts that constitute cacophony.”³ In other words, the cacophonous figure of Caliban has come to be overdetermined “so loaded with signifiers that he merely seems blank.”⁴ This blankness has given subaltern scholars and artists the ability define and claim Caliban as their respective representation of colonized subjectivity. However, Byrd argues in “using cacophony as a model for understanding the interrelationships between and amongst colonial and colonized experiences,” Caliban comes to contain multiple identities and histories.⁵ Thus, Caliban becomes in all interpretations of the figure a representation of the global racialized subject.

Given this ambivalence of who the real Caliban is, and where he comes from, he has become the dispossessed native subject, the enslaved African subject, and most significant for my work, the Muslim Other. As a global racialized subject, I ask: How does Caliban’s multiple entanglements with colonialization produce the modern western

² Shona N. Jackson, *Creole Indigeneity: Between Myth and Nation in the Caribbean* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 75.

³ Jodi Byrd, “Colonialisms: Native and Arrivants at the Limits of Postcolonial Theory,” *Dissertation* (University of Iowa, Ames, Department of English, 2002): 35.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, 42-43.

subject? More specifically, how and why does Caliban come to represent Muslim subjectivity in visual artist Abdul Abdullah's work? Finally, given that *The Tempest* was written in the 17th century, why does Caliban continue to appear in academic, literary, and visual texts? Why does he refuse to disappear? These are the questions that guide my intellectual inquiry into Caliban's entanglement with the ongoing colonial drama's paradigm of war.

The last half-century has seen the west re-narrate the discourse upon which colonialism has been conducted. White supremacy has gone from explicit and overt violence upon racialized peoples to a more insidious approach of conducting and reinforcing the racial-colonial juridical and economic architectures of modernity. Much of this last half-century witnessed anti-colonial uprisings throughout the world, however many have fallen prey to the incorporative logics of the nation-state, and Western modernity at-large, who see liberal reform as the only diagnosis for suffering and/or wrongdoing. The incorporation of anticolonial discourses by the state, capital, and the academy have immobilized any further critical dissent and/or calls for liberation. As scholar Jodi Melamed explains, “[Incorporation] has limited sanctioned antiracist discourses to those that take for granted the benevolence of U.S. global ascendancy and integrate that knowledge architecture of state-capital formations (e.g., property rights, free markets, and financial deregulation) into what racial equality may signify, and what may signify as racial equality.”⁶

⁶ Jodi Melamed, *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 1.

The movements of the 1960s and 70s saw out a transformation of the racial-colonial global space. Anti-colonial movements had supposedly ousted their former masters and colonizers to announce themselves as self-determining subjects. The apparent success of these movements gave way to the postcolonial era that has defined the historical institutionalization of those “formerly” colonized into modern subjects. These movements sought the belated inclusion of minoritized subjects into a world regulated by law and the global racialized economy. This form of inclusion continues to be consumed by those formerly enslaved and colonized as a form of liberation.

I argue, along with many other critical ethnic studies scholars, that the mainstreaming of anti-colonial and anti-racist discourses does not constitute liberation. The West no longer required colonial officers or bodies to patrol over and control colonial spaces because modern juridical, economic, and political architectures continue to be underwritten by conquest and colonial power. Modern formations of the nation-state, borders, capital, and the expropriation of land and resources all contribute the continuities of the Western colonial project. Hence, decolonial scholar Nelson Maldonado-Torres’s claim, “Coloniality survives colonialism.”⁷

Coloniality survives colonialism in multiple ways. Even though the colonial officer may have left after we gained our independence, we continue to witness atrocities throughout the world. Caliban becomes more than a representation of the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. Caliban within the discourse of the Global War on Terror cannot be separated from Caliban the slave, or Caliban the native. Rather, we

⁷ Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “On the Being of Coloniality: Contributions on the Development of a Conception,” *Cultural Studies*. 21, no. 2 (2007): 243.

must examine Caliban's multiple entanglements under the historical conditions of modernity/coloniality. In the following sections, I guide us through Caliban's racialization as a Muslim, the limitations in circumscribing Caliban to a single-identity, his refusal to disappear, and the possibilities of seeing Caliban as an insurgent figure within the West.

The potential of Caliban's insurgency is not only necessary, but vital to our lives today. We must continue to find ways to rupture the optics of coloniality which continues to demarcate the boundaries of life and death. Rather than making demands for recognition, we must "turn away" from the imperial gaze and seek out alternative approaches to liberating ourselves.⁸ Caliban may have been instituted in some locales for the inscription of modern subjectivity, but through the visual art of Abdul Abdullah, I argue that Caliban not only disrupts the visuality of race, but offers us an alternative to liberal reform and progress.

Primavera (2015)

The recent rise of anti-Muslim groups throughout the West is rooted in this post-Enlightenment vision of modern civilization. Islamophobia has fueled the rise of far-right movements throughout the world – from Donald Trump in the US to Brexit in the UK. In particular, far-right movements in the West are a result of a people seeking to revive a white nationalist state. These groups have made to discursively produce anti-Muslim, xenophobic, and anti-immigrant rhetoric as a way to strengthen the West's moral compass and standing in the world. Building walls, banning Muslims, and other vulgar

⁸ Glen Coulthard, "Subjects of Empire: Indigenous Peoples and the 'Politics of Recognition' in Canada," *Contemporary Political Theory*. 6, no. 4 (2007) 437-460.

forms of discrimination are not new forms of racial violence, but are rather at the core of what defines Western modernity, namely the logic of evisceration.⁹ Australia is no exception to this.

Australia has its own history that is very much entangled in the global web of racial-colonial power. Since 9/11, Australian scholar Shahram Akbarzadeh explains how Australia has seen the formation of anti-Muslim groups, such as Reclaim Australia and the Australian Liberty Alliance (ALA) along with a number of other anti-immigrant groups, that have come to push the “expressions of Islamophobia out of the political margins and onto the national stage.”¹⁰ He goes on to detail that the formation of the ALA in 2015 lists “stopping Islamisation of Australia” as one of its “values and core policies”:

Islam is not merely a religion, it is a totalitarian ideology with global aspirations. Islam uses the religious element as a means to project itself onto non-Islamic societies, which is manifest in the historical and ongoing expansion of Islam. It is our core policy that all attempts to impose Islam’s theocracy and Sharia law on our liberal society must be stopped by democratic means, before the demographic, economic and socio-political realities make a peaceful solution impossible.¹¹

Akbarzadeh argues that this anti-Muslim rhetoric by the far-right had reached many ears by the end of 2015 making it clear “that anti-Islam messages were not only prevalent amongst fringe groups in Australia, but had also made it into the Australian

⁹ David Rodríguez proposes the language of evisceration to account for the ways in which differently racialized groups have come to inhabit and experience racial-colonial power and violence.

¹⁰ Shahram Akbarzadeh, “The Muslim Question in Australia: Islamophobia and Muslim Alienation,” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*. 36, no. 3 (2016): 324.

¹¹ Australian Liberty Alliance, “Values and Core Policies”. <http://www.australianlibertyalliance.org.au/values-and-policies/values-and-core-policies> also seen in Shahram Akbarzadeh’s article “The Muslim Question in Australia: Islamophobia and Muslim Alienation.”

mainstream.”¹² The demonization of Islam in Australia has thus led to political alienation among many Muslims throughout the country who have begun questioning their belonging and citizenship.

Australian artist, Abdul Abdullah, is one of these Muslims who has turned to visual art to express his alienation in a country that where anti-Muslim racism has become a daily part of life. Abdullah grew up in Perth, Australia who describes himself to be an “outsider amongst outsiders” and his art is very much a reflection of that feeling.¹³ In a 2014 interview with Al-Jazeera, Abdullah expresses that his art is a response and provocation to anti-Muslim racism, alienation, and belonging in the West, “In Australia there is a segment of society that doesn't accept ... [the] brown, Muslim minority. I'm using my art as a provocation of white Australia that doesn't like us.”¹⁴

Indeed, Abdullah’s provocative art does bring to fore the racial-colonial violence that many Muslims, immigrants, and racialized peoples experience not just in Australia but throughout the world. His 2015 painting of Caliban (Figure 1.1) on display at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Australia has captured the attention of many audiences. However, what is striking about this illustration is the way in which Abdullah conjures Caliban, the racialized savage Other in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, to illuminate Muslim racialization under the Global War on Terror.

¹² Ibid., 327.

¹³ Abdul Abdullah, “Abdul Abdullah.” Accessed September 15, 2017. <http://abdulabdullah.com/home.html>

¹⁴ Rudabah Abbass, “Artist captures the mood of the marginalised.” June 25, 2014. Accessed September 15, 2017. <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2014/06/abdul-abdullah-australian-artist-marginalised-racism-ara-201462572052118236.html>.

The Museum of Contemporary Art in Australia details Shakespeare's Caliban as the "half-human 'mooncalf'" who "functions in the play as a ridiculed and disempowered outsider – the 'other' to Prospero's Eurocentric assumption of authority" The depiction of Caliban as the colonized, marginalized, and oppressed figure in Shakespeare's play has resonated with many people across the world, but for Abdullah, as "a seventh-generation Australian of Muslim background" he identified with the "oppressed Caliban in high school." 9/11 happened when Abdullah was only 14 years old, and like many young Muslims and brown kids around the world, the fear of the Muslim came to define the identities of many racialized Muslims who experienced increased policing, scrutiny, and hostility. Abdullah goes on to reflect on how anti-Muslim racism was constituted through visual practices that not only Othered Muslims, but also marked them for expulsion, "You couldn't open a newspaper, turn on the television or listen to radio without being reminded you were the bad guy and that you were frankly unwelcome. The war on terror felt like a war on you."¹⁵ This specific portrait of Caliban illuminates the entanglements of racial-colonial power by "[skirting] the stereotypes" and "going straight to the individual and the personal – a man who may or may not be Muslim, may or may not be Australian. But, as Caliban, he represents someone who is ostracized and diminished."¹⁶

Abdullah's description of his Caliban as possibly Muslim grasps at the entanglements of race and colonialism. The racialization of Muslims as "terrorist" brought upon an onslaught of racial-colonial violence not just upon those who identify as

¹⁵ Museum of Contemporary Art Australia. "Caliban." 2016. Accessed September 15, 2017. <https://www.mca.com.au/collection/work/2016.3/>

¹⁶ Ibid.

Muslim, but also racialized Latinxs and non-Muslim South Asians as possible threats to the state. Junaid Rana describes this process as the “fungibility of comparative racialization” in which a “number of objects, things, and ideas are conflated into a particular racial figure.”¹⁷ Caliban’s fungibility is constitutive of the multiple racial-colonial trajectories that have led Abdullah to create this portrait. Caliban’s blackness, Indigeneity, Latinidad, Muslim-ness, and the multiple forms of racial-colonial violences these respective communities have experienced have come to be entangled and unified in this portrait by Abdullah.

Caliban emerges in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* as a new category of human being whose othering takes place through representations of monstrosity. His representation as the irrational and savage Other is tied to his racial and sexual difference. In mobilizing Caliban’s monstrosity, Shakespeare establishes the global hegemony of European Enlightenment and its power to utilize racial-sexual difference in constructing civilization and modern humanism. Caliban’s monstrosity must then be eviscerated through Prospero’s patriarchal powers that are derived from Eurocentric ideas of race, gender, and sexuality. That is, Caliban’s freedom is contingent upon the reconfiguration of his body and being through the regulatory and disciplining powers of European humanism, namely law, capital, and morality. Hence, his enslavement.

In taking Abdullah’s identification with Caliban seriously, we must consider how the figure of the Muslim is tied to Caliban’s monstrosity.¹⁸ The portrait painted by

¹⁷ Junaid Rana, *Terrifying Muslims: Race and Labor in the South Asian Diaspora* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 53.

¹⁸ Sophia Rose Arjana, *Muslims in the Western Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

Abdullah above (Fig. 1.1) is illustrative of the way in which the racial panic around the “terrorist” is explicitly tied to Western paranoia around racial-sexual difference.

Abdullah’s portrait of Caliban, his dark complexion, sharp piercing teeth, and unruly hair are demonstrative of the imperial visioning of the “terrorist-monster.” The terrorist-monster figures in the Western imagination, as Jasbir Puar and Amit Rai argue, “A monster to be quarantined and an individual to be corrected.”¹⁹ We saw this unfold in the images released of the tortures that took place at Abu Ghraib. Torture, as a counterterrorism effort, is aimed at the Muslim body not only as a technology of disciplining, but is actively seen as a “necessary evil to stop an imminent attack.”²⁰

The racial-sexual panic around the Muslim “terrorist” authorizes the state to produce the Muslim body as a legible object of monstrosity that can be read as inherently pathological, deviant, and able to be tortured, surveilled, and controlled. Moreover, Muslim monstrosity not only subjects the body to the regulating regimes of the state, but also the targets the mind as an object to be disciplined. Visualizing the Muslim body as monstrous can then be disciplined in black sites, prisons, and cells to suppress the “animalistic, perverse, homo-, and hypersexual instincts” of Muslims.²¹ In transforming Muslims into monsters, Euro-American powers positioned Muslims into a zone of nonbeing—a zone for the subhuman—as a way to justify the racial-colonial violence that

¹⁹ Jasbir Puar and Amit Rai. “Monster, Terrorist, Fag: The War on Terrorism and the Production of Docile Patriots,” *Social Text*. 20, no. 3 (2002): 117-148

²⁰ Alfred W. McCoy, *A Question of Torture: CIA Interrogation, From the Cold War to the War on Terror* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006): 7.

²¹ Jasbir Puar. *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 87.

Muslims would be subjected to. Abdullah's "Caliban" is the figure that comes to represent this monstrous Muslim other.

Nevertheless, Abdul Abdullah's "Caliban" troubles and subverts the imperial gaze of the West on the Muslim body. Although he illustrates Caliban's monstrosity, it is act of internalizing this racial Otherness that is striking. Abdullah's portrait of Caliban subverts the imperial gaze that sees the Muslim body as monstrous and knows it to be deviant and threatening.²² However, what is productive about this portrait is its performative act in refusal. That is, Abdullah's representation of Caliban does not call for the recognition of the humanity of Muslim through the discourses of Enlightenment, but rather his painting haunts the Western psyche. This haunting, reveals the monster and the ghosts that the West has created: Imperial war, global militarism, and the quotidian violence.

In internalizing this monstrosity, Abdullah exposes the discursive regime that produces imperial logics of the state that narrate brown and black bodies as undesirable, and thus needed to be eviscerated. It is a refusal to submit, conform, or disappear to the objecthood and orderness of Prospero and his Enlightenment humanist philosophy. Abdul Abdullah's brown and black "Caliban" also provokes us to think about the ways in which racial-colonial power entangles all of those that have come under its helm and subjection. It forces us to think of decolonial possibilities that may free us from the Prospero's grip.

The Entanglements of Race and Colonialism

²² Ronak K. Kapadia, "Up in the Air and on the Skin: Drone Warfare and the Queer Calculus of Pain" in *Critical Ethnic Studies: A Reader*, eds. Nada Elia, David M. Hernández, Jodi Kim, Shana L. Redmond, Dylan Rodríguez, and Sarita Echavez See (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 365.

Shakespeare's *The Tempest* has had a number of interpretations during this last century. Uruguayan philosopher José Enrique Rodó's *Ariel* (1900) at the turn of the 20th century was one of the first known writers to suggest that Shakespeare's play was an allegory for conquest. His novel did not articulate a particular relationship between the colonized and Europe per se. Rodó instead employed Shakespeare's play to critique the relationship between Latin America and the United States. He was later followed by Octave Mannoni who wrote of politics in Madagascar and the psychological condition of being colonized in *Prospero and Caliban* (1956). The 1960s would see writings by Caribbean philosophers George Lamming and Aimé Césaire who would publish *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960) and *A Tempest* (1969) respectively to articulate the West Indians position in the postcolonial world.²³

I bring up this genealogy of Caliban for several reasons. First, to show the number of times Caliban has been conjured at various points during this past century. But to also, and most significantly, reveal his specific influence on global anti-colonial movements of the mid-century.

Each and every writer and intellectual who appropriated Caliban during this historical period did so on the basis that Caliban could come to represent their collective-selves and their desire for freedom and sovereignty.

The European construction of Caliban as the unruly savage who must be civilized has facilitated both anticolonial and postcolonial rewritings of the character. Aimé Césaire's *A Tempest* could be considered one of the most notable anticolonial rewritings

²³ Jodi Byrd, "Colonialisms: Native and Arrivants at the Limits of Postcolonial Theory," 35-36.

of Caliban. In Shakespeare's version, Caliban is referred to as "an islander" who is not native to this space. However, in Césaire's version, Caliban is clearly represented as the enslaved black subject who seeks belonging and indigeneity. Césaire's Caliban displays qualities of rebelliousness that resist colonial domination and subordination.

CALIBAN: Understand what I say, Prospero:
For years I bowed my head
for years I took it, all of it—
your insults, your ingratitude...
and worst of all, more degrading than all the rest,
your condescension.
But now, it's over!
Over, do you hear?
Of course, at the moment
You're still stronger than I am.
But I don't give a damn for your power
or for your dogs or your police or your inventions!
And do you know why? It's because I know I'll get you.
I'll impale you! And on a stake that you've sharpened
yourself!
You'll have impaled yourself!
Prospero, you're a great magician:
you're an old hand at deception.
And you lied to me so much,
about the world, about myself,
that you ended up by imposing on me an image of myself:
underdeveloped, in your words, undercompetent
that's how you made me see myself!
And I hate that image...and it's false!
But now I know you, you old cancer,
And I also know myself!
And I know that one day
my bare fist, just that,
will be enough to crush your world!
The old world is crumbling down!²⁴

This rewriting of the play is clearly a rejection of Shakespeare's construction of colonized dependency upon the colonizer. In Shakespeare's version, Prospero's magic

²⁴ Aimé Césaire and Richard Miller, *A Tempest* (New York: Ubu Repertory Theater Publications, 1992), 64.

and his Europeanness is what marks the difference between himself and Caliban. It is this spatial distance that is key to the discursive and material work of colonialism. The world to post-Enlightenment Europe – the exterior – was and continues to be visualized through orientalist visual representations that mapped race spatially and temporally. This mapping through conquest thus engendered racial knowledge formations and architectures that provided Europeans an understanding of self in relation to the others of Europe. In dividing the geography of the world into temperate zones of life and spaces of uninhabitability, post-Enlightenment Europe posited itself as the life-giving entity in the world.

In the story of Prospero and Caliban – the colonizer and the colonized – it is the former whose origin in Naples and magical powers has attributed him with “civilizing” qualities. Whereas Caliban, whose mother is from Algiers and now resides on the island where the encounter takes place, has no claim to the land upon which he lives. In Shakespeare’s version, Caliban is never native nor black, but always uncivilized, savage, and barbaric – subhuman. Nonetheless, Césaire’s Caliban, the enslaved subject, embraces an anticolonial attitude that refuses Prospero’s colonial methods and discourses. Caliban’s assertion of self-knowledge and self-recognition, which I will detail in the coming pages, establishes himself as a colonized subject undergoing a radical transformation from subordinate to resistant subject – setting in motion the emergence of the postcolonial era.

Césaire greatly influenced postcolonial subject formations of the Caribbean. In Shakespeare’s version of *The Tempest*, Caliban was put to work, as scholar Shona N.

Jackson explains, for the Prospero's being. Prospero sets out to recreate European Enlightenment through Caliban's labor when his shipwrecks on the island inhabited by Caliban and his mother Sycorax. In becoming black – the racialized other – to Prospero, Caliban represents the discursive limits of Enlightenment project. His disabled body and unsound mind, as Shakespeare represented him to be, become determining factors of his non-being. To put simply, Caliban is not human, and thus, Prospero through his magical powers (re: Enlightenment) could utilize Caliban in civilizing the island and its inhabitants. However, Césaire's version represents Caliban as an anticolonial militant whose set out to liberate himself from the bondage of Prospero. As Shona N. Jackson explains,

Caliban's assertion in Césaire's version represents an "I" of possibility for the inscription of the Creole as the "native" subject within a poetics of resistance based on two operations (that is, the doubling of labor): an "I say," or a declaration of being and an "I'm going," or a ceaseless dialectic of exchange based on immanence of becoming.²⁵

In Caliban's assertion of self-hood, he becomes a subject that the post-colonial state could capture and consolidate through citizenship and belonging. The issue Shona N. Jackson takes up with this inscription of creole subjectivity into a state-based politics is the displacement of native peoples. That is, postcolonial intellectuals and writers struggle to create sovereign subject replicates and reproduces the self-other binary.

The proliferation of postcolonial subjectivities does not come without risks as many critical ethnic studies have noted.²⁶ For example, Patrick Williams and Laura

²⁵ Jackson, Shona N. *Creole Indigeneity*, 78.

²⁶ Byrd, Jodi A. 2011. *The transit of empire: indigenous critiques of colonialism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press; Coulthard, Glen Sean. 2014. *Red skin, white masks: rejecting the colonial politics of recognition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press; Silva, Denise Ferreira da. 2007. *Toward a global idea of race*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Chrisman explain postcolonial theory as the end of “the era of formal colonial control” in their introduction to *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*.²⁷ The naming of this temporal break or discontinuity of the colonial disavows the ways in which racial and colonial architectures continue to manifest themselves across the geopolitical and biopolitical spectrum.²⁸ In other words, the problem with temporally positioning our current political and social moment after the fact erases the racial policies, imperial wars, and racial capitalist exploitation and expropriation of labor and land that continue to determine life and death.

In a recent article, scholar Dylan Rodríguez calls for a language that is “both methodologically capacious and conceptually acute enough to begin to differentiate the lowest common denominators of racial and racial-colonial power from others forms of ordering, hierarchy, and subjection.” He goes on to ask if “it is possible to propose a language that is useful to the inseparable tasks of explaining the complexities of racial dominance and (re)telling different stories to and about ourselves in relation to the historical present tense we have differently inherited?”²⁹ The language he proposes is enabled through a close reading of genocide, as it is defined formally through law and the academy, and also with an engagement with Patrick Wolfe’s theorization of the settler colonial logic of elimination. Rodríguez is apprehensive with reading racial violence through formal juridical and academic discourses of genocide and Wolfe’s logic of

²⁷ Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, eds., 1994. *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader, 1850-1990*. New York: Columbia University Press, 3.

²⁸ Márquez, John D. 2016. “Juan Crow: Progressive Mutations of the Black-White Binary” in *Critical Ethnic Studies: A Reader*. Durham: Duke University Press, 46.

²⁹ Dylan Rodríguez, “Inhabiting the Impasse,” *Social Text* 33, no. 3 124 (2015): 36.

elimination. Thus, introducing the “logic of evisceration” – an analytic that historically and theoretically accounts for the ways in which racial and colonial power/knowledge has had and continues to have a long-lasting impact on our currently historical moment.

While colonialism is seemingly relegated to the temporal past, then why is it that we continue to see and witness colonial violence within our current social conditions? Why are white supremacists out in numbers calling for the evisceration racialized peoples across the globe? These are just some of the questions that Rodríguez’s logic of evisceration hopes to answer in search of future that dismantles racial-colonial power structures. However, I find the logic of evisceration useful for helping to explain the entanglements of global racial-colonial violence and its unfolding in particular locales. For example, Césaire’s *Caliban* has become useful for understanding the colonizer-colonized relationship for the enslaved African. But I argue that *Caliban*, similar to Jodi Byrd’s understanding of cacophony mentioned above, allows us to witness the ways in which the racial-colonial architectures of the past continue to manifest in the present. In doing so, these unceasing systems of violence continue to strengthen white supremacy and racial capitalism that not only entangles Black peoples, Latinxs, and Indigenous peoples, but also pulls in Muslims within its globally destructive web.

Entanglements, like hauntings, is a useful way to understand how the unfolding of global processes in particular locales could be connected, linked, or enmeshed together. For example, how do social movements against the violence of policing come to take place in different cities across Europe as well as the United States? I find the analytic of

entanglements useful to reveal connections of “here, there, now, then.”³⁰ For quantum physicists, such as Albert Einstein, the idea of entanglements were once rejected as “spooky actions at a distance.”³¹ However, physicist, like Karen Barad, have found the concept of entanglements quite productive for explaining the “intra-activity” of the past-present-future.³² For Barad, the phenomenon of entanglements provides a new ethico-onto-epistemological understanding of matter that which we inherit. To put differently, as temporal beings we are entangled with the past that we inherit, the present we inhabit, and the future we envision. We are responsible for facing the ghosts of time and acknowledging that we are “bound to the other” – that we are not disparate, different, or distant beings, but are entangled particles who are obligated to one another on matters of life and death.

Hence, Caliban’s persistence in continuously reappearing in our literary imaginations. In recognizing Caliban as a death-bound-subject, postcolonial writers and intellectuals have transformed him into the resistant-subject.³³ More recently, Caliban has become the subject who refuses to disappear. This refusal to disappear evades the politics of recognition that has been consequential of the shifts in global colonial power

³⁰ Karen Barad, “Quantum Entanglements and Hauntological Relations of Inheritance: Dis/continuities, SpaceTime Enfoldings, and Justice-to-Come,” *Derrida Today*. 3, no. 2 (2010): 252.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 251.

³² Rick Dolphijn and Iris Van Der Tuin, “‘Matter Feels, Converses, Suffers, Desires, Yearns and Remembers’: Interview with Karen Barad,” *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies*. 2016. Accessed August 2, 2017. <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/o/ohp/11515701.0001.001/1:4.3/--new-materialism-interviews-cartographies?rgn=div2;view=fulltext>.

³³ Abdul JanMohamed posits in *The Death-Bound-Subject* (2005) that the subject’s “road to freedom is revealed precisely by the slave’s ability to recognize that while the master can appropriate the value of his labor, by confining him to the realm of social-death, even the value of his life, the only thing that the master cannot appropriate is the use-value of his actual-death” (18). That is, the subject is able to impart from the immanent threat of death through trying to find a life outside of it.

since the mid-century. The persistence and perseverance of the Caliban is witness to the ways in which the racialized subject has refused to disappear to the workings of violent abjection. David Rodríguez argues that the logic of evisceration “brings attention to how different forms of racial and racial-colonial terror (desecration, threat of sexual violence, symbolic degradation) may exert drastic physiological consequences (depression, suicide, paranoia, cancer) even in the absence of physical brutality.”³⁴ Furthermore, the logic of evisceration also illuminates how the “how the conception of race as a global physiological signification has formed a complex technology of violence and terror, in and of itself.”³⁵ In other words, through the concept of evisceration that Rodríguez posits we can grasp the globality of race and how differently racialized peoples are entangled in its web of violence and subjugation.

Caliban’s refusal to disappear at the helm of this logic signifies not only his subjugated position within the colonial matrix of power, knowledge, and being, but he also comes to represent multiple, and yet entangled, histories of racial-colonial violence. In particular, he has come to represent the racial figure of the Muslim whose been targeted by the West for evisceration in the name post-Enlightenment ideals of freedom and democracy.

The othering and distancing of Muslims, post-9/11, is not a new process of racialization. The process grounds its historicity within the Spanish expulsion of the Moors prior to 1492. As many scholars, such as Anouar Majid, Junaid Rana, and Sohail Daulatzai, have noted Western modernity attained its power, authority, and legitimacy

³⁴ Dylan Rodríguez, “Inhabiting the Impasse,” 35-36.

³⁵ Ibid.

through the othering of the Muslim before 1492.³⁶ 9/11 may have given the “Clash of Civilizations” notoriety by providing the West with the biopolitical and necropolitical means by which to define the materiality of certain populations and spaces. As Daulatzai explains,

Although 9/11 is what seems to have raised the specter of Islam in relation the West, a genealogy of the idea of race reveals that the Muslim – as the Other to normative whiteness – has not only haunted the very foundation of the West since its inception but has also given the West (now Europe and the United States) meaning, defining who is civilized and who is savage, who is democratic and who is autocratic, who is peaceful and who is violent, who is human and who is not.³⁷

The racialization of Muslims in this particular moment is an extension of the long history of Islam’s relationship to the West. The figure of the Muslim services the West in its quest for modernity, progress, development, and civilization. Insofar, the Muslim carries everything the West is not, i.e. notions of rationality, civility, morality, and ethicality. This racial discourse defines the West and its whiteness as superior to the nonwhite racialized Other, giving the former the power to assert biopolitical and necropolitical dominance over the latter.

Although we have seen triumphalist narratives that celebrate people of color for their exceptionalism and success, we continue to state violence being enacted on other black and brown bodies. The Global War on Terror may give us exceptional Muslims like Sadiq Khan, the mayor of London, but racial-colonial violence continues to define the lived experiences of people across the world. We can see this taking shape as the war

³⁶ Anouar Majid, *We Are All Moors: Ending Centuries of Crusades Against Muslims and Other Minorities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009); Junaid Rana, *Terrifying Muslims: Race and Labor in the South Asian Diaspora* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

³⁷ Sohail Daulatzai, *Black Star, Crescent Moon: The Muslim International and Black Freedom Beyond America*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), xviii.

drums continue to beat upon the Muslim bodies across spaces in South Asia, the Middle East, North Africa, and in the West. Muslim life, or rather death, is what gives the West the political, ideological, and material capital to wage wars in the name of freedom and democracy. The discursive field of death and survival becomes increasingly striking when we begin to take into consideration the actual materiality of how race and coloniality continue to shape ontologies and epistemologies of human life and freedom. The idea of freedom is founded upon the knowing and understanding of the “unfree,” or the savage, irrational, primitive Other. Freedom is shaped by the structures of race and coloniality; it is shaped by the legibility of Caliban and making him intelligible and available for neoliberal subjectivity and governance.

In our current political context, neoliberalism positions freedom as normative order to criminalize, manage, and dispose of deviant and non-normative populations. In this case, the Muslim body is always and already in opposition and threatening to the white Westerner. Neoliberalism frames the formers (non)being and the space he/she/they occupy as outside the realms of Enlightenment and civilization and in the zone of nonbeing. The division of the world through colonial discourses, i.e. free/unfree, human/not-human, civil/uncivil rests on the logic of evisceration. Neoliberal states require warfare to promulgate the power of racial capitalism globally. In doing so, they must target certain “anachronistic peoples for governance” if they are to attain “freedom,” or as Mimi Thi Nguyen explains:

In the carving out and delimiting of areas of social existence and belonging, the gift of freedom is normative, as a means of making other ways of being in the world appear to be insecure, illegible, inadequate, illegal, and illiberal, and it is also instrumental as a means of partitioning the world into spaces commensurate

or incommensurate, comparable and incomparable, with the rule of liberalism, which thus require certain forms of action, or force, to manufacture freedom.³⁸

Human life and freedom only becomes possible through ontologizing normative ways of being and living. This ontologizing is not just a process of becoming, but it's becoming with and through racial-colonial violence. War is fundamental to how and why this process takes place and shape. Neoliberal states target certain populations for governance and war becomes the strategy by which this process is carried out. This process of governance categorizes populations, based on normative scales, for life or death. In doing so, neoliberal nation-states utilize war to attain power, authority, and legitimacy through expanding its scope of governance across spaces of difference.

The Global War on Terror is demonstrative of how neoliberalism draws upon the legacies of race and coloniality to authorize imperial expansion in order to implement freedom and democracies in so-called anachronistic spaces. The figure of the Muslim “terrorist” generates a great deal of political and ideological capital that mobilizes certain racialized tropes of savagery, barbarity, and irrationality, that seemingly are encroaching upon the freedoms of the imperial West. These tropes are then leveraged to permit the removal of the Muslim Other, who is perceived as a threat or danger to liberal human life. The discourse of race and coloniality legitimate the Global War on Terror as a war to eliminate certain populations in order to secure or strengthen the life of the modern liberal subject.³⁹ However, in our modern world, and especially in our post-9/11 moment, we have not only seen certain people subject to elimination, but we have also seen entire

³⁸, Mimi Thi Nguyen, *The Gift of Freedom: War, Debt, and Other Refugee Passages* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 15.

³⁹ Achille Mbembe and L. Meintjes, “Necropolitics,” *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 18.

populations, along with their respective spaces, destructed in the name of peace and security for another.

Caliban's Insurgency in *Siege* (2014)

Prior to his *Primavera* exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art (Australia) in 2015, Abdul Abdullah had already established himself as a prominent Muslim artist. In exploring the intersections of racism, identity, and belonging, his art is intentionally created to resonate with being Muslim or being Othered in the West. In a sense, Abdullah truly creates art that examines the globality of racial-colonial violence. His series entitled *Siege* (2014) combined visual and written language to offer a glimpse into the insurgent politics of protest. In particular, *Siege* was inspired by the London Uprisings of 2011 wherein black and brown London youth protested the state-sanctioned murder of unarmed civilian Mark Duggan. We have seen similar insurgencies take shape throughout the world: Los Angeles 1992, Paris 2017, Oakland 2009, Baltimore 2015, Rio De Janeiro 2014, Ferguson 2014, Minneapolis 2020, and many other places that have seen people rise up against racial-colonial violence. As Junaid Rana and John D. Márquez argue, “The fires of Ferguson were connected to a broader matrix of insurgent acts against racial capitalism the world over...they are relationally connected by and within global racial capitalism.”⁴⁰ In this section, I argue that Abdul Abdullah's *Siege* provides us with a visual/poetic that imagines a global decolonial insurgency that connects various racialized groups who refuse to disappear and/or be eviscerated.

⁴⁰ John D., Márquez and Junaid Rana, “Black Radical Possibility and the Decolonial International,” *South Atlantic Quarterly*. 116, no. 3 (2017): 511.

Jodi Melamed argues that capitalism must continue accumulating in order for it to continue existing, and that “it can only accumulate by producing and moving through relations of severe inequality among human groups.”⁴¹ Accumulation and economic expansion require “loss, disposability, and the unequal differentiation of human value, and racism enshrines the inequalities that capitalism requires.”⁴² It does this by placing human beings in a racial hierarchy that draws upon significations of the mind and body that determine whether one is deserving of life or not. This systematic, or as Darwin would say “natural,” selection structures black and brown sociality. To put differently, capitalism is contingent upon the racial marking of certain bodies as human and others as non-human in order to “rationalize” slavery, colonialism, genocide, imprisonment, migrant exploitation, and imperial war, or as Aimé Césaire explains: “The colonizer, who in order to ease his conscience gets into the habit of seeing the other man as an animal, accustoms himself to treating him like an animal, and tends objectively to transform himself into an animal.”⁴³

Abdullah narrative in *Siege* gestures towards the conflation of race and species through animality. We can see that in wearing the ape masks and the poetry that accompanies each image suggests in the larger narrative of *Siege* that flesh has become a racial marker for political, economic, social, and cultural disciplining and hierarchizing. To animalize a specific racial group means that not only is this respective group being denied humanity in the evolutionary sense, but also this very discursive act becomes a

⁴¹ Jodi Melamed, “Racial Capitalism,” *Critical Ethnic Studies* 1, no. 1 (2015): 77.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Aimé Césaire and Robin D. G. Kelley, *Discourse on Colonialism* (Monthly Review Foundation Incorporated, 2000), 41.

productive force in how we understand the human in western modernity. In other words, animality has been and continues to be a technology employed in western imperial projects to mark the hierarchical species difference between western man and his others.

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon writes that for the colonized, the colonizer “is not only The Other but also the master.”⁴⁴ The world became a playground for the master and that is why the master built an empire – a world created through his image. For the colonized, our territories, our bodies, knowledges, have felt the immediate and enduring effects of this construction of a modern/colonial architecture. For the colonizer, the animality and savagery of Other – their non-humanness – appears as a “scene of nature” within this drama. As such, the space of Otherness, and the bodies that inhabit this space, must be eviscerated to create a world in Europe’s image. A world in which economics thrive while black and brown bodies die. This confrontation with death brings into existence the modern political subject. Death becomes vestibular to human life, or as Achille Mbembe states, “Politics is therefore death that lives a human life.”⁴⁵ Thus, the racial animalization of those inhabiting the spaces of Otherness in the world are subjected to conquest, intervention, investment, and other forms of violence as these scenes of nature are seen as a significant ill upon which salvation could be extended.

“You see monsters,” Abdullah writes in response to the racial-sexual subjection of black and brown bodies. “We are blood and bone, we are sweat and tears, from the beginning they told us we were shit” as the images and narrative progresses in referencing the misery, pain, and violence of raciality. Nietzsche once warned Europeans

⁴⁴ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 2008), 138.

⁴⁵ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 14-15.

to be aware of the darkness that surrounds the racial Other, “Beware that, when fighting monsters, you yourself do not become a monster... for when you gaze long into the abyss. The abyss gazes also into you.”⁴⁶ In a shot at Nietzsche, Abdullah responds, “We are the ones that look back from the abyss.” The darkness of the abyss is underwritten with decolonial poetics and dreams of “[watching] it [all] burn” and collapse for modernity/coloniality has caused too much death and destruction.



Figure 1.2: You see Monsters

⁴⁶ Peter Horstmann and Judith Norman, *Nietzsche: Beyond Good and Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 69.



Figure 1.3: We are blood and bone



Figure 1.4: We are sweat and tears



Figure 1.5: From the beginning they told us we were shit



Figure 1.6: We are the ones that look back from the abyss



Figure 1.7: They silence us in darkness



Figure 1.8: The disaffected byproduct of the colonies



Figure 1.9: Someone else's king and someone else's country



Figure 1.10: Watch it Burn



Figure 1.11: *For peace*

The decolonial insurgent poetics presented to us in Abdullah’s *Siege* offer us a glimpse into the collective possibilities of those who seen as monsters, animals, and savages. This is not a political-aesthetic only limited to the Muslim subjectivity, but rather calls upon a decolonial international that sees racial-colonial violence as a global phenomenon. Thus, a decolonial project is a kind of resistance that is a refusal of the logic of evisceration and a promise of liberation. As Nelson Maldonado-Torres argues decolonization “is not only different from that of European modernity; it also confronts modernity with a series of ethical, political and intellectual imperatives.”⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “Césaire’s Gift and the Decolonial Turn” in *Critical Ethnic Studies: A Reader*, eds. Nada Elia, David M. Hernández, Jodi Kim, Shana L. Redmond, Dylan Rodríguez, and Sarita Echavez See (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 444.

Fanon once warned of the politics of recognition under coloniality when he stated, “...there is but one destiny for the black man. And it is white.”⁴⁸ Fanon asserts that in order for the black subject to be recognized as a human he/she/they must kill their blackness to gain passage into western modernity. His assertion forces us to reimagine our subject-positions under racial modernity and thereby citizens of nation-states due to the ontological limits for White Being within the colonial context. That is, to gain access to a political life whereby the racialized subject can have access to a human life he/she/they must obfuscate other genres of being human. However, we cannot separate the rise of modern humanism from its relational formations through racial-colonial violence, i.e., slavery, indigenous dispossession, imperial wars, and racial capitalist exploitation and expropriation. Thus, the decolonial turn allows us to reimagine these relationalities in bringing about modern subject formation through the Eurocentric sciences that have constructed a racial-colonial world in which we now live and inhabit.

Decolonization provides the subjugated and the condemned the agency to produce a rupture in the which racialized life is privileged over economic progress and development. It is made possible by insurgent acts of resistance and refusal. The acts we see taking place throughout the world in cities where calls for liberation continue to transpire despite neoliberal appropriation and reform. The possibilities of fomenting a decolonial international aims to take us beyond life as defined by modernity/coloniality, and into what Enrique Dussel calls “transmodernity.” The decolonial dream of a “transmodernity” allows us to rethink and reapply a “liberation ethics to history and to

⁴⁸ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 11.

the ethical recognition of the other as a subject of knowledge and culture.”⁴⁹ It is a dream where we can radically destabilize ourselves and be reconstituted through the Other.

Conclusion

Abdul Abdullah’s *Primavera* and *Siege* offer us a glimpse into the globality of race and possibilities of liberation beyond our current modern/colonial ways of living, being, and relating with difference. Through his work, we are able to examine the ways in which the racial-colonial-imperial gaze has constructed social, economic, and political structures of control, discipline, and regulation. However, his work also allows us to dream of a possibility beyond Prospero’s quest to create a vision of a world where life and death are regulated through Eurocentric knowledges of what it means to be human.

Caliban’s racial-colonial entanglement not only reveals the subjection of Muslims, Blacks, Indigenous peoples, Latinxs, and other racialized peoples to the logic of evisceration, but his formation also exposes the ways in which his conjuring is a refusal to submit to this logic. In writing *The Tempest*, Shakespeare was fundamental in the formation of modern humanism. Caliban’s representation as the irrational/savage Other has provided many colonized peoples across the world a literary figure wherein ruptures could be possible. And it’s through the many Caliban’s around the world, who refuse to submit to power, where a decolonial world is not only possible but within reach.

⁴⁹ Nelson Maldonado Torres, “Enrique Dussel’s Liberation Thought in the Decolonial Turn,” *TRANSMODERNITY: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World* 1, no. 1 (2011): 2-3.

Chapter 2: Diasporic Suturing: Rajkamal Kahlon and the Disarticulation of Man

You are fascinated by our bodies--both male and female. Our garb, your torture. Our veil, your freedom. Our beards, your style. Our body, your bullets. Our weapon, your target. From Anonymous to Al-Qaeda, invisibility is now equivalent to threat. While visibility marks us in your crosshairs.

– SOHAIL DAULATZAI & JUNAID RANA, “Left”

In pondering the queer modalities of [the suicide bomber], one notices a pastiche of oddities: a body machined together through metal and flesh, an assemblage of the organic and the inorganic; a death not of the self or of the other, but both simultaneously; self-annihilation as the ultimate form of resistance and self-preservation. This body forces a reconciliation of opposites through their inevitable collapse—a perverse habitation of contradiction. As a figure in the midst of always already dying even as it is the midst of becoming, like the homosexual afflicted with HIV, the suicide bomber sutures his or her status as sexually perverse. Mbembe also points to the queer becoming of a suicide bomber—a corporeal experiential of “ballistics.” The dynamite strapped onto the body of a suicide bomber is not merely an appendage; the “intimacy of weapon with body reorients the assumed spatial integrity (coherence and concreteness) and individuality of the body that is the mandate of intersectional identities; instead we have the body-weapon. The ontological affect of the body renders it a newly becoming body.

– JASBIR PUAR, *Terrorist Assemblages*

In this chapter, I focus on the visual art of Berlin-based South Asian diasporic artist, Rajkamal Kahlon. Drawing on colonial archival texts, ethnographic photography, and history, Kahlon’s work challenges the ways in which modernity and its white supremacist interface tell and retell stories of human difference. Kahlon sketches and sculpts visual critiques of the West’s phantasmal representation of the racial Other. In doing so, her work sutures and rehabilitates the colonized body that has been injured and subjugated through the universalist proclamations of Eurocentric knowledge. In a recent interview, Kahlon describes her artmaking as a process of rehabilitation, “By using my own hand in redrawing, repainting, and sculpting the bodies of ethnographic subjects, I’m

attempting to rehabilitate those bodies, histories, and cultures that have been erased, distorted, and maligned. I am attempting to give them a new life through embodied acts of recuperation.”¹

I suture two of Kahlon’s solo installations to argue that her feminist art challenges modern/colonial forms of knowledge that have influenced practices of seeing and witnessing political violence. In the first installation, I argue that Kahlon demonstrates the ways in which modern/colonial systems of knowledge have produced objects of death and destruction within the Global War on Terror. In the second installation by Kahlon, I argue that she animates these “objects” to not only retaliate such colonial constructions and imperial subjugation but to also speculate on a future not-yet-here.

In suturing these two exhibitions, I argue that Kahlon’s art offers us a feminist methodology of “diasporic suturing.” As the Oxford English Dictionary tells us, the word “suture” came into English from the Latin *sutura*, meaning “sew.” As a verb, “suture” is defined as the act of stitching up a wound or incision. Therefore, I ask: What does suturing mean for a diaspora that has been racialized as a demographic threat? What are the politics of suturing the ghosts that continue to haunt the temporality of the modern/colonial world? Diasporic suturing recognizes the failure to remedy the trauma of this history through the extension of liberal reform and incorporation into Western body-politics. In its present continuous tense, diasporic suturing is “never faithful to linear timelines,” as scholar Grace M. Cho would say, for it continuously conjures the ghosts of those dispossessed of life and land by the colonial conquests and imperial wars of the

¹ "Constructive Disruptions." Contemporary And. October 13, 2017. Accessed March 25, 2018. <https://www.contemporaryand.com/magazines/constructive-disruptions/>.

West.² The grammar of diasporic suturing that I suggest here is one of possibility that gestures towards a future not-yet-here.³ In conjuring these ghosts, diasporic suturing mends, stitches, and links the matter that has been rendered immaterial by race and coloniality. This chapter, along with Kahlon's work, sutures multiple timelines, images, and histories that move ethically and politically together to stay with the trouble and to suture our bodies, lives, and relations otherwise.⁴

I begin this task initially by challenging the ascendant figure of the imperial Western humanism that has come to dominate the world through colonial conquest and genocide. I argue that this dominant form of humanism, which emerges out of Europe, colonized the field of knowledge through the racialization of human difference. This process rendered humans within the colonial spaces of Africa, Asia, and the Americas as not only sub-human, or what Frantz Fanon refers to as *les damnés*, but this positioning and orientation also rendered the humans of these spaces as objects targeted for death and destruction. I explain how this logic has infused the visual gaze of the colonial and imperial past and present through the artwork offered to us by Rajkamal Kahlon.

² Grace M. Cho, *Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy, and the Forgotten War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 4.

³ Tina Campt, *Listening to Images* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017); José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

⁴ Rajkamal Kahlon has said in a speech given in Weltmuseum in Vienna, Austria (2016) that she draws inspiration from Donna Haraway's *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016). Similar to what will be discussed in this chapter regarding Kahlon's method of rehabilitating and healing from colonial violence through her art, Haraway's work asks the question: "What is to write and think and act in a time of exterminations and extinctions? What is the work of recuperation?" Following Haraway, Kahlon says this work requires one to stay with the trouble. In staying with the trouble in this moment of political, economic, and ecological devastation may shape and transform our ways of living and relating to not only each other but also to the planet. \

Diasporic suturing will be a key method of how this chapter will be organized. I employ this method myself to disorient the readers spatial and temporal coordinates of when and where the Global War on Terror is unfolding. As such, part of this chapter will examine Kahlon's video installation entitled *People of Afghanistan* (2016).⁵ In this work, Kahlon overlays thermal imagery from an AC-130 Specter Gunship attack in 2002 with the photographs of Afghan men compiled in G.F. Debets' anthropometric survey from the 1960s. In this section, I focus on the ways in which Kahlon overlays, or sutures, distant historiographies to illuminate the expansion of the U.S. homeland security state within the post-9/11 Global War on Terror. More specifically, I am interested in examining the ways in which this expansion is tied to the academy. Through Kahlon's work, I argue, that the academy and the U.S. homeland security state have colluded to produce geographies of otherness through visual epistemologies of representation. Another part of the chapter will be sutured to Kahlon's solo exhibition entitled *Blowback* (2013). This image challenges the relationship between "early anthropological portraiture and modern political violence labeled as terrorism."⁶ In *Blowback*, Kahlon dismantles the racial-imperial visioning of the "terrorist body" by re-interpreting, or rather suturing, the body as a ballistic body-weapon. The suturing of the "terrorist body" in *Blowback* becomes within the field of visual studies particularly, and in the terrain of the modern/colonial world more generally, a method of retaliation against the political, economic, and ecological devastation of imperial war. Through these two exhibitions, I

⁵ Kahlon, Rajkamal. "People of Afghanistan." <https://www.rajkamalkahlon.com/copy-of-do-you-know-our-names>.

⁶ Kahlon, Rajkamal. "Blowback." 2013. <https://www.rajkamalkahlon.com/blowback>.

suture my way, as Kahlon does in her work, across multiple temporalities to examine the visuality of Muslim bodies as a way to not only address the longer history of anti-Muslim racism but to also illuminate how state technologies of surveillance are tied to colonial knowledge production, and vice versa.

I suggest that suturing may offer us an alternative way of being and relating to human difference. As a feminist ethico-political praxis, diasporic suturing draws upon what Sara Ahmed calls the disorientation of politics.⁷ If history calls upon the past, and the domain of politics tends to the present and future of our society, as temporal beings how can we reconfigure our relation to the past, present, and future so that we may address racial-colonial violence and suture our imaginations to conceive of other ways of being and knowing in the world? That is, to deorientalize our politics, we must first examine how our politics are orientalized. Through which spatial and temporal coordinates are we granted life, meaning, and direction?

For this chapter, I am interested in exploring how Muslims and Muslim lives are calculated within our current modern/colonial world system. What possibilities, or rather what can the possibilities be, for Muslims to not only imagine a world otherwise but to be active participants in dismantling and disorienting the colonial architectures of Euro-American modernity? And, ultimately, how might the figure of the Muslim undo imperial Western humanism and provide a new way of thinking the human anew? This chapter seeks to understand how imperial Western humanism came to be a conceptual arsenal to

⁷ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 177.

see, to know, to measure, and to dominate other genres of being human in this world.⁸ More specifically, I engage Rajkamal Kahlon’s insurgent aesthetic work to understand how colonial knowledge has not only produced non-beings but to also identify how that source of knowledge has been recycled to produce the discourse and its technologies around the elimination of the racialized Muslim terrorist within the Global War on Terror.

The Calculative Optics of Imperial Western Humanism

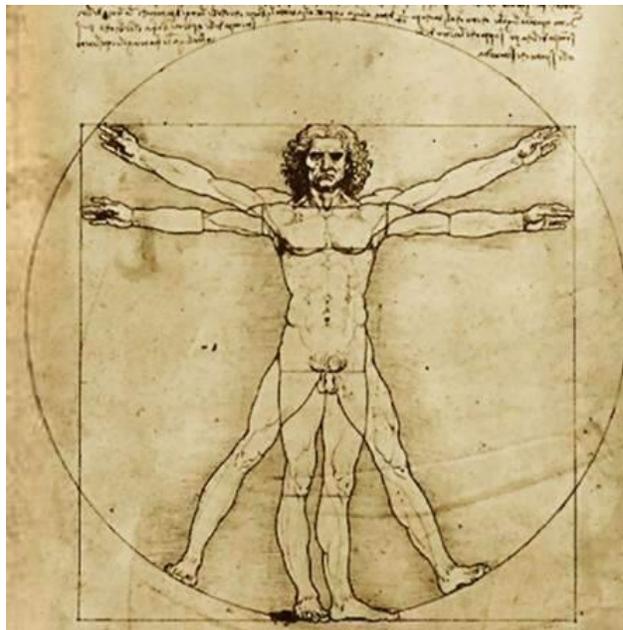


Figure 2.1: Leonardo da Vinci, Vitruvian Man, 1490. Ink.

We begin this decolonial endeavor with Leonardo da Vinci’s drawing of the “Vitruvian Man,” also known as European Man, Man, or simply the Human (Fig 2.1).

The Vitruvian Man was to become a calculated composition of Europe’s local image and conception of the model human: white, heterosexual, male, propertied, and Christian

⁸ “Genre” is another way of saying alternate forms of life. She argues that western Man has come to be overrepresented in our world through colonial conquest and genocide. This what I refer to as “imperial Western humanism” in this chapter. The idea that this “genre” of humanism (Western) has come to dominate and obliterate other genres (forms of life) of being human in this world.

subject. Audre Lorde would call this the “mythical norm.”⁹ Produced around the year 1490, only a few years prior to Columbus’s expedition, the Vitruvian Man, served as the imperial Western humanism to which every human being in the world was and continues to be measured with and against. Accordingly, the image was not only infused with the dominant principles and rules of knowing the human but also constituted the mode of thinking, measuring, and classifying when encountering non-European peoples (Mignolo 2015).¹⁰ Those who did not measure to the standards set by this imperial Western humanism were rendered exploitable and expendable.¹¹

It has been repeatedly argued that Christopher Columbus inaugurated the modern/colonial world system when he discovered the New World in 1492. His voyage led to what Sylvia Wynter describes as a “root expansion of thought” that was to provide the world with a “new image of the earth and a new conception of the cosmos.”¹² Columbus arrived in the New World with the image of the Vitruvian Man fresh in his mind. This image – along with knowledge associated with it – formed the visual anthropological grammar through which colonizers made sense of the objects – natives and land – they came across. That is, the eye, as scholar Ronak Kapadia argues, became “the privileged organ of knowledge and authority, the power to see became equated with

⁹ Audre Lorde, “Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference,” *Dangerous Liaisons* (1997): 374-380.

¹⁰ Walter Mignolo, “Sylvia Wynter: What Does It Mean to Be Human?” in *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

¹¹ Alexander Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

¹² Sylvia Wynter, “Columbus and the Poetics of the Propter Nos,” *Annals of Scholarship* 8.2 (Spring): 264.

the power to know and to dominate.”¹³ For example, when Columbus reached the shores of the New World on October 12, 1492 he wrote in his diary describing his first encounter with the natives. To Columbus the natives appeared to be “a race of people poor in everything” who “should be good servants” and could be “easily made Christians, as it appeared to [him] that they had no religion.”¹⁴ For Columbus and the explorers that came after, race and religion became the anthropological grammar in and through which the natives of Africa, Asia, and the Americas were observed, described, and translated for colonial occupation.¹⁵ This language allowed for the understanding of human difference through classifying the people of these regions as not only lacking religion and souls but also lacking rationality and reason.¹⁶ As Nelson Maldonado-Torres explains, colonizers saw “bodies that looked like humans [in the colonial spaces], but that did not mean that full-fledged humans would be there.”¹⁷ Thus emerged the object of anthropology: Frantz Fanon’s *les damnés* – the non-being who exists outside of modernity whose interiority is devoid of civility, nobility, morality, and ultimately, rationality. They are merely objects whose humanness was measured ontologically through and against the phenotypical and philosophical grammar of imperial Western humanism.

¹³ Ronak K. Kapadia, “Up in the Air and on the Skin: Drone Warfare and the Queer Calculus of Pain” in *Critical Ethnic Studies: A Reader*, eds. Nada Elia, David M. Hernández, Jodi Kim, Shana L. Redmond, Dylan Rodríguez, and Sarita Echavez See (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 365.

¹⁴ Christopher Columbus, *Journal of the First Voyage of Columbus* (Wisconsin Historical Society, 2003).

¹⁵ Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “Race, Religion, and Ethics in the Modern/Colonial World,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 42, no. 4 (2014): 691-711.

¹⁶ Talal Asad, *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* (New York: Humanity Books, 2011); Abdelmajid Hannoum, “Translation and the Colonial Imaginary: Ibn Khaldun Orientalist,” *History and Theory* 42 (2003): 61-81; Barnor Hesse, “Racialized Modernity: An Analytics of White Mythologies,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30, no. 4 (2007): 643-663.

¹⁷ Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “Race, Religion, and Ethics in the Modern/Colonial World,” 700.

The locale of anthropology originates in the Eurocentric social sciences of modernity, which had largely been a practice of Western colonial endeavors. The world upon which colonizers traversed in their ships required a language to make “sense” of the objects (read: natives and land) they came across. Religion and the advent of classification system known as race became the anthropological grammar of Western expansion and conquest. Through this grammar and understanding of difference, colonizers classified the natives of Africa, Asia, and the Americas as peoples who had no religion, and thus had no souls. They were merely objects whose humanness was measured ontologically through the grammar of modern Western sciences:

Bodies that looked like humans could be there [in the colonial spaces], but that did not mean that full-fledged humans would be... The New World and the torrid zones of Africa became markers of sub-humanity, and the religious/non-religious, and soul/non-soul divides gradually turned, by virtue of the secularizing and fundamentally colonizing turn of the time, into various divides, most notably the divide between White and Black or Native. Secularism and colonization worked together in the production of “race” as a category.¹⁸

The rise of Christendom through colonial expansion gave way to a racial-religious anthropological grammar to understand human difference. Those who belonged to the torrid lands of Asia, Africa, and the Americas and practiced Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, or other indigenous religions had their ways of living, being, and knowing rendered sub-human as they were placed into zones of non-being. The formulation of this anthropological grammar to understand human difference established the racial geographical coordinates that demarcated boundaries of civilization and barbarism, or the biopolitical border between life and death.¹⁹ That is, in being spatially and/or temporally

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ I use the term “racial knowledge” here to explicitly state that race is part and parcel of the modern humanism. That the boundary between modern human life and death is written and determined by race.

positioned with/in the West one was oriented against a classification of racial Others, or those who are not spatially and/or temporally with/in the West.²⁰ Thus, begging the questions: What does it mean to be oriented? What is one oriented towards? And what is one oriented against?

Walter Mignolo introduces the concept of the modern/colonial world to argue that the rise of modernity is not separate from the practices of coloniality, but rather both modernity and coloniality are entangled and constitute each other.²¹ Therefore, the modern/colonial world that was created due to Western colonial expansion and conquest is very much tied to the cartographies of empire – the production of a geography through biopolitical and geopolitical dominance. The West’s geographical sense of place – of knowing the coordinates of their location in relation to the world – is made through the production of zones of being and zones of non-being. Living in the former zone means having the possibility to locate and affirm one’s humanity and having access to means of existence. On the other hand, the latter zone is the space of abjection, death, and barbarism.²² However, these are not two disparate zones of life and death, rather these zones are created in relation to one another. The West is given life and value through the death and devaluation of peoples from Africa, Asia, and the Americas. In this modern/colonial entanglement, the subject of modernity is construction through its orientation towards the object of coloniality. Thus, for a subject to be oriented, they must

²⁰ Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

²¹ Walter Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000).

²² Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality,” *Frantz Fanon Foundation* (2016): 13.

be given a specific set of coordinates that point them towards and against a specific direction.

In turning to Edward Said's classic *Orientalism*, we may begin to unpack the significance of the spatial formations of the modern/colonial world.²³ As a post-colonial literary scholar, Said's *Orientalism* accounted for the texts that were made intelligible and discernable to the colonial gaze and mind of Europe. The intelligibility of "Eastern" texts was made knowable through the terms and knowledge systems that were produced through Western epistemologies, and then institutionalized in the Western university. As such, the colonial intelligibility propelled the implementation of institutions wherein the colonial entity could hold political, economic, and social power over and against the native subject. The spaces from which these texts were extracted became an abstracted view of peoples and places dispossessed of their traditions for the purposes of colonial control and subjugation. The canon gave way to the cannon.

This production of colonial intelligibility through Orientalist knowledge made way for the identificatory and classificatory systems of human differentiation that the West believed to be necessary for war-making. Hence, the production of a racial panic around a particular object required a language and Orientalism was and still is the grammar for language. War may be or may have been taking place on a battlefield elsewhere – or "over there" – but the practices of war-making permeate the cultural and social politics of the everyday. Hence, the Homeland Security's implementation of the "see something, say something" campaign or Hollywood's production of films around

²³ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

safety and security of the American family. These practices of reporting to the state are intimately tied to popular culture, and the production of discourses that make visible targets of suspicion and terror. For instance, Rey Chow argues that this permeation into the quotidian is part and parcel of war-making, “in the age of bombing, the world has also been transformed into—is essentially conceived and grasped as—a target”: “To conceive of the world as a target is to conceive of it as an object to be destroyed...Increasingly, war would mean the production of maximal visibility and illumination for the purpose of maximal destruction.”²⁴

Orientalism, or rather being oriented, shapes the Western subject’s perception of war and war-making. War requires the classification of an enemy. In the days after 9/11, President Bush was very explicit in positioning the U.S. as a victim of an evil that lurks beyond the borders of the nation: “We’ve been warned there are evil people in this world. We’ve been warned so vividly – and we’ll be alert. Your government is alert. The governors and mayors are alert that evil folks still lurk out there.”²⁵ The discourse produced by Bush both “vividly” classifies an enemy while also orienting the U.S. imperial gaze towards a specific object(ive) – what has come to be known as the Global War on Terrorism.

The Muslim has always been marked as a non-being and expendable object in the crosshairs of imperial Western humanism – for the Muslim embodies the limits of the

²⁴ Rey Chow, *The Age of the World Target Self-Referentiality in War, Theory, and Comparative Work* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 31.

²⁵ CBS News. “Business as Usual.” Cbsnews.com

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/business-as-usual-16-09-2001/> (accessed September 25, 2019)

political.²⁶ However, the racialized Muslim as the object of terror can only be perceived as such depending on one's location. For within the context of the Global War on Terror, the Muslim must be eliminated to make Western life possible. That is, the untimely death of the Muslim makes time as we know and live it possible. Conceptions of self, time, and space are some of the determining factors for this locus of enunciation, or the idea of "who speaks and from what epistemic body-politics of knowledge and geopolitics of knowledge they speak from in the existing power relations at a world-scale."²⁷ The locus from where one enunciates the geographical coordinates of terror is always already determined by a cosmogony that has been discursively framed as the natural truth. In this case, the coordinates of terror are situated outside the West and within the Orientalized spaces of difference that have traditionally been non-Christian, and thus perceived as uncivilized societies and cultures.

²⁶ Gil Anidjar, *The Jew, the Arab: A History of the Enemy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); Talal Asad, 2003. *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); Sohail Daulatzai and Junaid Rana, *With Stones in our Hands: Writings on Muslims, Racism, and Empire* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018); Vivek Bald et. al, *The Sun Never Sets: South Asian Migrants in an Age of U.S. Power* (New York: New York University Press, 2016); Wael Hallaq, *Restating Orientalism: A Critique of Modern Knowledge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018); Deepa Kumar, "Colonialism and Orientalism" in *Islamophobia and the Politics of Empire* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012); Sunaina Maira, *The 9/11 Generation: Youth, Rights, and Solidarity in the War on Terror* (New York: New York University Press, 2016); Nadine Naber, "Look, Mohammed the Terrorist Is Coming!": Cultural Racism, Nation-Based Racism and the Intersectionality of Oppressions after 9/11," in *Race and Arab Americans Before and After 9/11*, ed. Nadine Naber and Amaney Jamal (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008); Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Junaid Rana, *Terrifying Muslims: Race and Labor in the South Asian Diaspora* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

²⁷ Ramón Grosfoguel, "Epistemic Islamophobia and Colonial Social Sciences," *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge* 8, no. 2, 30 (2010): 30.

Scene of the Crime: Anthropometrics, Drones, and the Locus of Anti-Muslim Racism

In 1970, American anthropologist Henry Field eulogized the death of his Soviet colleague and friend Dr. George F. Debets in the preface of Debets' *Physical Anthropology of Afghanistan I-II*. Field recounts his 35 years of friendship with Debets from the time he met him at the Institute of Anthropology in Moscow in September 1934 to his death in 1969. However, it was in 1964, as the secretary of the International Congress where Fields not only recounts the "worldwide recognition" Debets received from his colleagues but also the moment when Fields had suggested Debets undertake the Anthropometric Survey of Afghanistan. In commemorating his late friend and colleague, Fields welcomes Debets' "rich array of anthropometric data recorded on 86 groups in Afghanistan" for it filled a "major lacuna for descriptive and statistic data on the peoples of Southwestern Asia."²⁸

Anthropometry, the scientific method employed by Debets and other physical anthropologists was first introduced by the French police officer Alphonse Bertillon in the 1880s. Also known as bertillonage, Alphonse Bertillon's techniques utilized measuring the human body for the purposes of classification, cataloguing, and identifying criminals. As a form of "policing knowledge" Bertillon designed a method alongside craniometry and phrenology that calculated and measured a person's criminality based on the size of certain body parts, i.e. the head, ear, nose, and iris.²⁹ Through this technique,

²⁸ G. F., Debet and Louis Dupree, *Physical Anthropology of Afghanistan: I-II* (Cambridge: The Peabody Museum, 1970), ix-xi.

²⁹ Pierre Piazza, "Alphonse Bertillon and the Identification of Persons (1880-1914)." Alphonse Bertillon and the Identification of Persons (1880-1914) | *Criminocorpus*. August 26, 2016. Accessed March 25, 2018. <https://criminocorpus.org/en/exhibitions/suspects-defendants-guilty/alphonse-bertillon-and->

agents of the state believed they calculated and determined a person's intelligence, capacity to reason, and criminality by measuring the skull.

The subjects of the bertillonage system were taxonomically identified through the processes of racialization and gendering. For example, with the invention of photography and the mugshot, the state now had its disposal visual technologies of biopower to categorize, identify, and classify the criminal body. To render a body as a criminal body meant to script racial meanings on to that specific body. Decolonial thinker Frantz Fanon refers to this phenomenon as the "epidermalization of inferiority."³⁰ The visual field was deeply tied to the white supremacist power/knowledge interface that determined the value and valuelessness of particular peoples. Mugshots, or as Black studies scholar, Tina M. Campt would call "convict photos" produced visual narratives around the black and brown body that not only sought to capture Otherness but also construct objects deserving of discipline, control, or even death and destruction.

In drawing upon the archives of empire, Rajkamal Kahlon's *People of Afghanistan* illustrates the ways in which race and epistemology codify certain bodies, or rather peoples, as inferior, and therefore deserving of death. In juxtaposing images from Debets' 1960s study with those from an AC-130 Specter Gunship attack from 2002, *People of Afghanistan* unearths the academy's role in the making of objects of terror. Although Kahlon overlays and sutures past archives with more recent images, the video

[identification-persons-1880-1914](#); Simone Browne, *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

³⁰ Seen in Tina M. Campt, *Listening to Images*, 11.

installation not only attempts to capture the relationship of the visual to knowledge and war, but also to temporal violence.

As subjects of empire, colonial ethnographic accounts depict and institutionalize the dispensability of the colonized, thus exposing them to different forms of political violence. The ways in which westernized researchers tell stories or produce knowledge around a subject of study are through the colonial tools and systems of knowledge they have inherited. Area studies, anthropology, and anthropological surveys may illuminate as well as make intelligible spaces and populations of difference, but the very methods, principles, and rules researchers enact are colonial.

In G.F. Debets' 1960s anthropometric profiling of the peoples of Afghanistan, we encounter the ways in which Debets and objects of study are framed through the Western epistemic arsenal of raciality. It was the American friend and colleague, Henry Field, who validated the significance of Debets' study, "The publication of these data,

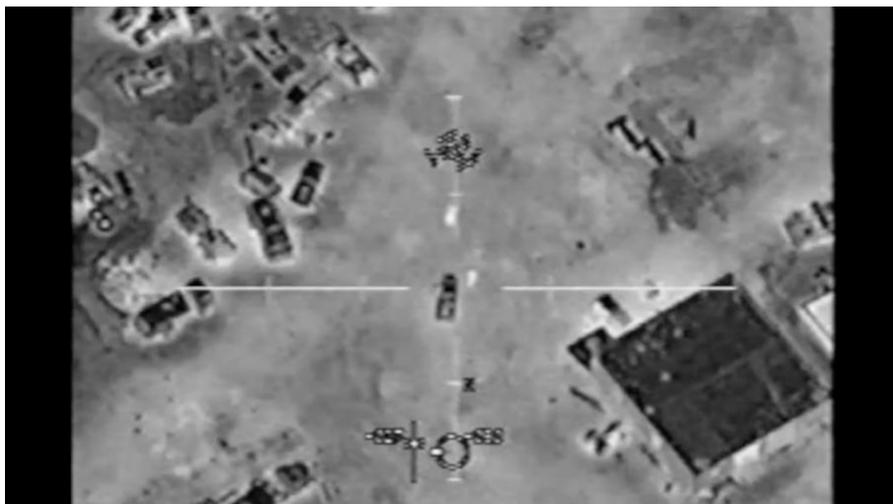


Figure 2.2: Rajkamal Kahlon, *People of Afghanistan*, 2016. Video Still

combined with the excellent photographs of racial types supplied by Dr. Louis Dupree, now make known the principal racial types of the peoples of Afghanistan.”³¹

Moreover, the anthropometric data presented in G.F. Debets’ study leads him to conclude that “the concept of race is applicable to the Afghan groups” for some groups are “more Mongoloid” in their measurements while others who are of “darker skin” do not “[indicate] any presence of Negroid or Australoid elements.”³² In racially scripting the “bodies” on the ground through colonial methods of understanding human difference, G.F. Debets data is underwritten with Eurocentrism, with whiteness as a standard for measuring the human body and speculating on its possibilities. As an inheritor of bertillonage – a system of criminal identification introduced by French police officer Alphonse Bertillon – Debets reproduces racial-colonial classifications of human difference in his anthropometric survey. G.F. Debets may have been from the Soviet Union but his locus of enunciation is from within the West a spatial and temporal coordinate that has built its institutions of knowledge through the subjugation and obliteration of life in Asia, Africa, and the Americas.

³¹ G. F., Debet and Louis Dupree, *Physical Anthropology of Afghanistan: I-II*, v.

³² *Ibid.*, 7.



Figure 2.3: Rajkamal Kahlon, *People of Afghanistan*, 2016. Video Stills

Kahlon comes across this data not in the same vein as a westernized researcher, but as an artist who seeks to heal and rehabilitate. Kahlon uses G.F. Debets' "data" to illuminate how data and/or intelligibility of racial-colonial differences are tied to Western imperial

wars of invasion. Her *People of Afghanistan* video installation makes visible the systemic operation of racial knowledge within the contexts of the targeted killing of so-called “terrorists.”

We witness Kahlon’s suturing temporally disparate archives to produce an autopsy of modern drone warfare in the Global War on Terror. In particular, *People of Afghanistan* sutures Debets’ study with that of post-9/11 drone footage where the audience witnesses the bombing of a village in Afghanistan (Fig. 2.2-2.3). Kahlon gestures to her audience that the history of racial science that produced the Afghani as a racial other is critical to understand how modern/colonial systems of knowledge rely on systems of classifications, i.e. anthropometry, to target certain bodies for death and destruction. The overlaying Debets’ images with the drone footage captures how the visual in both instances is intimately tied to racial knowledge. That is, one must have knowledge of the body being targeted for death and destruction.

Furthermore, Kahlon’s suturing of Debets’ study with drone footage suggests a troubling of linear narratives of space, temporality, and ultimately, normative modes of power. As such, Kahlon’s video installation animates the colonial archive for the purposes of radical critique. It is through this practice of suturing these multiple and disparate, but also deeply intimate archives of empire where we witness Kahlon’s conjuring the ghosts of the past to visually articulate a politics against the ongoing violence of imperial violence then, now, and of the future for as long as the scope of history continues to bring into its crosshair’s objects marked as ahistorical and expendable. The dead cannot be forgotten; they are, in fact, critical agents of our

contemporary social formations, and to omit them is to ignore the traces of the past that continue to play out in our present. The past does not exist independently from the present; however, the past is very much in the present. In seeing the present as the creation and formation of history, we can begin to see how ghosts are traces of a violent past that seek to rupture the continuity of time that renders their histories reconciled, settled, and/or healed. *People of Afghanistan* is a refutation of temporalities' linear narrative to heal and/or rehabilitate trauma and violence. Rather, Kahlon's suturing of the historical and bodily fragments that are left in the wake of ongoing racial-colonial violence suggests the making of a queer diasporic politic wherein "questions of the past, memory, and nostalgia" are conjured to speak to the colonial conditions of the present.³³ By juxtaposing, and piecing together fragments of the past, Kahlon sutures a queer diasporic memory of the trauma experienced by the *People of Afghanistan* in particular, but those classified as non-normative, and thus non-human, in general.

Visuality, or the ways of seeing, is significant in managing imperial wars of invasion. In being laden with the methods and technologies of the modern/colonial world, the imperial gaze abstracts souls and life from people, rendering them as mere objects or bodies targeted for civilizational destruction. This vector of racialization, which ethnic studies scholar Keith P. Feldman calls "racialization on the ground" and exemplified through G.F. Debets study, territorializes life and death through geopolitical and biopolitical borders that distinguishes civil society from the state of nature (Feldman

³³ Gayatri Gopinath, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 4.

2016, 381).³⁴ The eye is linked to constructing the zones of being and non-being as captured in the Frantz Fanon's famous "Look, a Negro; I'm scared!" This racializing gaze that Fanon experiences is significant for the way in which sight and/or vision becomes the technology through which objects of terror are consolidated to specific geographies and bodies.

On the other hand, as colonial powers took to the air, the use of aerial imagery became part and parcel of the imperial gaze from above. Unmanned aerial systems, or known simply as drones, blurred the territorial borders among nation-states as the West's expanded its regimes of surveillance and control to secure its own borders from the threat and risk of terror. However, just as the colonial gaze through the eyes on the ground can interpret and racialize certain bodies as a threat and/or danger, the eyes in the sky also operationalize similar racializing patterns of bodies on the ground, or what Feldman refers to as "racialization from above."³⁵ Drone technology bring to fore questions around borders and bordering, police and policing, and ultimately, their interlinks with systems of globalized warfare. That is, within the current Global War on Terror and the discourse of "homeland security," the physical borders of the U.S. nation-state are not necessarily redrawn per se but are rather transnationally expanded and transmuted in the effort to secure the homeland from the terror threat.

Drones facilitate this expansion of the homeland security state as the threat appears to be simultaneously distant and remote, yet very much near and intimate on the

³⁴ Keith Feldman, "Empire's Verticality: The Af-Pak Frontier, Visual Culture, and Racialization from Above," in *Critical Ethnic Studies: A Reader*, eds. Nada Elia, David M. Hernández, Jodi Kim, Shana L. Redmond, Dylan Rodríguez, and Sarita Echavez See (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 381.

³⁵ Ibid.

video screens of the drone operators who control and interpret the visual objects targeted for death. The eyes in the sky do not visualize the images objectively. For in attempting to make legible the objects targeted for death, the visual field that is produced from the eyes in the sky are infused with Orientalist and anti-Muslim racial knowledge about the geography and the demography. The objective is to make transparent the “terrorist” body after the smoke settles.

The Muslim body could only be transparently recognized as “terrorist” through the blending of the visual field, knowledge, and warfare. Through this mixture the West comes to onto-epistemically map the Orient lifeless and render the bodies that are there not-human. This logic implies that salvation for Muslims lies with the obliteration of the virus that breeds terrorism.³⁶ What is dismissed, or rather obfuscated, within this line of thought is historical and political context in which “terrorism” is produced.

Drones may abstract cartographies of life but technology itself is not an “[idle machine] hovering above; they are loaded with certain assumptions and ideologies” that link visibility and anthropological grammar to understand human difference in the targeted killing of “terrorists.” Drones deploy a wide spectrum of imaginaries that determine life’s possibilities of people on the ground. They are ultimately technologies of regulation, control, and destruction.

³⁶ Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Pantheon, 2004).

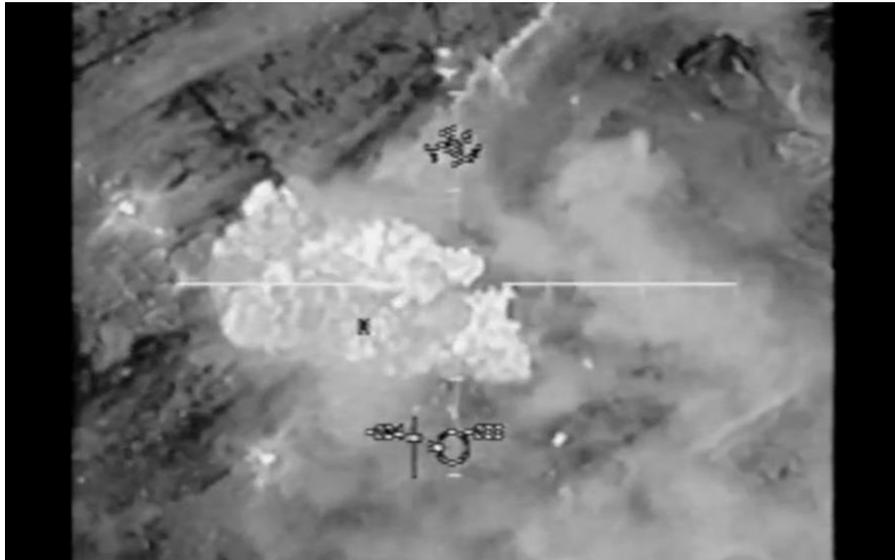


Figure 2.4: Rajkamal Kahlon, People of Afghanistan, 2016. Video Still

A Speculation on the Prospects of Diasporic Suturing



Figure 2.5: Rajkamal Kahlon, *Vetruvian Man or How I learned to love the bomb*, 2013. Acrylic on assembled wood cutout 180 x 180 x 50 cm

Let us return to the scene of the crime – a locale in the Global War on Terror – the place-world that makes enunciation possible, and death and destruction inevitable. The war that Derek Gregory terms the “everywhere war.”³⁷ Drones facilitate the expansion of imperial Western humanism. Many critics and scholars have argued against the drone as a more precise, rational, and surgical killing machine.³⁸ In fact, the discourse of the

³⁷ Derek Gregory, “The Everywhere War,” *The Geographical Journal*. 177, no. 3 (2011): 238-250.

³⁸ Lisa Parks and Caren Kaplan, *Life in the Age of Drone Warfare* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017); Anjali Nath, “Stoners, Stones, and Drones: Transnational South Asian Visuality from Above and Below” in

precise, the rational, and the surgical drone gaze is laden with racial-imperial geographical knowledge that link the eye with the anthropological grammar to understand human difference in the targeted killing of so-called “terrorists.” What’s more, the production of death and destruction is made possible in visualizing the bodies on the ground not as an assemblage of affective matter but as merely objects with potential risk and as possible threats. That is, bodies that look like humans could be there but not full-fledged humans. In rendering Muslim bodies on the ground as lifeless and not-human, the US and the West imply that salvation for Muslims lies with the obliteration of the virus that breeds terrorism. What is dismissed, or rather obfuscated, within this line of thought is historical and political context in which “terrorism” is produced. It is only after the smoke settles from the so-called surgical strike do we see precision. Precise in destroying and devastating all life in its sight. This is the modus operandi of imperial Western humanism.

Berlin-based South Asian American artist Rajkamal Kahlon enters the scene of this crime by offering to conduct her own surgical procedure. In doing so, her work sutures and rehabilitates the colonized body that has been injured and subjugated through the universalist proclamations of Eurocentric knowledge. The attempt to universalize a European particularity of being human by imposing its structures upon colonial subjects and spaces would not go unchallenged. From W. E. B. Du Bois and Aimé Césaire to Gloria Anzaldúa and Chela Sandoval, anti-colonial, women of color, and queer scholars

Life in the Age of Drone Warfare eds. Lisa Parks and Caren Kaplan (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 248.

intervened and have continued writing, crafting, and plotting against the discourse of colonialism that is inflected with death and destruction of the condemned. Frantz Fanon most poignantly summarizes the disenchantment with Eurocentrism when he writes, “When I search for Man in the technique and the style of Europe, I see only a succession of negations of man, and an avalanche of murders.”³⁹ “Vetruvian Man, or How I Learned to Love the Bomb” is in fact a betrayal, a refusal, and a retaliation of conforming to the practices of imperial Western humanism.

In the conclusion of her book *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, Jasbir Puar rearticulates the “terrorist body” as a “assemblage that resists queerness-as-sexual-identity.”⁴⁰ That is, Puar disposes of the binary opposition that determines queer subjects, i.e. being queer and not-being queer. According to Puar, the categorization, identification, and classification of intersectional identities “underscore [their] contingency and complicity with dominant formations.”⁴¹ In other words, Puar troubles how intersectional identities may become visible through the state and in doing so may attain power to dominate over Others. In being opposed to the intersectional formations of identity where there is a “demand [in] knowing, naming, and thus [the] stabilizing of identity across space and time” there is also a betrayal that takes place when “taking imbricated identities apart one by one to see how they influence each other.”⁴² For example, individuals with complex identities can be accommodated by the state by being granted rights and recognition in order to facilitate, and even extend, the idea that

³⁹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1966), 251-252.

⁴⁰ Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 205.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 212.

the US (and the West) are exceptional spaces wherein complex identities can be consolidated and spatiotemporally fixed. Thus, generating the narrative that not only frames the US as an inclusive and tolerable society but also as the moral authority to save Muslims from the inherently monstrous and oppressive terrorist. Intersectional model of identity becomes a tool to manage diverse populations by authorizing the state to not only categorize and classify human difference but to also produce the liberal multicultural myth that sanctions imperial wars abroad; Gayatri Spivak may refer to this as the West “saving brown women from brown men.”⁴³ This problematic for Puar is one in which elides the relationalities that are produced when “bodies interpenetrate, swirl together, and transmit affects and effects to each other.”⁴⁴

In displacing queerness-as-sexual-identity wherein the racial-gendered-sexual knowledge of human difference meets the visual technologies of colonial-imperial rule, Puar suggests we take into account bodies as an “assemblage,” an alternative modality that is “[attuned] to movements, intensities, emotions, energies, affectivities, and textures as they inhabit events, spatiality, and corporealities.”⁴⁵ In other words, the state employs the intersectional model of identity to make the colonial subject visible and knowable, and thus controllable and killable. On the other hand, assemblage refuses colonial intelligibility and the colonial quest to represent and destroy deviant bodies. In seeing, hearing, feeling deviant bodies as an assemblage of matter, thoughts, desires, frustrations, and fears, we can come to truly know the human, particularly a humanism that takes into

⁴³ Gayatri Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994). 93.

⁴⁴ Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 212.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 215.

account the lashes of modern/colonial violence and the backlashes that may come as a result.

Kahlon's suturing of the "Vetruvian Man, or How I Came to Love the Bomb" comes to be an affectively unruly and decolonial aesthetic that dismantles and disorients the onto-epistemic cosmogony of imperial Western humanism that has come to be canonized through the cannon of the old and the new. She offers a suturing that assembles both Muslim interiority and body that has been held captive by the modern/colonial world. re-semblance of Kahlon's "Vetruvian Man" (Fig 2.5) to that of both Da Vinci's "Vitruvian Man" (Fig. 2.1) and a suicide bomber is not merely appealing just as an aesthetic. In fact, the re-semblance is what I argue to be the politics of diasporic suturing. Kahlon's suturing of the "Vetruvian Man" as a ballistic-body weapon aesthetically and insurgently combats Leonardo da Vinci's model "Vitruvian Man." Kahlon animates a colonial anthropological archive to challenge the dominant racial conceptional arsenal that has determined how we witness, see, know, and measure other genres of being human in the world.

The framework of diasporic suturing I offer here through Kahlon's work not only troubles the conventional understanding of "diaspora" wherein the diasporic subject is traditionally one who has a longing for home or the past.⁴⁶ Rather, the politics of diasporic suturing being framed here serves as a decolonial site that seeks to unsettle the long history of the War on Terror from British colonial occupation to US imperial invasion that has sought to identify, classify, and categorize objects for death and

⁴⁶ Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

destruction. Kahlon as a South Asian diasporic artist draws upon this archive in both *People of Afghanistan* and “Vetruvian Man, or How I Learn to Love the Bomb” to suture this history and how it plays out within the Global War on Terror. In this process, Kahlon shares a disenchantment of Euro-American power with that of Frantz Fanon. For those of us submerged under this avalanche, diasporic suturing is the rehabilitation of debilitated bodies and animating of lifeless objects for the possibility of speculating on and towards a future not-yet-here.

Kahlon sutures the body as a ballistic body-weapon, possibly exploding in all directions, possibly disrupting the coordinates of Eurocentric knowledge, power, and being, and possibly undoing imperial Western humanism.⁴⁷ This ballistic body “blur the insides and outsides, infecting transformation through sensation, echoing knowledge via reverberation and vibration” forcing those of us with/in the US and the West to listen to cacophonous sounds that surface – the screaming and crying of all life clashing with and piercing the composition of imperial Western humanism.

Conclusion

The most pressing matter for the West in the Global War on Terror has always been about eliminating and managing risk. George W. Bush, just days after 9/11, called upon Congress to forcefully and preemptively act to eliminate any possible future threats, “The only way to defeat terrorism as a threat to our way of life is to stop it, eliminate it, and destroy it where it grows.”⁴⁸ What’s striking about this enunciation is not just the “Us

⁴⁷ Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 217.

⁴⁸ Bush, George W. "President Bush Addresses the Nation." The Washington Post. September 20, 2001. Accessed June 14, 2018.

http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpsrv/nation/specials/attacked/transcripts/bushaddress_092001.html.

versus Them” framework but the naturalization of a specific genre of life that is given privilege through the death of the Muslim Other. The solution for Bush and his kin to self-preserve Western life and knowledge was through the racial classification of Muslims as non-humans or viral pests in need of elimination for they threaten the political, economic, and ecological terrain and future of the modern/colonial world system. The drone became a vital technology to this operation in the undefined battlefields of the Global War on Terror. As a dominant technology of empire it allowed for Western forces, particularly the United States military, to manage and destroy the racialized Muslim terrorist from a distance. To put simply, it was killing without getting killed. This imperial operation and visioning of drones have blurred the boundaries between humans and nonhumans targeting everything in its sight as something to be managed and/or destroyed for its potentiality of becoming a risk in the future.

This logic of preemption does not simply seek to eliminate bodies, it also seeks to manage so-called unruly and unknowable Muslim populations by targeting their affective terrains – the interior realm of imagination, desire, fear, and hope – as site for governance by way of disciplining. In an October 2013 Congressional hearing, we witness the victims of U.S. drone strikes in Pakistan, give their testimony and stories of life in the age of drone warfare.⁴⁹ Rafiq ur Rehman, a Pakistani primary school teacher, along with his 13-year-old son, Zubair, and 9-year-old daughter, Nabila, appeared in Washington D.C. to describe the death of their 67-year-old mother, Momina, who had been a victim of a

⁴⁹ McVeigh, Karen. "Drone Strikes: Tears in Congress as Pakistani Family Tells of Mother's Death." *The Guardian*. October 29, 2013. Accessed June 01, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/oct/29/pakistan-family-drone-victim-testimony-congress>.

drone strike in North Waziristan. Zubair poignantly explained, “I no longer love blue skies. In fact, I now prefer grey skies. The drones do not fly when the skies are grey. When the sky brightens, drones return and we live in fear.”⁵⁰ Zubair’s testimony accounts for the ways in which drones are not only a racializing technology of death and destruction but also of disciplining and controlling the “potential threat” through the affective structure of fear. Life’s possibilities for people like Zubair, his family, and others under the scopic regime of drone warfare is reduced to merely that – a possibility – a calculation based on potential risk and possible threat.

In both *People of Afghanistan* and *Blowback*, Rajkamal Kahlon sutures distant historical archives to illustrate how colonial anthropology has constructed the Muslim terrorist in the Global War on Terror. Kahlon’s feminist methodology of what I have called “diasporic suturing” not only refuses the subjugation of life to imperial war, but her refusal also reveals an interior desire for freedom that cannot be precisely captured or measured by modern/colonial knowledge and its technologies of death and destruction. This form of politics must always suture the matter that has been rendered immaterial by the optics of race and coloniality. Rajkamal Kahlon’s visual art offers us and those like Zubair and his family the possibility to speculate on a future beyond being subjugated to imperial violence. As such, diasporic suturing grants those subjected to imperial violence a possibility of life and dignity in this moment of global political, economic, and ecological devastation.

⁵⁰Abad-Santos, Alexander. "This 13-Year-Old Is Scared When the Sky Is Blue Because of Our Drones." *The Atlantic*. October 29, 2013. Accessed June 01, 2018. <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2013/10/saddest-words-congress-briefing-drone-strikes/354548/>.

Chapter 3: The Brown Atlantic: Swet Shop Boys & the Ungovernability of Diasporic Noise

The figure of the Muslim continues to find its way into US political discourse. During the U.S. presidential election of 2016, both Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton conjured and/or employed the Muslim either as a specter or literally as promotional mouthpieces during their campaign trails. In doing so, the Muslim was used to garner the political will and ideological capital to shape not only the discourse of the election, the Global War on Terror, and of Muslims, but also in leveraging the border as a material and discursive site of disciplining and differentiating desirable immigrants from undesirable, governable immigrants from ungovernable – the “good” from the “bad.”

Donald Trump did not hide from arousing anti-Muslim racism amongst his supporters. In August 2016, Trump suggested he would introduce a vetting process to “screen out any [immigrants] who have hostile attitudes toward [the US] or its principles or who believe that Sharia law should supplant American law.”¹ His supporters felt it necessary to not just screen out those they saw as undesirable but to take it a step further by becoming vigilante officers of whiteness themselves. For instance, Adam W. Purinton shot and killed Srinivas Kuchibhotla, an engineer from India living and working in Olathe, Kansas, after yelling “Get out of my country!” in February of 2017.² What’s significant about this case and among many others is the extension of anti-Muslim racism

¹ “Donald Trump Vows ‘extreme Vetting’ of Immigrants.” August 15, 2016. Accessed July 12, 2018. <https://www.cnn.com/videos/politics/2016/08/15/donald-trump-extreme-vetting-screening-test-immigration-sot.cnn>.

² Stevens, Matt. “Kansas Man Who Fatally Shot Indian Immigrant Gets Life in Prison.” *The New York Times*. May 06, 2018. Accessed July 12, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/05/us/adam-purinton-sentenced-kansas-shooting.html>.

to non-Muslim peoples. The term “Muslim” here becomes not just a religious identity but also a racial classification that extends to anyone who appears to be Muslim and/or brown.³

In racializing Muslims as foreign, violent, and as inherently terrorists, the political landscape has positioned and entrapped Muslims, South Asians, and Muslim-looking people in an impasse that has curtailed dissent and solidarity with other aggrieved groups to the prerogatives of the state. That is, this purported demographic threat must seek recognition as rights-bearing citizens through performing and representing themselves as normative beings whose interests are aligned with the state and not against it. We witness this taking place through the discourse of liberal multiculturalism that presents the United States as a political and cultural haven.

For instance, the 2016 Democratic National Convention is a prominent example of the Muslim Other having to perform their allegiance to the United States. Patriots across the United States applauded and celebrated when Khizr and Ghazala Khan, the Pakistani American parents of a slain U.S. soldier, pulled out a copy of the U.S. constitution at the 2016 Democratic National Convention. In attempting to critique the white supremacist and misogynist platform of Donald Trump’s campaign, Khan asserted the constitution contradicted the Trump’s rhetoric. Khan suggested to let Trump borrow his copy of the constitution and advised Trump “look for the words liberty and equal protection of the law” – words that inherently present the U.S. as an exceptional nation of

³ There are numerous examples of anti-Muslim racial violence extending to non-Muslim communities. For example, the case that is most cited in post-9/11 era is the murder of a Sikh by the name of Balbir Singh Sodhi.

freedom, progress, and modernity.⁴ The triumphalism around Khizr Uncle's action within leftist circles did not just become a cornerstone of the 2016 Presidential elections, but also exemplary of U.S. liberal multiculturalism and violence.

The positioning and celebration of Muslim faces and bodies on the empires pedestal calls for a serious analysis of the multiple forms of power and knowledge that have led to this (or that) moment. Khizr Khan's speech at the Democratic National Conference and his public role after the election of Donald Trump comes to reflect a veneer of success, or an illusion of Muslim inclusion into U.S. civic life. These spectacles of inclusion not only maintain American exceptionalism, but they also produce exceptional subjects that delineate the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, of savagery and docility. The incorporation of these exceptional subjects is a direct result of the U.S. liberal multiculturalist agenda. An agenda that ensures the "security" of its citizens through spreading "freedom" globally, accumulating capital globally, and maintaining excellence globally. All of which speak volumes of a globality ruled by a normative social order rooted in the histories of conquest, colonialism, and slavery.

Furthermore, the inclusion of Muslims, South Asians, and those perceived to be Muslims into the prerogatives of the state tamper with the political possibilities of racialized peoples to form solidarity amongst each other. That is, we begin to see our identities being formed through the state and not against it; foreclosing the possibility of drawing upon multiple histories of racial-colonial violence that has not only positioned us

⁴ "Khizr Khan to Trump: Have You Read the Constitution?" *Al Jazeera*. July 29, 2016. Accessed November 14, 2016. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/07/khizr-khan-trump-read-constitution-160729052917517.html>.

differentially within the diaspora but also relationally. In other words, in order to be accepted and included, and to attain a sense of being and belonging, we are quick to forget the violence that produced the diaspora to begin with.

For many, 9/11 redefined what it meant to be South Asian in America: many South Asians, including myself, realized that despite our perceived “assimilation” into U.S. society and culture, we were suddenly and perhaps still seen as the “enemy” and “outsiders.” There have been two general responses to this racialization as racial terrorist others. On the one hand, some South Asian Americans (especially Hindus) have embraced and reapplied the racial politics of the model minority myth to the Global War on Terror discourse, which others African Americans, Latinxs, and Muslims, in order to actively and publicly deny that they could be “criminals” and/or “terrorists.” On the other hand, many South Asians have adapted what scholar Nitasha Sharma calls a “global race consciousness” in which they see themselves in relation to other oppressed groups as also victims of state violence and racism.⁵ This chapter will examine how South Asians in the U.S. and the U.K., along with African Americans, forge transnational political imaginaries to create sites of solidarity that address issues of racialization and state violence as a result of the Global War on Terror.

This chapter asks: What are the conditions that produce the possibility of forging transnational political imaginaries? How may South Asians and Muslims in the U.K. and the U.S. challenge their subjectivities in relation to their respective modern nation-state? In doing so, I want to explore how the Swet Shop Boys produce knowledges to radically

⁵ Nitasha T. Sharma, *Hip Hop Desis: South Asian Americans, Blackness, and a Global Race Consciousness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

reimagine a world in which they create spaces and sounds of solidarity with other subjugated groups. Furthermore, I am interested in how the Swet Shop Boys together have the power to create new sound waves and discourses that yield the potential to challenge South Asians who embrace the racial politics of the model minority myth and the Global War on Terror. This project articulates a transnational Afro-South Asian-Muslim solidarity equipped to provide the Black, South Asian, and the Muslim diaspora in the West discursive strategies to debunk the model minority myth and to form cross-racial alliances with other subjugated groups.

This chapter explores the possibilities of Hindu-Muslim poetics through the sound and music of South Asian diasporic artists Swet Shop Boys. I argue that this hip hop group, which consists of British Pakistani artist Riz Ahmed, aka Riz MC, and Indian American artist Himanshu Suri, aka Heems, articulate and disrupt conventional notions of diasporic identity formation. Their music not only becomes an expression of their lived experiences in England and the US but also an expression or gesture towards a place from which they historically come. That is, the Swet Shop Boys are not simply “Post-9/11 Blues.” Rather, I argue their music draws on multiple temporalities and geographies to give us – the listeners – an unsettling and cacophonous noise striking and colliding with modern civilization’s most dominant political imaginary, the nation-state and its borders.

In sampling the homophonic translation of the viral Tamil music video “Benny Lava,” the Swet Shop Boys produce a cacophony of noises to articulate an exilic consciousness that is in opposition to governance through nationalism and modernity.

American studies scholar, Alex Lubin explains the contradictions that emerge from modernity's Enlightenment ideals for racialized groups:

For [racialized groups], the Enlightenment projects of colonialism and nation-state formation have often meant being cast beyond the pale of the national community and being relegated to "the other." Each of these groups has carried the scar of racial violence, exclusion, and expulsion that seem to animate the practices of modern nation-states.⁶

These practices of modern nation-states produce the collisions between nationalism and colonialism for racialized groups. The collisions generate "spaces of dissonance" in which the "exile compares the world as it is with a restructured world he or she would like to create."⁷ Drawing on Edward Said, Lubin explains the consciousness of the exile as being between home and homelessness. This consciousness reflects the exiles sense of exclusion from the modern nation-state in which he or she feels "contrapuntally" about national belonging and inclusion. Thus, as Lubin argues, these "[c]ontrapuntal modernities are exilic imaginaries in which the condition of homelessness produces emergent aesthetic politics."⁸ In other words, the poetics produced by the Swet Shop Boys are constitutive of an insurgent politics that are anticipatory imaginations beyond modernity.

South Asians and Muslims have reacted to the ontologizing of the terrorist body as a social reality by distancing themselves from being read as such. The ontologized terrorist body cannot be incorporated within the body politic, because the terrorist body is imagined to be "the non-American, the nonnormative, the pathologized, and the

⁶ Alex Lubin, *Geographies of Liberation: The Making of an Afro-Arab Political Imaginary* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 7.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 13.

recalcitrant.”⁹ For South Asians and Muslims to repudiate the terrorist body as not-self, but Other, is to also render oneself rightless, as Lisa Cacho explains:

The passive act of being recognized as a potential terrorist rendered one rightless because it was not only criminal to look suspiciously Arab and/or Muslim; it was also criminal not to actively, emphatically, publicly, repeatedly, insistently reiterate that one was not a terrorist.¹⁰

In attempting to show their allegiance to the U.S. nation-state, the insistent denouncement that one is not a terrorist reifies that there are beings and bodies that could potentially be. This “potential” is not only policed by the state, but docile South Asians and Muslims also self-police their own communities for “terrorist” activity.

The rise of multiculturalism has coerced South Asians and other racialized peoples into positions of docility and/or compliancy. This coercion, as some scholars argue, is a tactic to manage racial difference in order for the nation-state and capital to secure its own legacy and longevity.¹¹ According to Vijay Prashad, Americans are taught to respect different cultures as well as celebrate those individuals from these cultures that produce exceptional model citizens.¹² In essentializing difference, multiculturalism does not account for the diversity within groups. As this difference becomes incorporated or integrated into the nation-state, certain groups are given more value over and against those that threaten the natural order of things, or in this case the “terrorist” subject. In other words, whether we are Muslims, Hindus, or Sikh, in embracing and reapplying the

⁹ Lisa Cacho, *Social Death: Racialized Rightlessness and the Criminalization of the Unprotected* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 7.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 105.

¹¹ Jodi Melamed, *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011); Grace Kyungwon Hong, “‘The Future of Our Worlds’: Black Feminism and the Politics of Knowledge in the University under Globalization,” *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* 8.2 (2008): 95-115.

¹² Vijay Prashad, “Ethnic Studies Inside Out,” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 9.2 (2006): 157-76.

model minority myth discourse to the Global War on Terror, we are doing so by disavowing another racial other.

Rather than providing solutions to the perpetuity of racism and coloniality, liberal multiculturalism aims to totalize and subsume our way of being and knowing within the state and capital. As Roderick Ferguson notes with passage of the 1965 Immigration Act, “Immigrant communities would become targets for power’s archival operations, making the racial, cultural, and ethnic differences of those communities into raw materials for hegemonic affirmation and regulation.”¹³ In opening the borders to South Asian migrants, Ferguson argues that “political emancipation would become the spirit of hegemonic institutionalization.”¹⁴ This process offered South Asian migrants selective entrance into the United States where they could work, live, and progress as postcolonial diasporic subjects. However, as neoliberal multiculturalism gained steam so did the docility of South Asians who could be managed and controlled as a result of 9/11 and the racialization of our bodies as terrorist others.

Against Black-Brown Antagonisms and Towards Solidarity

Sureshbhai Patel, a 57-year-old grandfather from India, while walking through his son’s neighborhood in Mobile, Alabama in early 2015 was handcuffed and thrown to the ground by police officers who responded to a suspicious person call. This call made by a white neighbor identified Patel as a “skinny black man.” An NBC News article also reported, “The caller also said that he was following Patel from a distance, and that he

¹³ Roderick A. Ferguson, *The Reorder of Things: The University and its Pedagogies of Minority Difference* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 149.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 174.

was afraid to leave for work and leave his wife alone at home.”¹⁵ Although Patel was not black, this call animates the ghostly presence of slavery that continues to haunt the South in particular, and the US in general.

However, it was not only the fear of blackness that left Sureshbhai Patel partially paralyzed, but it was also his foreignness that defense lawyers claimed to justify the beating. The trial to send ex-officer Eric Parker to prison began with his defense attorney, Robert Tuten, blaming Sureshbhai Patel for his own injuries. Tuten argued, “When you come to the US we expect you to follow our laws and speak our language...Mr. Patel bears as much responsibility for this as anyone.”¹⁶ This racialization of Patel as not only black but also foreign other must be discussed critically in order to account for the different and complicated ways white supremacy manifests itself in organizing social life. That is, there are clear links in the case of Patel that illustrate how race and the law operate together to target certain bodies as inherently criminal, rendering them ineligible for personhood.

The police violence against Patel stems from anti-black and anti-Muslim racism. The safety of white men’s wives and their family is questioned due to the mobile “skinny black man” walking through his neighborhood. According to the 911 phone caller, it was transparent that Patel was black, but upon the officer’s arrival Patel was also foreign. His blackness rendered him criminal and subject to policing. But his foreignness presents to

¹⁵ Frances Kai-Hwa Wang, “Alabama Cop Arrested for Takedown That Left Indian Man Partially Paralyzed - NBC News,” *NBC News*. February 13, 2015. Accessed February 22, 2016. <http://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/alabama-cop-arrested-takedown-left-indian-man-partially-paralyzed-n305471>.

¹⁶ Challen Stephens, “Defense Blames Indian Grandfather at Start of New Trial, 'follow Our Laws and Speak Our Language,’” *AL.com*. October 27, 2015. Accessed February 22, 2016. http://www.al.com/news/index.ssf/2015/10/defense_blames_indian_grandfat.html.

us a more complicated understanding of race that cannot simply be reduced to the corporeal.

In trying to make sense of this case, we must understand that this issue is not merely an issue for either the black or South Asian community, but it is an issue for both. For the black community, it's an issue that stems from the slavery and its afterlife. For the South Asian community, it's not only an issue about race and nation, but also about how we are now very much intertwined and entangled within this long history of slavery and its afterlife as immigrants to the US.

Days after the event, the Hindu American Foundation (HAF), an advocacy group for the Hindu American community, released a public statement where they explained how they were working with the Department of Justice to develop "Hinduism 101" trainings. These training were to "improve the cultural competency of police officers and avoid the escalation of incidents based on language and cultural barriers."¹⁷ This move by HAF not only fails to address the antiblack, anti-Muslim, and anti-South Asian racism that is at the root of this issue, but it also fails to recognize the ways in which racial and colonial architectures have historically subjected South Asians to violence. Furthermore, HAF's move to team up with the Department of Justice is also a tactic to attribute value to Hindu American's as people deserving of rights and recognition as humans and not criminals, illegals, and/or terrorists.

¹⁷ "HAF Urges Immediate Action to Curb Police Brutality." Hindu American Foundation. February 11, 2015. Accessed February 24, 2016. <http://www.hafsite.org/whats-new/haf-urges-immediate-action-curb-police-brutality>.

HAF's advocating for rights and recognition of Hindu Americans plays into the very hands of liberal warfare, as many liberal foundations do. Rather than seeking rights and recognition for Hindu Americans in ways that attribute value and make them legible to the public, scholar Lisa Cacho forces us to think of how such a tactic is produced relationally. Liberalism insidiously positions itself relationally where its own public value is predicated on the devaluing of an other object – Muslims and terror, Blackness and criminality, Latinxs and illegality, or Indigeneity and savagery. Although many scholars have repudiated or rejected these Western understandings of the “other,” Cacho asks: “Whom does this rejection really benefit and whom does it hurt?”¹⁸ In trying to deny one's otherness, whether it be criminal, illegal, savage, or terrorist, Cacho argues, “We actually reproduce the problems we are meaning to resolve”¹⁹:

...there is no way out of this dilemma because recuperating social value requires rejecting the other Other. Ascribing readily recognizable social value always requires the devaluation of an/other, and that other is almost always poor, racialized, criminalized, segregated, legally vulnerable, and unprotected.²⁰

The racialized colonial subject's aspiration to be recognized as human is a project that is inherently contradictory. Our understanding of “human” is itself a racial project that is deeply intertwined with the legacy of white supremacy and legitimated by the state. Since the modern human subject has come to be over and against the racialized and gendered other, does not the latter's aspiration to be recognized as humans reproduce the same logic employed by the colonial state? Social value could potentially be recuperated

¹⁸ Cacho, *Social Death*, 31.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 13

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

through the extension of citizenship to rightless groups. However, this process comes along the lines of normativity and always through the devaluation of another. The state may recruit certain deserving people of color to become citizens, but only if these certain people do so by accepting the racial logic of the liberal empire.

Thus, HAF's "Hinduism 101" trainings to help police officers distinguish between criminals and non-criminals obscures the multiple temporalities that came down upon Sureshbhai Patel's body: slavery, colonialism, and their afterlives. In their attempt to gain recognition, HAF fails to recognize how the history of slavery and colonialism continue to haunt the American political and cultural landscape. And it was these hauntings and ghosts that left Sureshbhai Patel immobile and the crook, officer Eric Parker, free and mobile.

To demand some type of justice for Patel transcends either the black or South Asian community. The Patel case is more about how race and white supremacy structure social life such that even taking a morning stroll while black or brown denies one of personhood. Nonetheless, the multiple racialization's that took place upon Patel's body targeted him to the processes of death and devaluation. Rather than reaching out to the black community, the Hindu American Foundation reached out to the Department of Justice to make police officers aware that Hindu Americans are different – that they are not Black, and thus criminal. This response exemplifies how white supremacy has constructed these two groups as more than just antagonistic. Thus, the demand for justice must account for the ways in which this case isn't about any particular group. Moreover, it is about how race is a mutually constitutive process for both African Americans and

Asian Americans. This is a case not only about how white supremacy has constructed African Americans and Asian Americans as antagonistic, but it also a case that must recuperate the shared histories, coalitions, and solidarities between the two groups.

In his groundbreaking historical text *Bengali Harlem and the Lost Histories of South Asian America*, Vivek Bald pieces together a fragmented archive that tells the stories of Bengali migrants to the US between the 1890s and 1940s. Much of the South Asian American scholarship focuses on the stories of post-1965 migrants who arrived following the passing of the Immigration and Nationality Act. Prior to 1965, South Asians were barred from entering the US as the 1917 Immigration Act prohibited certain Asians. The infamous 1923 case of *U.S. vs. Bhagat Singh Thind* exemplifies this prohibition in that it declared South Asian migrants as “non-white” and undesirable.²¹ However, Bald’s scholarship traces a different story of South Asian migrants to the US. These migrants were not seen as the “model minority,” which has come to discursively frame much of Asian migration. Rather, the Bengali migrants Bald examines reveal how these migrants assimilated and integrated not into white America, but into black America.

Bald begins his book by quoting Édouard Glissant, “Each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other.”²² The relationship and encounters of South Asians with black America not only reveals a “lost history,” but these stories also unearth the political possibilities of Afro-Asian solidarity. The story of Abdul Fara, who

²¹ Vinay Harpalani, *DesiCrit: Theorizing the Racial Ambiguity of South Asian Americans* (August 12, 2013). 69 *NYU Annual Survey of American Law* 77 (2013); Chicago-Kent College of Law Research Paper No. 2013-30.

²² Vivek Bald, *Bengali Harlem and the Lost Histories of South Asian America* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2012).

was beaten by a World War I veteran named Fitzhugh Davis in the 1922 for sitting in the “white” section of a street car, echoes the beating of Sureshbhai Patel in 2015. Bald explains that as these types of incidents kept occurring for South Asians, many found black people to be comrades, brothers, sisters, potential wives and husbands; rather than the Other, the enemy.

South Asians married into and lived within black communities like Tremé, Black Bottom, West Baltimore, and Harlem. Bald rereads how these spaces were shaped by both African Americans and by immigrants of color:

These were places that were shaped by southern migrants familiar with the worst aspects of racial power in the United States and by immigrants of color from other parts of the world who had experienced life under colonial rule. These neighborhoods were not just patchworks of separate enclaves through which different groups of immigrants passed on their way to the American dream. They were dense, heterogeneous spaces, that were home to multiple groups for whom the American dream was largely deferred or inaccessible, and the stories of South Asian migrants suggest that they fostered different possibilities, gave rise to different registers of community and affiliation, and allowed for different forms of immigration assimilation and integration.²³

South Asian Bengali migrants who moved into these black geographies carried with them their own experiential and embodied knowledge of life under colonial rule. However, these spaces also offered Bengali migrants to encounter and exchange knowledge of freedom with African Americans whose way of being, living, and knowing America was shaped by the racial violence and terror of slavery and Jim Crow.

Afro-Asian solidarity is formed within these everyday registers of working-class affiliations, encounters, and exchanges. But rather than treating blackness as a fixed category that is only inscribed on black bodies, blackness could also become a productive

²³ Ibid., 226-227.

site from which to exercise political power and extend knowledge of freedom. Blackness carries a heavy moral weight within the US political and cultural landscape. This weight stems from America's roots in the slave economy where the racialized black body was commodified for accumulation and exchange. And this weight carries with it the knowledge of freedom in navigating the "worst aspects of racial power in the United States."

For immigrants of color, sampling blackness could be useful to entering into anti-racist coalitions and to bolster solidarity work with black Americans. In her book *Hip Hop Desis: South Asian Americans, Blackness, and Global Race Consciousness*, scholar Nitasha Sharma explains how South Asian Americans "make race" by sampling black cultural performances. She argues, "In contrast to dominant analyses of Asians, desi performers do not deracialize hip hop to make it 'their own'; rather, they use Black music as Asian American jazz musicians do: to racialize themselves as minorities drawing upon models of Blackness."²⁴ Blackness and black popular culture offers South Asians a language and sound to resist the mutability of whiteness. This resistance rests upon understanding that the act of sampling blackness is not one of appropriation, but rather a political maneuver that is more about exchange and solidarity.

The travel of black popular music and culture not only reveals the global circuits of capital, but the movement of black music to other spaces also becomes a way to understand how those subjected to colonial and imperial violence also forge relational political imaginaries. In his transnational analysis of Afro-Asian solidarity, Yuichiro

²⁴ Nitasha Sharma, *Hip Hop Desis*, 22-23.

Onishi turns to Du Bois's notion of "racial groove" as a lens to understand how "the participants of Afro-Asian solidarity projects...make connections across multiple efforts to revise the blueprint of Black radicalism to present a meaning of human liberation that exceeded the boundaries of nations and modern political thought."²⁵ He posits how the participants in his study moved in a racial groove to aid a "culture of liberation" that found solidarity not based on identity politics but a politics centered on the opposition to nationalism, militarism, imperial and colonial expansion. In centering their politics on these processes, participants within the Afro-Asian solidarity project transformed their ways of knowing and being to create a collective consciousness that cultivated new understandings of liberation across space and time.

The Noise of the Brown Atlantic

In her book *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures*, scholar Gayatri Gopinath discusses the complexity of the South Asian diaspora's racial formation. She brings our attention to the mid-century actor Sabu, who was known for his roles in both British and Hollywood films. Sabu, who made his debut in the British adventure film *Elephant Boy* (dir. Robert J. Flaherty, 1937), was discovered in Mysore, India and went on to feature in many more Orientalist British and Hollywood films, such as *The Thief of Baghdad* (dir. Michael Powell, Ludwig Berger, and Tim Whelan, 1940) and *The Jungle Book* (dir. Alexander Korda, 1942). In retelling Sabu's trajectory from India to the UK to the US, Gopinath not only explores the

²⁵ Yuichiro Onishi, *Transpacific Antiracism: Afro-Asian Solidarity in Twentieth-Century Black America, Japan, and Okinawa* (New York: NYU Press, 2013), 10.

“meticulous[ness] mapping of South Asian diasporic movements” but also contends that this history “eloquently speaks to the peculiar construction of South Asian masculinity within dominant popular cultural imaginary of both the United States and Britain.”²⁶ In particular, Sabu’s racial othering in the UK and the US charts what Gopinath and other South Asian diasporic scholars have named the “Brown Atlantic.”²⁷ That is, Sabu’s popularity in the mid-century as the exotic savage is just one example of how South Asian diasporic subjectivity then and now continues to be circulated and constructed through Euro-American Orientalist fantasies that traverse both the Atlantic and the afterlife of colonialism.²⁸

Cultural studies scholar Paul Gilroy argues that significance of Black culture is to be the “counterculture of modernity.”²⁹ The ships that crossed the Middle Passage with enslaved Africans were part and parcel of the construction of modernity and racial capitalism. However, Gilroy warns against the afro-pessimistic thinking of those transported to be merely commodities. Instead, he argues that the “ships are to be thought of as cultural and political units rather than abstract embodiments of the triangular trade. They were something more – a means to conduct political dissent and possibly a mode of cultural production.”³⁰ Thus, the cultural production of black peoples has at its core the insurgency to dismantle modernity and its attendant systems of domination. In his

²⁶ Gayatri Gopinath, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 70.

²⁷ For more on “Brown Atlantic” see: Jigna Desai, *Beyond Bollywood: The Cultural Politics of South Asian Diasporic Film* (London: Routledge, 2004).

²⁸ Vijay Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

²⁹ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1993), 1.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

seminal essay, Cornel West asserts the need for a new cultural politics that must seek to dismantle the modernity and its cultural domination over difference. West argues that cultural producers must “aim [to] dare to recast, redefine, and revise the very notions of ‘modernity,’ ‘mainstream,’ ‘margins,’ ‘difference,’ ‘otherness.’”³¹ Where the struggle for freedom rests in culture and its ability to rupture modernity’s tendency to homogenize history and experiences of difference. Culture, he argues, and culture producers must align themselves with the “demoralized, demobilized, depoliticized, and disorganized people” to bring crisis to civilization.³²

Culture becomes the discursive space to challenge dominant ideas of racialized life. Culture and art are not only reflections of spaces from which identities are formed, but they are also a remapping of those respective spaces to reveal the undertones of life. That is, as Stuart Hall argues in his essay, culture is a site “where we discover and play with the identifications of ourselves.”³³ More importantly, art and culture become the site where artists come to challenge and resist white and male cultural domination.

The transportation of Black peoples as cargo/labor was also not only entangled with systems of expropriation and exploitation in Asia, Africa, and the Americas but also with the coterminous transfer of racial and gendered knowledge across the globe. Hence, the development of a racialized international division of labor whereby non-Europeans were made, or rather forced, to work and die for white Euro-Americans economic and

³¹ Cornel West, *The New Cultural Politics of Difference*, October, 53 (1990): 108.

³² *Ibid.*, 94.

³³ Stuart Hall, "What is "Black" in Black Popular Culture?" *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. David Morley, and Kuan-Hsing Chen (New York: Routledge, 1996), 470.

biopower.³⁴ This development is not produced in isolation through a singular group or a singular historical moment, i.e. slavery. In other words, what I am arguing here is not that we minimize the history of slavery and the plantation but rather think about this history non-linearly entangled in the engines that makes modernity possible – slavery, indigenous dispossession, colonialism, imperial war, etc. That is, Euro-American empire and dominance was produced and continues to reproduce this racial-colonial past which has charted our settler colonial and imperial present, and undying future. In taking these entangled histories seriously, we may begin to understand the dispersal of indigenous peoples of Africa, Asia, and the Americas across the globe as co-related and interactive transcripts of memory and lived experience.

However, just as the Black Atlantic connected the Black Diaspora to Africa, the Brown Atlantic connected the South Asian diaspora to one another across the pond - in Europe and North America. As scholar Jigna Desai argues, the Brown Atlantic “[engenders] South Asian diasporic transnationalities” that produce a “certain heterogenous and hybrid multiscalar place.”³⁵ This place is not limited to a specific national framework or location but rather entangles the South Asian diaspora is a network of “complex, contradictory, and enmeshed power relations.”³⁶ More specifically, the Brown Atlantic is attuned to the ways in which South Asian and Muslim subjectivities negotiate the racialization, discourses of undesirability and foreignness, and the denial of personhood and dignity in the West.

³⁴ Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

³⁵ Jigna Desai, *Beyond Bollywood: The Cultural Politics of South Asian Diasporic Film* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 17.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

It is precisely the modern nation-states juridical ordering and discursive framing that composes the sociality of South Asian and Muslim subjects. For example, in *Whiteness of a Different Color*, Matthew Frye Jacobson demonstrates how U.S. power is organized through race by citing multiple immigration laws passed by the U.S. between 1790 and the 1920s, particularly the Immigration Law of 1790 and the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924. The former, which officially set the boundaries of inclusion for “free white persons” and the latter which utilized race to enforce restrictions on immigration. These two immigration acts set the precedent for how the state would define its relation to racialized groups, and how citizenship would be consolidated through whiteness. Jacobson states “citizenship and whiteness were conjoined,” in other words, participation in the republic and “fitness for self-government” were predicated on a person’s whiteness.³⁷ As racialized people, nonwhites were ultimately seen as a threat to the republic, their very presence was deemed “undesirable” and since the state has sought to purge all presence of the “Other” from its collective body. Most recent example of this legacy can be found in Donald Trump’s executive order nicknamed the “Muslim Ban” and/or the United Kingdom’s vote to withdraw from the European Union. Both of these policies emerge out of xenophobic and Islamophobic fervor around the presence of South Asians and Muslims and their racialization as terrorists within the US and the UK.

Although the West celebrates South Asians and Muslims who perform their desirability as model minorities, I am interested in examining those who perform their undesirability and ungovernable socialities through what I call “diasporic noise.” I situate

³⁷ Matthew F. Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 29.

this noise in the Brown Atlantic through the Swet Shop Boys who articulate a political imaginary and consciousness that challenges and combats Euro-American border imperialism and their discourses of the South Asians and Muslims within the Global War on Terror.

The colonization of the Americas and transatlantic slavery set in motion the making of a modern world colonial system that exists to this day. In previous chapters, I have argued how this system continues to unfold within the current Global War on Terror and will not repeat that argument here. However, for the purposes of this chapter, I want to elaborate on how the Atlantic has become a critical site of studying the dispersal of post-colonial subjects, particular South Asians, across the West, and how these subjects have collaborated and fashioned alternative expressions of belonging across the pond to collectively create disruptive sound waves and discourses.

The Swet Shop Boys formed their cross-Atlantic friendship and released their first single “Benny Lava” in 2014 on the audio distribution website *Soundcloud*.³⁸ In sampling the viral music video for S.A. Rajkumar’s Tamil song “Kalluri Vaanil,” the Swet Shop Boys respond to, and thus resist, the translation of racial noise to an aurally pleasing Western language and sound. That is, they refuse “Benny Lava” – the retitled, edited, and “twisted” English homophonic translation that was made to phonetically sound similar in English to the original Tamil lyrics.³⁹ This act of translation by YouTube user Buffalax

³⁸ Swet Shop Boys, “Benny Lava,” *Soundcloud*, 2014. <https://soundcloud.com/swetshopboys/benny-lava>

³⁹ Monty Phan, “Buffalax Mines Twisted Translations for YouTube Yuks,” *Wired*. November 6, 2007. Accessed July 23, 2018. <https://www.wired.com/2007/11/buffalax-mines-twisted-translations-for-youtube-yuks/>.

demonstrates what scholar Roshanak Kheshti calls “racial noise,” or the making legible/audible uncomfortable and undesirable noises and sounds into music.

The homophonic translation of “Kalluri Vaanil” suggests a mishearing and/or deafness on behalf of the listener. In fact, in order to make the original “Kalluri Vaanil” audible for the Western listener the song had to be abstracted from its primitive site of nature and given culturally meaning through English translation. Only after this colonial act does “Kalluri Vaanil” become “Benny Lava”; become music; become modern. In other words, the desire to make the subaltern speak, the subaltern is given the language – which is always already determined by power – from where to speak. That is, to become audible to power – “speak truth to power” – the racial noise of the undesirable subject can only be made desirable when translated, interpreted, and acknowledged through the structures of value and affirmation, which is arranged and organized by Western colonial modernity, and privileges the white western male.

Furthermore, the homophonic translation of “Kalluri Vaanil” to “Benny Lava” also operates as a joke for the Western ear and eye to establish their power and authority over the subaltern subject. For instance, the homophonic translations into English suggest that the racialized languages are easy to ridicule because they lack the rationality and science of European languages. That is, the noise of “Kalluri Vaanil” is not only racialized but also gendered in the sense that the Western ear becomes an invaginated

organ whereby the listening Self can sexually exploit the racial Other by fucking it for a self-gratifying pleasure and laughter.⁴⁰

In sampling S.A. Rajkumar's "Kalluri Vaanil," the Swet Shop Boys situate their own "Benny Lava" within the context of Buffalax's version and in the larger discourse of racial violence in the UK, US, and globally. Whereas Buffalax's version becomes a way in which the undesirability of racial noise is translated for pleasure and desire for the modern listener, the Swet Shops Boys embrace their racial otherness and produce a diasporic noise that draws upon collective memory to simultaneously articulate white supremacist violence as well as resist the desire to belong to the West. In *Black Noise*, Tricia Rose argues that sampling becomes a tool for communities of color to articulate a "communal counter-memory" where the traces of the past are made responsible not only for the present but also for the future.⁴¹ Similarly, the Swet Shop Boys' sampling of "Kalluri Vaanil" and the lyrics sutured together forges a diasporic noise that becomes a site of insurgent critique of South Asian nationalities but also the various dispersals, movements, and mappings of the enslaved and colonized through and across the Atlantic.

For example, Heems opens up his verse in "Benny Lava" by revealing both historical and contemporary racial violence in the United States:

Yo Himanshu with the pen, I'm killing it
The white man the villain, them deny them penicillin (Why?)

⁴⁰ Roshanak Kheshti, *Modernity's Ear: Listening to Race and Gender in World Music* (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 101; bell hooks. "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance," in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992).

⁴¹ Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 65.

Syphilis experiments, death to the Tuskegee men (Why?)

Somewhere in New York they say death to the squeegee men

The opening lyrics here raise a number of issues that resonate throughout the entire song. Heems's rhyme pattern invokes a memory of state sanctioned violence upon racialized bodies. He further articulates his frustrations through the lyrics: "They say stop and try to frisk/ I say whoa just suck my dick/ I ain't white but I know my rights/ And you full of shit/ I'm a big belly rude boy/ I'm a fat sweaty Hindu/ Stinky sticky icky/ Smokin' on that mildew." In this instance, Heems not only refuses the logic of state sanctioned violence in stop and frisk – a NYPD surveillance program – but he also embraces his racial difference in a manner in which that reverts the imperial gaze of the state by an unruly and intoxicated diasporic noise.⁴²

On the other side of the Atlantic, Riz MC composes hard to decipher lyrics that rhymed together rapidly, similar to UK's grime music. Riz MC's verse touches on several important issues that have shaped South Asians and the diaspora in the West:

⁴² Anjali Nath, "Stoners, Stones, and Drones: Transnational South Asian Visuality from Above and Below" in *Life in the Age of Drone Warfare* eds. Lisa Parks and Caren Kaplan (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

*Smoke since I'll never be white
enough
And plus Bombay stock price is up
Is inviting us, sayin book a flight
you mug
It's not a toy, it's not Rhymes-R-Us
But it's made by brown boys that are
tired and fucked*

*For the fans that PRISM who
listening to us
So giggle up the urban spies up
And the 90s asian day timers
And Prince Naseem and that Adidas
tracksuit
Green with white stripes, timeless
As the beef from the Af-Pak border*

In these two instances from Riz MC's verse, as a listener we come to hear the diasporic noise and consciousness that Riz Ahmed is articulating. For Riz MC, diasporic doesn't mean to be attuned to only the issues and struggles of those *outside* of the place from which we are native to, but for him South Asian diasporic identity is beyond nationality. Moreover, South Asians and the diaspora may be differentially subjected to violence but we are connected in the sense that we share a collective history – one that could be traced to the British colonial past and linked to the Euro-American imperial present wherein racial capitalism, borders, and the Global War on Terror have determined the lived experiences of many racialized peoples across the world.

Buffalax's homophonic translation also mirrors a long history of colonialism whereby the native and its primitiveness distinguish the human from the not-human. This translation of a racialized language in Tamil into English postulates that the latter brings to the former what it lacks, namely humanity. The mishearing and/or deafness on behalf of the listener is only possible because of an absence of a language through which the listener can interpret the sonic information. As a result, the unintelligibility of the sound and music signifies a racial and gendered intelligibility, or a racial noise that can only be listened to if incorporated into a more pleasurable and desirable language, i.e. English. This absence of a pleasing modern language to the western ear characterizes the racial noise as not only other but also a site of imperialism where the technologies of modernity can introduce language, law, and reason to the not-humans.

However, this site of imperialism is imbued with alternative possibilities whereby those in the diaspora have found methods to resist and combat modernity and its

attendant formations. Similar to how those on the ship brought noises that disrupt modernity, those that came after on from the Third World also brought with them a legacy of dissent and resistance. Together, both black and brown peoples harness a noise that holds the capacity to dismantle the modus operandi of modernity. In sampling “Benny Lava” and rapping in English, the Swet Shop Boys produce a noise that interrupts the modern listening ear. In doing so, they articulate an ungovernable and transnational political imaginary that possess a ethco-political possibility that lies beyond modernity. Their English not only allows them to participate in the

world of humans, but their English appears in poetry not in prose – a form of art that makes the

explode on the pages of history.

An Undying Colonialism: Towards an Ethics of Dissensus, Dissonance, and Decoloniality

In one of the first scenes in *The Battle of Algiers*, director Gillo Pontecorvo depicts the Algerian National Liberation Front's (aka the FLN) revolutionary instruction for the people of Algeria. "Communiqué Nombre 1," the first of many radio broadcasts by the FLN, declared: "People of Algeria, our combat is directed against colonialism."¹⁷⁵ The radio not only conjured a new social space where the boundaries between the national and the local -- the public and private -- were blurred, but it also initiated a clash in the airwaves wherein the Algerian people refused the colonial administration and occupation of their bodies, spaces, and knowledges. The airwaves in this particular instance no longer belonged solely to the colonizer.

The sound of "The Voice of Fighting Algeria," among many other broadcasts, on the radio airwaves gave way to a unifying force that allowed the Algerian people to form a collective vision for sovereignty and nationhood. In his book *A Dying Colonialism*, Frantz Fanon recounts the utility of the radio as a means of disseminating anti-colonial knowledge and tactics. *The Voice of Fighting Algeria* attempted to narrate and instruct this struggle for Algerian nationhood through the transmission of a new language of resistance and the possibility of revolution. "Gone were the days when mechanically switching on the radio amounted to an invitation to the enemy," writes Fanon. "For the Algerian the radio, as a technique, became transformed. The radio set was no longer

¹⁷⁵ *The Battle of Algiers* (dir. Gillo Pontecorvo, 1966)

directly and solely tuned in on the occupier.”¹⁷⁶ Whereas the possession of a radio in French Algeria was a representation of colonial power, the Algerian Muslim had infused the radio with new meanings and discourses that transformed airwaves. As Fanon explains, “The Algerian who wanted to live up to the Revolution, had at last the possibility of hearing an official voice, the voice of combatants, explain the combat to him, tell him the story of the Liberation on the march, and incorporate it into the nation’s new life.”¹⁷⁷

To possess a radio in French Algeria, similar to possessing a smartphone or a car today, meant to possess an instrument of modernity. For the radio and other forms of mass media, then and now, continue to be instrumental in disseminating colonial discourses that generate the ideological capital and political will around a specific threat and/or fear. In French Algeria, the “threat” lingered in the shadows of the Casbah where the figure of Muslim haunted colonial society and its values. Along with policing Muslims on the land and in the Casbah, colonial officers also policed the ether in which a different war was battled over the airwaves.

However, this transmission of anti-colonial tactics brought upon “a new form of struggle into being.”¹⁷⁸ Obviously, this dissemination did not go amiss amongst the French colonial authorities. In an attempt to sabotage and disrupt the rising anti-colonial fervor amongst the Algerians, the French colonial authorities would systematically jam these radio frequencies, ineffectively making them inaudible. I use the word “ineffective”

¹⁷⁶ Frantz Fanon and Haakon Chevalier, *A Dying Colonialism* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 2007), 95.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 85.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

because the inaudibility and the static that resulted from the radio jamming did not dissuade the Algerians from tuning in and listening. Even though the frequencies transmission were inaudible, Fanon describes how the noise from the static of the radio jamming appealed to the sensibilities of those listening:

“Every evening, from nine o’clock to midnight, the Algerian would listen. At the end of the evening, not hearing the *Voice*, the listener would sometimes leave the needle on a jammed wave-length or one that simply produced static, and would announce that the voice of the combatants was here. For an hour the room would be filled with piercing, excruciating din of the jamming. Behind each modulation, each active crackling the Algerian would imagine not only words, but concrete battles. The war of the sound waves, in the *gourbi*, re-enacts for the benefit of the citizen armed clash of his people and colonialism.”¹⁷⁹ The decision by the French colonial authorities to jam the radio frequencies of anti-colonial forces did not cut off the listeners’ from the battlefields. As Fanon describes above, the listener “behind each modulation, each active crackling” would imagine the battlefield right there in his or her living room. Thus, the radio transformed from an instrument to a technique, and listening became a tactic of guerilla warfare.¹⁸⁰

The radio may have blurred the boundaries of the public and private by way of bringing the noise of the battlefield into one’s living room. However, the listener understood that the information he or she received through the radio needed to be

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 88

¹⁸⁰ Ian Baucom, “Frantz Fanon’s Radio: Solidarity, Diaspora, and the Tactics of Listening,” *Contemporary Literature*. 42, no. 1 (2001): 24.

interpreted and was vital to the revolution. But how does one interpret the static? How does one go about interpreting fragments of noise? How does one reconstruct a story that is inaudible? In this instance, the listener in and through the noise became a broadcaster and storyteller of the revolution itself. And as a collective of Algerians the radio as a social space offered a realm in which anti-colonial politics could be practiced and the struggle for independence could be achieved.

However, my retelling of this story through Fanon's work is not the goal of this chapter. More significantly, I am interested in the concept of noise – its dissonance, dissensus, and decolonial possibilities. That is, Fanon's account of the Algerian Revolution in "A Dying Colonialism" should probably be retitled to "An Undying Colonialism." I make this provocation because for the colonized, our territories, our bodies, knowledges, have felt the immediate and enduring effects of the modern/colonial architecture, which has rendered us non-entities and non-human.

Although the formal colonial era has ended, the engulfment of colonized peoples into the global political arena marked by law, capital, freedom, and democracy bring to fore questions of how western modernity and colonality continue to unfold in so-called post-colonial geopolitical contexts. We see this reflected in the political and economic transformations of globalization that have seen post-colonial nation-states go through readjustment programs that better suit the west and bourgeois nationalists. We see this in nation-state building practices that have developed policing, surveilling, and profiling practices to determine the human versus non-human, the citizen versus non-citizen. These forms of social, economic, and political control have been organized under the logic and

modality of coloniality.¹⁸¹ According to Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, this extension of governance (whiteness) is the “annunciation of universal exchange” where those once marginalized by capitalism now have the ability to announce or voice their own interests.¹⁸² The absorption of bodies into governance is thought to be “[bringing] to blackness what it is said to lack, the thing that cannot be brought, interests.”¹⁸³ This moment of exchange where one’s interests could be announced or legible to capital is the moment in which those interests could be captured for the benefit of capital. The ungovernability of blackness draws the attention of capital to find ways to integrate it into a global system of governance. However, Moten and Harney show us that this violence must be confronted by moving from “muteness to dumb insolence by way of bringing the noise.”¹⁸⁴ That is, rather than accepting the annunciation of self-interests as the only option to be granted a valued political life, Moten and Harney tell us to embrace our racial otherness. In doing so, we can inhabit the spaces blackened by colonialism and listen to the noise of the “crazy, nonsensical, ranting language of the other, the other who has been rendered a nonentity by colonialism.”¹⁸⁵

Given the continued violence against black peoples and the expansion of the Global War on Terror, we are obligated to redefine the politico-ethical terms by which black and brown people have been constructed relationally to the liberal Euro-American Man. For example, in the midst of increasing police violence in the 1980s, hip-hop group,

¹⁸¹ Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality,” *Frantz Fanon Foundation* (2016).

¹⁸² Stefano Hartney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (Wivenhoe: Minor Compositions, 2013), 56-57.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 8

Public Enemy, called upon their communities to “Bring the Noise” as a way to articulate an oppositional politics of resistance. Similarly, South Asian diasporic artist M.I.A. finds resonances with her own experiences of being represented as “terrorist, “terrorist sympathizer,” and/or a troublemaker with that of America’s so-called Public Enemy number one – the black criminal—and aptly named her transnational song of rebellion “Bring the Noize.”

In these two instances, the idea of noise gestures towards the impulse of an insurgent decolonial internationalism. One that differs from the techniques and tactics utilized in French Algeria. The anti-colonial uprising in Algeria in the mid-century produced a noise that required the colonial state to shift and adjust its biopolitical regimes of letting live and letting die only to produce another Other whose symbolic death became life for the post-colonial subject. The call for bringing the noise in the 1980s and then again in the post-9/11 era suggests we need within this very moment a collective politics that works towards dismantling this global modern/colonial edifice that has brought under its scope various public enemies: the Muslim terrorist, the black criminal, the Latinx undocumented immigrant, and the refugee. We must produce dissonant noises that disidentify with conventional liberal politics and reform. However, we must continue making noise for sovereignty occurs in the quiet, between the breaks, or as Fanon would say “behind each modulation, each active crackling.” We are granted our sovereignty not in the apparent ability to exercise power over others but in the interiority of our own “inner life – [our] desire’s, ambitions, hungers, vulnerabilities, fears.”¹⁸⁶ We gain our

¹⁸⁶ Kevin Quashie, *The Sovereignty of Quiet: Beyond Resistance in Black Culture* (Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 6.

sovereignty in the quiet of our living rooms when we listen to those noises and let them engross our spirit and our bodies. When we learn to listen to noises in this method, we may then begin to see a freedom not in the state as a representation of the body/politic, but within our own entangled lives whose being has been overcome and wrapped in the noises of otherness.

Chapter 4: Policing Muslims: Race, Empire, and the State of Extraordinary Violence in Los Angeles

The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the state of emergency in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight. Then we shall clearly realize that it is our task to bring about a real state of emergency, and this will improve our position in the struggle against Fascism. One reason why Fascism has a chance is that in the name of progress its opponents treat it as a historical norm. The current amazement that the things we are experiencing are 'still' possible in the twentieth century is not philosophical. This amazement is not the beginning of knowledge—unless it is the knowledge that the view of history which gives rise to it is untenable.

- Walter Benjamin

On an unseasonably warm afternoon on December 2, 2015 in San Bernardino, California—a city about 60 miles east of Los Angeles—two active-shooters entered the Inland Regional Center where the city's Department of Public Health was hosting a Christmas party. The shooters killed 14 and wounded 22 other individuals. Initial reports from a CBS News interview with Sally Abdelmageed, an eyewitness and employee at the Inland Regional Center, had suggested that there were three white men dressed in all-black military gear who had stormed the building.¹ These reports were quickly dismissed by state officials who confirmed the shooters had been a Muslim couple, Syed Farook and his wife Tashfeen Malik. A couple the media went on to describe as ISIS terrorists and which the police would later kill.

In erasing Abdelmageed's eyewitness testimony, the state and the FBI not only assumed the authority on knowledge, but it also utilized the language of the global War on Terror to identify the event. Turning to so-called experts in the field of active shooter

¹ CBS News. "Witness Describes the San Bernardino Shooting." CBS News. CBS Interactive, January 2, 2016. <https://www.cbsnews.com/video/witness-describes-the-san-bernardino-shooting/>.

prevention, the state via the media explained the active shooters and the event as a “coordinated attack with specialized training” in “de facto ISIS uniform.”² It’s not coincidental that many of these counterterror experts have are former military officials who have spent time in Iraq and/or Afghanistan, or have been on SWAT teams. As such, their knowledge of so-called terrorists is always already coded through the grammar of racial and gendered differentiation. A language shaped by power to normalize the terrorist as an object targeted for death and destruction.

In situating the discourse and practices of the global War on Terror in San Bernardino, California, the events that took place that day reveal nexus of war power and police power. That these two entities are not detached from one another. In fact, the language used to possibly frame Syed Farook and Tashfeen Malik suggests that these two entities are bound to one another by the U.S. state as declared by then-President Obama:

It is entirely possible that these two attackers were radicalized to commit this act of terror. If so, it would underscore a threat we’ve been focused on for years: The dangers of people succumbing to dangerous, violent, extremist ideologies. We know that ISIL and other terrorist groups are actively encouraging people around the world and in our country to commit terrible acts of violence...Even as we work to prevent attacks, all of us—government, law enforcement, community faith leaders—need to work together to prevent people from falling victim to these hateful ideologies. More broadly, this tragedy reminds us of our obligation to do everything in our power together to keep our communities safe.³

This declaration of a shared commitment to eliminate this threat to civil society has circulated public discourse since World War II. However, what makes terrorism distinct from communism is the idea that the latter was actually assumed to have been defeated.

² WJLA. “Experts: Initial reports on San Bernardino shooting suggest ‘coordinated attack’.” WJLA, December 3, 2015. <https://wjla.com/news/nation-world/experts-initial-reports-on-san-bernardino-shooting-suggest-coordinated-attack>

³ The Obama White House. “Weekly Address: We Will Not Be Terrorized”. Filmed [December 2015]. YouTube video, 3:51. Posted [December 2015]. <https://youtu.be/cHyB8fLiEMs>

Counterterrorism, on the other hand, is a “project subject to constant failure, and precisely because it fails constantly, it energizes a hyperactive, and increasingly planetary, U.S. security apparatus, on that is forever striving to realize its imaginary potential.”⁴ In other words, as a project that is constantly failing, the global War on Terror, or what scholar Ronak Kapadia has called the “Forever War,”⁵ the real violence of the war is not from those whom they call “terrorists,” but from the what the fear and anxiety that the threat produces: an ever-increasing, expanding, and endless genocidal state.

In this chapter, I will examine M.I.A.’s interpretation of the how genocidal logic of the modern racial state has constructed the figure of the Muslim terrorist as a threat to the West positions it in a racial state of expendability that necessitates imperial war and occupation. Through M.I.A.’s *Born Free* (2010), a music video set in the city of Los Angeles—a city known for its history of violent policing in communities of color—I read, listened to, and watched M.I.A. articulate the ways in which imperial power has targeted the figure of the Muslim terrorist as an expendable racial object. Based off Peter Watkins film *Punishment Park* (1971), which is also set in Los Angeles, *Born Free* depicts the genocide of young red-haired boys somewhere surrounding the city of Los Angeles. I draw upon Peter Watkins film to contextualize not only how it inspired M.I.A. and her director Romain Gavras to produce *Born Free* but to also explore how the politics and culture of the Global War on Terror are tied to that of the Cold War. As such, my

⁴ Joseph Masco, *The Theater of Operations: National Security Affect from the Cold War to the War on Terror* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 10.

⁵ Ronak Kapadia, *Insurgent Aesthetics: Security and Queer Life of the Forever War* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).

analysis, like her music video, centers Los Angeles as a critical site of investigating two main questions: In what ways does the modern state produce and reproduce discourses and practices of expendability? And for what purposes? With these guiding my inquiry, my analysis likens the music video to practice in dreaming of a decolonial future that gestures towards a world without genocidal measures of the modern nation-state. Finally, I conclude with a meditation of Zack de la Rocha's solo EP *One Day as a Lion*.

To many on the left, 9/11 marked the beginning of violence perpetrated by the West on Muslims. However, 9/11 was just a more expansive form of modern violence executed on a global scale wherein the figure of the Muslim was and continues to be vital to the Euro-American imagination and its shared commitment to protecting human rights. As I argue in this dissertation, the Muslim has always been framed in terms as a global figure who became the racial and religious other to Christianity and later secular modernity. As such, the construction of the Muslim as Other is vital to how modern civilization is organized and also a how it was brought into existence. In this chapter, I expand upon how the construction of the Muslim as the ideological enemy instituted a global permanent war whereby the Muslim was positioned in a racial state of expendability.

Policing Insurgents in M.I.A.'s *Born Free*

"I came to music as a medium, but the need to express myself through anything came before," explains British Tamil artist M.I.A. in her 2018 documentary *Maya / Matangi / M.I.A.* Having grown up during political unrest and the Sri Lankan Civil War, M.I.A.'s story as a refugee of a postcolonial disaster is a complicated one. It delves into

issues of state violence, race, gender, caste, and refugeeism. Fortunately, she escaped genocide in her native homeland and lived to communicate her story through music.

As with many others, life in the diaspora has armed M.I.A. with the ammunition to speak about the multiple ways in which she was racialized. In an interview she says, “One day, in Sri Lanka, I was being shot at for being a Tamil, then I came to England, and I was being spat at.” For those in the diaspora, one can no longer be only Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Tamil, Arab, Hindu, Muslim, or Sikh. In fact, within the social and political context of the global War on Terror, these particular taxonomical identities are racialized as Muslim.

It is no surprise that M.I.A. herself was considered to be a terrorist and/or a terrorist sympathizer during her career. However, rather than attempting to recuperate any kind of social value in articulating she is not Muslim, nor a terrorist, she has somewhat embraced this identity because she understands that the same institutions that brought her into being are the same ones operating in the West or rather originate there. And it is this historical trauma that M.I.A. expresses in her music. In fact, her work is relatable because the experience of being at the helm of state and military power has definitively defined the lives of the global South.

The post-9/11 crisis has rendered the world a battlefield so much so that the contemporary insecurities of the imperial West continues to replicate the tactics and rationality employed during colonial wars of conquest. We witness this crisis play out in M.I.A.’s *Born Free*.



Figure 4.1: M.I.A., Born Free, Dir. Romain Gavras, 2010, Video Still of SWAT member prepping for raid

The initial scene is set in Los Angeles, a city known for its history of violent policing in communities of color. The S.W.A.T. (Special Weapons and Tactics) team is seen driving across a bridge in search of an unidentified suspect. The officers, all dressed in black, bulletproof vests and gas masks, with rifles in hand, arrive at an apartment complex. Upon charging into the building, they push and assault tenants in their way. As the camera zooms out, we can see the S.W.A.T. team pass through the hallway and smash open a door into a room where a couple is having sex. The officers beat the couple, toss them off their bed, and ransack the apartment. Then, door-by-door each tenant is subject to a beating. Guns, batons, boots, and smoke fill each scene. This suggests there is no safe space in this imagined world besieged by policing as even the intimate and private lives of individuals are subject to sanctioned violence.

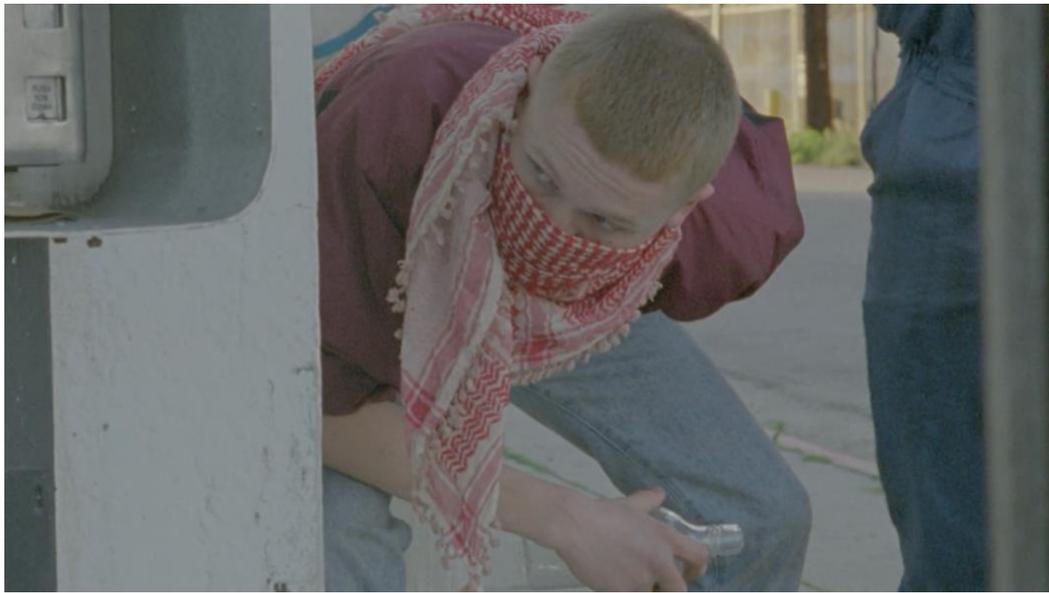


Figure 4.2: M.I.A., *Born Free*, Dir. Romain Gavras, 2010, Video Still of young boy wearing keffiyeh

Finally, the S.W.A.T. team captures their target: a red-haired boy hiding out in his shower. He is restrained and forcibly taken to a prison bus full of other red-haired males. As the bus drives off into the streets of Los Angeles, three, young red-haired men wearing keffiyeh's — a checkered black and white scarf that became a symbol of Palestinian resistance against Israeli occupation in the 1960s — pop out from a side street to throw stones and glass bottles at the bus as well as giving it the middle finger in an effort to disrupt its movement. It is notable that their “weapons” hardly pale in comparison with those of the state. The bus continues and heads outside of the city. The landscape changes to the barren, dry, and isolated deserts that surround Los Angeles.



Figure 4.3: M.I.A., *Born Free*, Dir. Romain Gavras, 2010, Video Still of prison bus carrying young red-hair boys enters gated area marked by “Danger Mines” sign.

Eventually, the bus enters an area marked with a warning sign that reads “Danger Mines.” An officer barges onto the bus and repeatedly yells at the passengers to get off. Thereafter, the officers order the young men to keep moving further into this zoned off area to eventually form a line while facing the open and vast desert. They are then commanded to run across the field, presumably colonized with mines. When no one makes a move, an angry, impatient officer executes a young boy by shooting him through the temples after which the remainder start running. In short, the landmines kill them all.

In *Born Free*, the modern state finds it necessary to target and eliminate a certain type of people. For without this process, as the reasoning goes, modern civilization would run amuck and thus collapse. For instance, the scenes leading up to the capturing of the red-haired boy illustrate the ways in which biology becomes a marker that M.I.A. is purposely and aesthetically using to comment on how racial knowledge systems

authorize imperial power to distinguish between expendable and valuable lives. The red hair in this case is that which sanctions capture and an inhumane death.

Although not superficially apparent, the music video is not meant to draw attention to an imagined persecution of red-haired males. Instead, it is highlighting how racial knowledge produces bodies targeted for destruction. In the name of security and peace, the modern state authorizes the police and military, as illustrated through the S.W.A.T. team in the video, to carry out the elimination of those racialized as a potential and imminent threat to civic order and national security.

This is to say, the video parallels ideas similar to that of race-making within the imperial discourses of the war on terror wherein the figure of the Muslim is racialized not as a fixed racial object but profiled as a potential racialized threat. Although the red hair of these subjects is portrayed as a fixed racial object, it cannot be the only possible reason for their elimination. In fact, they are eliminated because they are racialized as Muslim, which suggests that they are not only biologically different but they are ontologically different. Their elimination is warranted because of their ontological difference; they do not equip the attitudes, sensibilities, and behaviors that define what it means to live a modern life. And it is this form of difference that racializes Muslims as a potential threat to the modern world.

In a larger context outside of the video, the racial targeting of those from the global south — those deserving of colonization and domination — is predicated on Eurocentric structure of thought forced upon the world as a universal modality of living and being. This geopolitics of knowledge was not only located in and from Europe but

also resided and performed in and through modern law — the expression of sovereign authority. *Born Free* captures the extraordinary violence through its expression of how the racial state dominates, oppresses, and kills those who occupy and threaten a political or philosophical position besides the dominant one. However, my purpose of pointing out the underlying logic of this visual text is to broaden our thinking and understanding of the terrorist subject. That is, this specific insurrectionary subject has had many different iterations throughout modernity, from the feral indigenous subject and the fugitive slave in the Americas and the anti-colonial subject in the mid-19th century to the Muslim terrorist post-9/11. Many figures have emerged in social movements, including those who fundamentally haunt the edifice of this modern/colonial world, for they provide us with a knowledge to dream an alternative one. For instance, a society in which living and being is determined not by a Self/Other, friend/enemy, human/non-human binary but a moral and ethical understanding that regulates our relations with all forms of life. In sum, these figures refused the modern civilizationist discourse; their very existence — in the state of nature — threatened the security and safety of those who resided in the “civil world.”

Furthermore, M.I.A.’s “Born Free” shares the same title as European naturalist Joy Adamson’s book *Born Free*, which tells the non-fictional story of Elsa the lioness, whom Adamson and her husband George raised in Kenya. The book and the award-winning film it was later adapted into were both widely celebrated in its narrativizing of Elsa’s journey after being released back into the wild after two years under Adamson’s captivity. The narrative portrays the unruliness of non-humans and how the non-human can be disciplined and tamed to acquiesce and submit to the desire of humans. For

example, after Elsa injures a herd of elephants, the Adamson's are faced with a decision to send her to the zoo or release her into the wild. The Adamson's choose the wild, for the non-human lion does not belong in the world of humans.

Thus, for the sake of my argument, I imagine the subjects of M.I.A.'s *Born Free* as racially animalized lions whose bodies are marked for political, economic, social, and cultural disciplining and disappearing by the modern state. In witnessing the death-making powers of the state in the final scenes of the music video, we come to learn that the lives of those in M.I.A.'s "Born Free" are not determined on their own account but on the account of the state and its police forces. Like the Adamson's, the state could have kept the young men within the bounds of "human" society to tame and discipline but instead decide to release them into the wild, i.e., eliminate them from society. The death of all the targeted subjects in the music video is not only disturbing but an interruption. I chose this term as it not only denotes the state interruption of the lives of those it criminalizes but also the interruption of the audience's sensibilities. As such, we are faced with difficult questions: What did we just witness and what are we going to do about being witness to war-caused death and displacement of human lives?

In the modern state's calculative move to erase racialized life from civil society as depicted in *Born Free* whereby the subjects are taken to an isolated desert and forced to run into the wild as they are chased to their deaths upon active mines can be interpreted in multiple ways. Some may see this rewilding as only a depiction of state-sanctioned violence. However, for me, the hope of avoiding a violent and brutal death suggests that we must speculate on a future that exists outside of violence enacted by colonial

modernity. We must contend with the idea that sites of death are laden with the spirit of those haunt the modern world. We must come to reckon with the ghosts that are intrinsically a part of our social realities and social worlds. In this space where the living, dead, and the living-dead meet, the opportunity for transformation may present itself. Only there, we can think toward an unthinkable politics of wildness wherein, as Lisa Cacho reminds us:

“...victory is not connected to winning but to struggling despite guaranteed failure. When guaranteed failure is the predicted result of struggle, an aggrieved group's allies and adversaries will seem to want the same cause of action--to put the struggle on hold, to wait, to give up. In the spaces of social death, any and every option is unthinkable, not because of the impracticality or the U.S. public's reluctance to change but because of the threat and promise of state violence. We are disciplined to not think the unthinkable when we learn about the risk of incarceration or deportation or when our families are held hostage. And yet the space of social death is always graced with hope, courage and/or youthful idealism, where those who decide to take responsibility for the unprotected are always looking for and stepping on the pressure points that can barely manage the contradictions that their very presence, their very being inspires.⁶

We have been witness to the numerous deaths that have taken place in the name of liberation. Mines have exploded on this path to liberation — into an unthinkable wildness — because we were never meant to survive this modern tragedy. Nevertheless, some of us will make it after the smoke clears.

Thus, the figure of the Muslim has always haunted the modern/colonial world. As Gil Anidjar suggests, it was the West's first theological enemy.⁷ Also, its construction as the racial-religious Other signifies how it has been at the center of the production of modern knowledge and power. In other words, the Muslim is inherently a site of terror

⁶ Lisa Marie Cacho, *Social Death: Racialized Rightlessness and the Criminalization of the Unprotected* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 145.

⁷ Gil Anidjar, *The Jew, the Arab: A History of the Enemy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

because it was through the Muslim whereby modern knowledge and power around peace and democracy was first created. Thus, its racialization as a terrorist casts it into the state of nature — a discursive and material site where modern states can enact their sovereign power to kill and destroy. The Muslim is not just simply anti-modern. In fact, the Muslim is counter-modern. In other words, the Muslim does not only exist in direct opposition to the founding of modernity and colonial expansion, but also as a terrorist is capable of dreaming a world beyond colonial modernity. For embracing the Muslim may lead us to travel down into the state of nature – into the wild – in a non-Eurocentric terrain of knowledge that which we do know.



Figure 4.4: M.I.A., Born Free, Dir. Romain Gavras, 2010 Video Still of boys running in the desert from police and explosive mines

No Humans Involved: Muslims and Counter/insurgency in Post-Civil Rights Los Angeles

Los Angeles has a deep history of political conflict and solidarity amongst its Black and Brown population. However, Los Angeles's post-1960s history makes an interesting story for the purpose of this chapter, particularly for how the city became a model carceral city and how the LAPD became a model in policing.⁸ Most notable of the city's policing innovations has globally become known as the Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) unit; a militarized police team organized to attack and eliminate any political opposition. In the late 1960s, this political opposition was predominantly made up of Black and Brown radical social movements. Then-inspector Daryl Gates and the Tactical Operations Planning Unit created the SWAT team to deal with the social movements they described as "guerilla warfare" that was taking place on "the streets of urban American [which] had become foreign territory."⁹

SWAT blurred the lines between war and policing by bringing the tactics and language developed for the war in Vietnam to the streets of Los Angeles, and many other streets thereafter. By tying Vietnam to the Los Angeles, the LAPD itself become a transnational organization. Officials within the department not only turned to readings on revolutionary movements and counterinsurgency but also sought the counsel of the U.S. military to implement policing tactics that could help maintain order over Los Angeles's

⁸ Max Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles: Race, Resistance, and the Rise of the LAPD* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 12.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 52.

racialized communities.¹⁰ Even members of the SWAT teams had their roots in war as many of them were veterans of the Korean and Vietnam war. The military also provided counterinsurgency training for SWAT members at the Camp Pendleton military base near San Diego.¹¹ This nexus of war power and police power that blurs the border between military and civilian forces reveals how the military forms police conduct domestically. In other words, the military's strategies and tactics of war shape how both the modern military and police combat uprisings, rebellions, strikes, and other movements against colonialism, occupation, and racial capitalism.¹²

Moreover, the "military-civilian split" establishes the popular idea that "the state disposes two radically different kinds of violence, one for foreigners and the other for members of the imagined community."¹³ In public discourse, lethal state violence is rationalized to be appropriate and legitimate when unleashed in wars abroad. However, the same lethal violence that is imposed on the racialized communities at home is concealed and/or forgotten.¹⁴ This presents the police to be politically neutral entities and the military as a politically driven entity who carry out the necessary violence in order to maintain the state's sovereign power.

¹⁰ Stuart Schrader, "Order Maintenance and the Genealogy of SWAT" in *Badges Without Borders: How Global Counterinsurgency Transformed American Policing* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019), 214-234.

¹¹ Micol Seigel, *Violence Work: State Power and the Limits of the Police* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 47.

¹² Caren Kaplan. and Andrea Miller, "Drones as Atmospheric Policing": From US Border Enforcement to the LAPD". *Public Culture: Bulletin of the Project for Transnational Cultural Studies*. 31, 3 (2019): 419-446.

¹³ Micol Seigel, *Violence Work*, 54.

¹⁴ Laleh Khalili, *Time in the Shadows: Confinement in Counterinsurgencies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013)

The late 1960s and 1970s captured this political moment where the U.S. was engaged in counterinsurgency in Vietnam and throughout the streets of many its cities. The rise of the Black Panthers and the Brown Berets brought the attention of the LAPD as many members of these two organizations embraced an abolitionist position on policing. In particular, the Black Panthers were labeled as a national security threat authorizing the state to respond with violence. On December 8, 1969, the LAPD attacked the Black Panther Party's office on Central Avenue with over 250 officers and the SWAT team equipped with "M16 rifles, gas masks, a grenade launcher, and armored vehicles [firing] over 5,000 rounds into the building."¹⁵ The shootout solidified on the one hand that the police were, in fact, operating as counterinsurgents whose mission was to control and eliminate any and all threats. On the other hand, the shootout also revealed the urgency to create solidarity amongst communities who were subjected to police violence. What's more, the shootout also awakened many Black leaders and intellectuals to the nexus of war power and police power. For instance, James Baldwin described the ways in which militarized counterinsurgency techniques shaped how local police dealt with rebellions and uprisings: "The Panthers thus became the native Vietcong, the ghetto became the village in which the Vietcong were hidden, and in the ensuing search-and-destroy operations, everyone in the village became a suspect."¹⁶

The post-Civil Rights era witnessed the rise of a liberal multiculturalist nation-state and the inclusionary adjustments of capital domesticating identity politics. This shift

¹⁵ Max Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles*, 77.

¹⁶ Jordan T. Camp, *Incarcerating the Crisis: Freedom Struggles and the Rise of the Neoliberal State* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 41-42; James Baldwin, *The Price of the Ticket: Collected Nonfiction, 1948-1985* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), 672.

did not only take place in America; the mid-century saw a wave of anti-colonial movements redefining politics and the concept of the political. In Carl Schmitt's formulation, the political is characterized through a friend/enemy distinction.¹⁷ Schmitt, whose writings have been very influential in reflecting on the formation of the modern state and sovereignty, argues that the realm of the political rests with the state wherein the sovereign power of the modern state defines itself as a political entity, one that may choose to assert its biopolitical right to eliminate any and all forms of enmity. Thus, war and warfare become an exhibition of the political, whereby the destruction of the enemy is the utmost priority of those who seek to preserve the modern political state. While many leaders in Black freedom struggles were either assassinated and/or coopted into the logic of the U.S. nation-state, many around and in the global South also saw their plight for freedom and decolonization thwarted and dismantled. The West's shift from anti-communism to anti-terror was primarily distinguished through the "moralization of the friend/enemy distinction" wherein the terrorist 'becomes an incarnation of evil or irrationality and beyond the bounds of properly human.'¹⁸ For liberals, the end of the Cold War marked the end of the ideological battle between capitalism and communism, and any contemporary conflict can only be explained as apolitical because it lacks the ideological character that is translatable and audible to the West. Thus, for the global South, or what scholar Sohail Daulatzai names the "Muslim International," calls for decolonization and liberation fell under the racializing logic of "terrorism" while the

¹⁷ Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*. Translated by George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997)

¹⁸ Salman Sayyid, "The Dynamics of a Postcolonial War," *Defence Studies*. 13, no. 3 (2013): 289.

threat of “Muslim terrorist [helped shape] U.S. national identity in the post-Civil Rights era.”¹⁹

Within the context of the War on Terror, this chapter argues that this Muslim subject has come to inhabit this affectable position wherein the dispossession of life and land serves as an “ontological ground through which U.S. settler colonialism enacts itself as settler imperialism.”²⁰ This form of thinking racializes Muslims as feral non-beings whose psyche and theology explain their potentiality to commit acts of terror. As a result, the only prognosis to this terrorist threat is either the elimination or secular conversion (read: assimilation) of Muslims into a political society. In other words, the racialization of the Muslims aids in the construction of a Western sociality and spatiality whereby the death of the Muslim through permanent war secures life for the West. In so doing, the figure of the Muslim is positioned in a racial state of expendability — a feral terrain of absolute abjection — that calls upon the police power and war power of the West to execute its sovereign right of self-preservation by any means necessary. Thus, it “[permits] the suspension of the law, by the law, in the name of the law.”²¹ The Muslim is cast out of the world of humans into a zone outside of the law.²² Law aids and abets this crime as law becomes criminal in and of itself. The enactment of law and legality in the name of security and peace ultimately leads to a form of race-thinking written into the

¹⁹ Sohail Daulatzai, *Black Star, Crescent Moon: Black Freedom Beyond America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 171.

²⁰ Jodi Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), xix.

²¹ Eli Jelly-Schapiro, *Security and Terror: American Culture and the Long History of Colonial Modernity* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018), 5.

²² See Sherene Razack, *Casting Out: The Eviction of Muslims from Western Law and Politics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012)

fabric of law, such that the enactment of legal measures is a necropolitical calculation of killing some for the self-preservation of others. Many scholars have named this process the state of exception and/or the state of emergency wherein racial expendability through policing and war becomes the modus operandi of subduing a particular Muslim threat.

The production of a state of exception within modernity is not arbitrary but actually structurally integral to the function of the modern political and legal systems that govern modern states. In other words, race becomes the modality marking the border between civility and incivility or life and death. The state of exception is anything but an exception. In fact, it is more normative in terms of its ordinary and everyday practices. To put it differently, for the racialized Muslim subject, the state of exception exists not as an exception from the everyday violence Muslims are subjected to, but an “addition, partial displacement, and intensification” of that ordinary violence.²³ Scholar Wael Hallaq describes this expression of sovereign power not as “outside the law” as Carl Schmitt and Giorgio Agamben define the “state of exception,” but rather an integral and constitutive element of the function of modern sovereign power. Thus, in naming this exercise of sovereign power as a “state of extraordinary violence,” Hallaq provides a different rubric to assess racial-colonial violence. This calculative process of death, in fact, is contingent on the production of sovereign knowledge and its domination over those in the state of nature. The state of extraordinary violence is then the expression of sovereign power in

²³ Wael Hallaq, *Restating Orientalism: A Critique of Modern Knowledge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 211.

its most normative setting, or as Wael Hallaq states, “The extraordinary is the moment of truth in the ordinary.”²⁴

Punishment Park: The Cold War and the National Security State

It has been noted that the director of M.I.A.’s music video, Romain Gavras was deeply inspired by *Punishment Park*, a film written and directed by Peter Watkins in 1971.²⁵ The similarities between the two visual texts are striking. While *Punishment Park* is also set in a Southern California desert, the plot of the film also explores an authoritarian state that has rounded up dissenters who have a choice of serving a prison sentence or participating in “punishment park.” The film tracks the mechanisms of the latter where those who choose to enter the park are given a chance to attain their freedom if they reach the American flag at the other end of the desert. To make matters worse, the participants not only suffer from the brutal desert heat, but they must also avoid being captured by the police and the National Guard.

The film’s setting in the long winter of the Cold War, Civil Rights, and anti-war dissent makes for a telling tale of 1960s American politics, culture, and society. *Punishment Park* becomes one way to explore how anti-communist law was animated to construct the U.S. carceral state as well as reinforce American exceptionalism narratives. For example, the 1950 McCarran Internal Security Act became a piece of legislation that was emblematic of a war that was imagined through an Orientalist logic that targeted an external threat to U.S. national security. That is, the internal security of the U.S. nation-

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Lisa Respers France, “M.I.A. Music Video Elicits Strong Online Response.” *CNN*. Cable News Network, April 27, 2010. <https://www.cnn.com/2010/SHOWBIZ/Music/04/27/mia.music.video/index.html>.

state was predicated on imagining and narrating a threat imposed by communism to U.S. democracy, capitalism, and individualism. The communist was racially constructed to be a figure whose ideologies must be contained, if not eliminated, because its philosophically and politically cast beyond the boundaries of Euro-American civilizational power/knowledge. Communists, like the colonial native, were organized in and through a language of Otherness whose savagery and irrationality must be disciplined through an arrangement of militaristic, political, and economic strategies. That is, the rise of McCarthyism during the “red scare” gave way to a state of emergency that established a permanent war “[incorporating] all of society into the militaristic sphere” of American imperial power.²⁶ In other words, communists within the borders of the United States were not the only ones subjected to control and expulsion. The United States extended its internal police powers to engage wars abroad in Latin America, Africa, and Asia; what became known as the “Truman Doctrine” under President Truman’s declaration of emergency in the 1950s.

Punishment Park tells the story of the state of emergency during the Cold War and its impact on those who sought to think and act otherwise. The film disrupts the temporality of history as progress, development, and modern by bringing the racial Other into the narrative of power’s collusion with and of history. The film is produced as a mockumentary that follows a British TV crew chronicling the tribunal of Corrective Group 638, seven radical activists who are on trial for their role in inciting violence against the U.S. state, and Corrective Group 637 who have already been sentenced and

²⁶ Jelly-Schapiro, *Security and Terror*, 39.

have chosen to participate in Punishment Park. The film cross-cuts between the two groups, giving the viewer a sense of how the carceral state targets and attempts to manage insurgent ideologies and struggles for freedom. For example, when a black defendant name Charles Robbins is brought up to testify, he condemns the tribunal members for their role in oppressing black people: “Pigs are running madly through our community, slaughtering off our children and our women. The truth in America is that America is a sick society. America is full of motherfuckers who have shitted on people.” He goes on to end his response by calling out all the members on the tribunal, “You ain’t got no humanity in you cause you a pig, a lying punk, that’s what you are!” His charge at the tribunal leads to his silencing as he is tied to a chair and gagged so that he could not speak his truth any further.



Figure 4.5: Peter Watkins, *Punishment Park*, 1971, Video Still of Charles Robbins being abused by police

Charles Robbins character personifies revolutionary Black Panther Fred Hampton who was assassinated by the FBI on December 4, 1969. Hampton, a chairman of the Black Panther Party in Chicago, was also very vocal about the police violence and anti-Black racism in the U.S. The similarities between Robbins and Hampton are quite striking. For example, in a speech titled “Power Anywhere There’s People” that Hampton delivered at the Olivet Church in 1969 echoes the same concerns that Robbins expresses in his testimony to the tribunal:

A lot of people get the word revolution mixed up and they think revolutions a bad word. Revolution is nothing but like having a sore on your body and then you put something on that sore to cure that infection. And I’m telling you that were living in an infectious society right now. I’m telling you that were living in a sick society. And anybody that endorses integrating into this sick society before it’s cleaned up is a man who’s committing a crime against the people.²⁷

Charles Robbins characters harnesses the spirit of Fred Hampton. A young black revolutionary hell-bent on liberating his people by any means necessary. They both reject the Cold War liberalism that sought to see the integration of Black peoples into American society. In fact, individuals like Robbins and Hampton maintain a revolutionary position that imagines an alternative political model that confronts neoliberalism, wealth inequality, incarceration, and the rise of the security state in the America’s cities. That is the sickness they are alluding to in their speech.

Those in the park soon learn that their freedom is not attached to their successful reaching of the American flag. Many of the militants who decided to stand up and fight

²⁷ Fred Hampton, “Power Anywhere There’s People” (1969).
<https://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/fhamptonspeech.html>

the pursuing police officers and National Guard are met with bullets and those who actually do end of the park are barricaded from reaching the flag that was to guarantee their freedom. They too also are brutally beaten by state officials.

These scenes depict the theater of operations at play within American politics and culture. The detainees of punishment park were guaranteed their freedom in reaching the great American flag at the end of the park. Watkins subverts our commonsensical ideas of the flag as a symbol of peace, democracy, and freedom by bringing attention to how the flag itself promotes a false narrative of American politics and culture. He disqualifies the site of the flag as a place of refuge and freedom. Instead, we witness a border of police violence – the contours of America that shape and structure the conditions of its being. In other words, America, as symbolized by the flag at the top of the hill in Fig. 4.4, can never be a site of freedom because the U.S. as a nation-state is founded on the twin pillars of settler colonialism and chattel slavery. The flag on the hill symbolizes how that violence has become normalized within the ontology of citizenship.



Figure 4.6:
Peter Watkins,
*Punishment
Park*, 1971,
Video Still of
US Officials
surrounding
American flag

Furthermore, the 1960s was a period wherein Black and Brown communities across the United States saw their freedom struggles curtailed by the state. The Cold War language of anticommunism, law and order, and national security, as scholar Jordan T. Campt argues, aided in the production of the modern carceral state. Those who made public America's racial and class oppressions were not only rendered the objects of the national security state but the regime "pursued [their] arrest, incarceration, and deportation" from the body politic.²⁸ The Truman Doctrine became part and parcel of how the state dealt with, disrupted, and ultimately dismantled any radical social movement that sought to provide alternatives to American white supremacy and racial capitalism. The declaration of a state of emergency had set in motion a biopolitical logic of permanent war that rendered certain peoples and their insurgency as enemies of the state. The language of McCarthyism reinforced the 1960s anti-communist ethos in which the U.S. expanded its carceral state. The racial Other became the site through which U.S. nationalism and citizenship was to be articulated and further developed. That is, communism was interpreted as a racial parasite whose totalitarian aspirations sought to pervade and destroy the United States. *Punishment Park* documents the ways in which the construction of carceral spaces and criminality went hand-in-hand with targeting of subversives to state-sanctioned and extralegal violence. Hence, the rise of confinement and incarceration as the central tactics of permanent warfare; both of which we witness in *Punishment Park*.

²⁸ J. T. Campt, *Incarcerating the Crisis*, 31.

U.S. Cold War politics operated through what scholar Leerom Medovoi terms “dogma-line racism,” a form of racism that constructed its targets not through physiognomy but through ontology.²⁹ That is, the figure of the communist during this postwar period was constructed “with reference to their creeds, thoughts, and loyalties rather than their blood, color, and physiognomy.”³⁰ As such, communists were seen racial parasites who needed to be purged from the Western world. The declaration of a war on those who threatened the national security was precisely produced through a racial taxonomy and hierarchy of humanity that targeted the body by way of the one’s mind and their interior desires and thoughts. Communism presented itself to be an inhuman form of non-being that ultimately gave way to the normalization of policing powers and the expansion of war powers to ideologically battle those who seek to “impose their will, and their way of life, upon other nations.”³¹

The Cold War transformed the domestic political landscape of the U.S., which also served as a model for managing the politics of counterterrorism.³² The threat of a foreign and external enemy produced a counter-communist state that installed a series of “affective, imaginative, and material” infrastructures to manage and eliminate the existential crisis.³³ The rise of the security state was empowered by tapping into the everyday insecurities of American citizens that was largely due to the violence of

²⁹ Leerom Medovoi, “The Race War Within: The Biopolitics of the Long Cold War” in *American Literature and Culture in an Age of Cold War: A Critical Reassessment*, ed. Steven Belleto and Daniel Grausam (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2012), 163-186.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 167.

³¹ Harry S. Truman, “Truman Doctrine” in *The Avalon Project - Laws of War: Laws and Customs of War on Land* (Hague IV); October 18, 1907. Accessed December 18, 2018. http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/trudoc.asp.

³² Joseph Masco, *The Theater of Operations*, 7.

³³ *Ibid.*, 9.

neoliberalism. In other words, the United States produces its own political, economic, and environmental crises, but rather than attempting to limit or even end that instability, the U.S. “mobilizes the resulting vulnerability of its citizens and systems to demand an even greater investment in the security infrastructures...replacing the social commitment to building a prosperous collective future and a stable international order with the project of warding off a field of imagined and emergent dangers.”³⁴

The Cold War strategy of confinement organized the postwar logic to insurgency and insurgent movements. In addition, confinement was also repurposed to fit the necessities of the rising neoliberal state. As such, the affective, imaginative, and material infrastructures of counterinsurgency not only dismantled radical social movements that rose up against policing, incarceration, and neoliberal economics, but these infrastructures also found ways to contain “potentially rebellious populations rendered surplus by capitalist restructuring.”³⁵ *Punishment Park* becomes the imaginative confined space that the state seeks to produce to target and eliminate the threat to its racial capitalist international order.

One Day As A Lion: Transnational Solidarity in Los Angeles

Finally, I want to conclude with some ruminations on former Rage Against the Machine’s lyricist Zack de la Rocha’s solo EP entitled *One Day as a Lion*. The opening lyrics of “Wild International are as follows: “They say that in war, the truth be the first casualty, so I/ Dig in selector, I the resurrector, fly my shit/sever your neck wider than ever, with my/ Tongue dipped in funk arsenic/ Burn this illusion, this lie, with straight

³⁴ Ibid., 2.

³⁵ J.T. Campt, *Incarcerating the Crisis*, 17.

arson shit/.”³⁶ Rocha’s opening brings to mind Amiri Baraka’s famous provocation for “poems that kill/ Assassin poems, Poems that shoot guns.”³⁷ In doing so, Rocha’s poetic maneuver formulates a potential lyrical roadside bomb to combat the destructive force of the modern/colonial world that has re-organized the global space and lives through an imperial logic of permanent war on the lives of those from the global South. It is within the domains of this form of domination that Rocha refutes the modern/colonial authority on knowledge-as-truth and lives deemed indispensable versus those calculated to be expendable.³⁸ In embracing an unruly tongue by “[dipping it] in funk arsenic,” Rocha challenges this imperial logic of permanent war and maintains his position throughout the E.P — a position, or rather a dream, of dismantling the fictive cosmogony of the West, a cosmogony coded in and through the death of the racial Other from the indigenous global South.

The lyrical world of Rocha finds its historical and phenomenological referent in the social and epistemic order that emerges out of Euro-American modernity and its “naturalization of the death ethic of war through colonialism, race, and particular modalities of gender differentiation.”³⁹ Through this logic, we may conceptualize war not as historical conflicts amongst varying entities but as part and parcel of sustaining and securing modern life. Hence, as listeners, we hear the frustration and anger in Rocha’s

³⁶ Zack De La Rocha, *Wild International*. Anti-Records, 2008. August 20, 2018, <http://www.anti.com/releases/one-day-as-a-lion/tracks/wild-international/#lyrics>

³⁷ Amiri Baraka, “Black Art” in *The LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka Reader*, ed. William J. Harris (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 1999), 219.

³⁸ I am using “knowledge-as-truth” here to counter the dominant discourse of the West as being the only legitimate producer of knowledge and the only entity to have access to Truth. Thus, positioning the West as universal and rational.

³⁹ Nelson Maldonado-Torres, *Against War: Views from the Underside of Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 4.

voice and music; nevertheless, we may also be enamored by his life-affirming tone. That is, as the resurrector, Rocha's lyrics attempt to breathe life into the spaces of Otherness condemned by the Orientalist and war-making necropolitical logics of the West.

Moreover, in titling the opening song, "Wild International," Rocha gestures toward an internationalist politics that disrupts the long and on-going colonial discourse that has constructed the global South as savage non-beings. He dreams of a world going feral — a rewilding of human life from the constraints and conscriptions of imperial Western humanism. In employing Rocha's music, I argue that the decolonial fantasy he dreams of seeks to completely break from the power and knowledge of the West. Rocha provokes an insurgent critique and aesthetic that is ethico-politically anti-colonial, anti-imperial, and anti-capitalist — positions that have been rendered other, foreign, undemocratic, and anti-Western and are thus subject to punitive and retributive measures of war and death.

For example, in the song "Last Letter," Rocha lyrically crafts a story wherein an insurgent has written their final words while walking the beltway of Washington D.C. He declares disenchantment with the modern world and has set out to do "something" about it: "Your god is a homeless assassin/ Who roams the world to save/ He's digging for buried treasures/ He's leaving nothing but fields of graves... Your god is dying much younger than Rome/ He's killed so many he can't go home/ Your god's heart is a tumor now rotten/ Born of a blood that's never forgotten/ And this is my last letter to you/ I'm walking the beltway and there's/ Something I've got to do."⁴⁰ Through this letter, we are

⁴⁰ Zack De la Rocha, *Last Letter*. Anti-Records, 2008. Accessed August 20, 2017. <http://www.anti.com/releases/one-day-as-a-lion/tracks/last-letter/#lyrics>

witness to the affective dimensions of the writer's interiority as they not only reveal their desire to do "something" about the relentless devastation of settler colonial violence but also its theological roots of imperial Western humanism.

The formation of this secular liberal identity is shaped and positioned by its Orientalist relation to the colonial world where the Western colonizer believed in his Self as the inheritor of the divine spirit, and thus it was his manifest destiny to civilize the world and universalize that God-given spirit. The colonizer roamed the world carrying with them what they believed to be the "universal truth" – a plan of salvation. As abject non-beings, the wretched of the Earth were not only subjected to the violence of this truth but also served as its Others. Thus, giving the secular liberal human the means to produce knowledge in order to dominate and/or eliminate the colonized Other. This was the logic through which the colonizers saw themselves as God-like beings. For the logic goes it was God who naturally selected the Western man to possess superior knowledge and superior methods in being superior humans. Thus, only through liberal empire-building can Western humanism's God ordained qualities come to fulfill its destiny and desire to not only be self-possessing God-like secular individuals free of any outside forces but also capable of possessing and accumulating every object and nonhuman the world over. This coupling of empire with liberal secular cosmopolitanism defined Western humanism as the cosmogony of all human life.

Liberal empire develops as a project to standardize the human experience through systematic elimination or assimilation of difference. Race-thinking was central to this global project of dividing the world into what Black studies scholar Alexander Weheliye

calls “racializing assemblages” – a sociopolitical process of hierarchizing human difference into “full humans, not-quite-humans, and nonhumans.”⁴¹ The race-thinking of this biopolitical vision to eliminate and/or assimilate difference in fact has legitimated war-making as a method of conducting politics. In fact, humanitarian intervention and capitalist investments are built on this foundation of race-thinking whereby the indigenous global South are identified as candidates for Western salvation because they may live amongst a significant ill, i.e. poverty, violence, authoritarian regimes or ideologies, etc. This Westernized knowledge of the Other assumes a certain degree of naturalness where race becomes a technology of normalizing and locking certain humans into abject status where the West’s desire to save actually “[leaves] nothing but fields of graves,” as Rocha would say. For the expansion of Eurocentric secularism through conquest and empire-building led to the devastation of the indigenous global South’s own respective epistemologies and ontologies. This historical process rendered the latter’s life-forms as both unruly, and thus expendable – leading to a racial state of expendability and permanent war.

I conclude this chapter with Zack de la Rocha’s E.P. for multiple reasons. The first being, *One Day as a Lion* presents an anti-colonial politics that seek to disrupt the imperial project of the West. Furthermore, I am interested in disrupting the imperialist ontology of Western humanism and its imperative to declare war on behalf of the political survival of its inheritor. That is, imperial Western humanism establishes a state of emergency whereby war becomes the modus operandi to target certain populations for

⁴¹ Alexander Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 4-5.

death for the survival of others. Another reason to end with *One Day as a Lion* is to offer a speculative glimpse into the interiority of those we have come to call “terrorists.” I am not arguing here that Zack de la Rocha is a “terrorist,” but that he poetically crafts a cultural and social response to the racial-imperial configurations of the feral Muslim terrorist. His music provides an example of the rewilding project I have undertaken in this presentation.

Rocha himself concludes his own EP with a record I find to be quite striking in its provocation to dismantle white supremacy and global imperialism. In the titular song *One Day as a Lion*, we witness Rocha insurgently rap about an anti-colonial and anti-imperial politics that threaten the status quo:

Close your eyes but don't sleep
We comin 'like People's Army
For the people who can't eat
Who work with no sleep
For the child with no shoes on their feet
A generation who flash heat
Roll up on banks for they cash, see
You're a criminal? You got the nerve to ask me
Tear mics 'til my voice get raspy
Faced flame for five centuries
And if LA were Baghdad, we'd be Iraqi
With our straps in the backseat next to a general
Tied up with shit in his khakis

Rocha vocalizes a relational politics in this opening when he sings, “And if LA were Baghdad, we'd be Iraqi.” He makes an unexpected connection with the young red-haired boys in M.I.A.'s *Born Free* who as explained are set into the wild by state and military personnel. This superimposition of Baghdad on to Los Angeles not only suggests the transnational connection between the two cities but also conjures how global U.S. empire building is intimately tied to the local. Although geographically distant, Rocha ties these

cities of Los Angeles and Baghdad for the lives of those racialized in these respective spaces have historically and systematically been determined by the settler colonial and imperial enterprise known as the United States. Chicanx, Latinx, Indigenous, Blacks, Arabs, Muslims, non-Muslims, and all those categorized as subhuman have lived alongside the global casualties of war. “And when [their] cubs grow, [they’ll] show you what war is good for,” for they harness the imminent threat against the modern state and military. It is certainly through our relationality that the work of these artists in discussion and many more whereby those who dream of a liberation, as Walter Benjamin states can “bring about a real state of emergency.” Rather than seeking rights and recognition in ways that attribute value and make racialized groups legible to the public and to the state, we must engage in a radical politics of relationality that draw parallels and connections to how systems of oppression across various geographical and temporal sites of racialized lived experiences. This radical act opens up new possibilities for constructing a politics that can potentially animate new collectivities who grapple with and against the geopolitical and biopolitical borders that divide us. For the road the liberation is mined not only with death but also explosive truths that must not be swept away with the ashes. These truths as expressed and articulated in art and culture will only become clearer after the smoke dissipates.

Conclusion: Islamists and Communists in the Streets, Unit!

My dissertation project, “Terrorist Threats: Dreaming Beyond the Violence of Anti-Muslim Racism,” offers a critical analysis of the violence in the modern/colonial world as well as ways to imagine a world free from the language, vision, and sound of modern knowledge and power.

At the time of writing this conclusion from May to June 2020, we are witnessing the imperial decline and reckoning of American political domination. Thus, I would like to articulate how my dissertation has offered an alternative sensibility to analyze recent traumatic events: the George Floyd Rebellions of 2020. Furthermore, I want to highlight that the imperial discourse and practices of the Global War on Terror have fundamentally shaped our understanding of these domestic uprisings. Tying the Global War on Terror to the domestic enables us to recognize the extension of the logic of white supremacy beyond the U.S. political landscape into a global political realm. In doing so, we may begin to understand the racial figure of the Muslim terrorist not only in the language and terms of colonial and imperial entities, but also as a figure that encapsulates all who protest, rebel, and become insurgent against the modern/colonial world and its most dominant political imaginary: the nation-state.

The writing of this dissertation was in and of itself a practice in producing a terrorist threat, that is, an insurgent decolonial knowledge and aesthetic challenging the onto-epistemic sensibilities of our modern/colonial world. It is my hope that the historical and political processes explored within threaten and therefore unsettle the architecture of not only our modern/colonial world, but also the epistemic structures that built and

support it. My dream is for this threat to unsettle the power and authority that has secured the modern/colonial world's claim to universality.

My dissertation argued that the United States, in particular, has advanced an imperial universalism within the discourse and practices of the Global War on Terror. This universalism gives the U.S. authority to dominate the world by claiming its imperial endeavors are in the interest of all of humanity and that the defense of civil society against terrorist threats should be the utmost priority of all who share the values of the West. To put it simply, in the words of George W. Bush, "Either you're with [the U.S.] or against [it]." Thus, I examine the terrorist threats of Abdul Abdullah, Rajkamal Kahlon, the Swet Shop Boys, and M.I.A. as a way to bring this form of imperial universalism under serious consideration. These artists challenge, if not, dismantle the racial and imperial construction of the Muslim as a universal threat deserving of death and destruction.

To be clear, my dissertation's discussion of Muslims does not reduce them to a faith-based category; rather, it contends that Muslims have, in fact, become a racial category to classify and target new enemies of the state — enemies who, through lens of imperial universalism, are seen as barbaric, irrational, and evil. However, it is important, now more than ever, to comprehend how the discourses and practices of the Global War on Terror has animated a new system of classifying (terrorist) threats to civil society. The sole purpose of such a system is identifying potential (terrorist) threats and subjecting them to the violence of counterterrorism.

Over the past few years while writing my dissertation, I have witnessed firsthand the counterterror state's violence enacted on those who do not identify as Muslim. Although named differently (counterterror), it is not an anomaly, but rather a development in a much longer form of violence (counterinsurgency) that Western states have waged on unruly populations. With that said, counterterrorism and counterinsurgency are two sides of the same coin. On the one side, the U.S. has historically deployed counterinsurgency tactics in the Cold War era, as explained in chapter 4. Domestically, this systematically targeted Black nationalists as well as those involved in other radical movements taking shape during the 1960s. Additionally, throughout the Global South, counterinsurgency was deployed to quell and crush the rise of communism and anticolonialism in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Therefore, U.S. domestic movements considered their dreams of freedom intrinsically intertwined with the struggles for liberation unfolding in the Global South. Local movements were part and parcel of global movements and vice versa. These multi-racial and geographically distant movements intellectually, politically, and culturally informed the praxis of one another, and their demise was precisely because of these interconnections.

On the other side of the coin, with the development of counterterrorism, tactics once used for counterinsurgency mutated as the state shifted its focus, or rather, reclassified all global insurgencies as forms of terrorism. One of the earliest to gain worldwide infamy was the rise of Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation during the 1970s.⁴² However, historian Garrett Felber's recent scholarship has traced the language

⁴² Nadine Naber and Junaid Rana, "The 21st Century Problem of Anti-Muslim Racism," March 9, 2019, <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/39830>.

of terrorism to describe the racial fear and panic during the rise of the Nation of Islam to the 1960s.⁴³

During the era of Cold War anti-communism, the world was also setting the stage and building the structures that would authorize the counterterror state to not only name Muslims as terrorists but also obliterate them with impunity. It is interesting as well to consider the figure of the terrorist emerging onto a global stage in a post-colonial historical moment wherein the former colonial savage has now gained independence and official membership into modernity. As such, the terrorist becomes the new cosmopolitan language to mean “savage” and, in doing so, sanctions all modern-nation states to create their own terrorist as a way to not only produce societal panic but also capitalize on it. For instance, the necessity to eliminate and/or incarcerate Palestinian terrorists, Black militants, Black and non-Black Muslims, and jihadis has arisen in the West as well as the Global South in countries like India to classify the racialized Muslim terrorist as the universal enemy.

Assata Forever

A few months before my departure from Los Angeles to Minneapolis for graduate school, those of us in radical circles witnessed a bewildering and astonishing event: In May 2013, the Federal Bureau of Investigation placed former member of the Black Liberation Army (BLA), Assata Shakur, on their most wanted terrorist list. As a member of the BLA in the 1970s, her radical activism positioned her on the frontlines in the battle against white supremacy, capitalism, and militarism. Being all too familiar with the

⁴³ Garrett Felber. *Those Who Know Don't Say: The Nation of Islam, the Black Freedom Movement, and the Carceral State* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2020).

prerogatives of the racial capitalist state, her militancy reflected her desire to dismantle state power and its repressive apparatuses. For Assata, the police, or the “racist pigs,” function as the repressive state apparatus, in which Black peoples are rendered undesirable and therefore disposable. Her activism within the Black Liberation Army sought to expose the machinations of the racial capitalist state:

Every time a Black Freedom Fighter is murdered or captured, the pigs try to create the impression that they have quashed the movement, destroyed our forces, and put down the Black Revolution. The pigs also try to give the impression that five or ten guerrillas are responsible for every revolutionary action carried out in amerika. That is nonsense. That is absurd. Black revolutionaries do not drop from the moon. We are created by our conditions. Shaped by our oppression. We are being manufactured in droves in the ghetto streets, places like attica, san quentin, bedford hills, leavenworth, and sing sing. They are turning out thousands of us. Many jobless Black veterans and welfare mothers are joining our ranks. Brothers and sisters from all walks of life, who are tired of suffering passively, make up the BLA.⁴⁴

In the early 1970s, “Wanted” images of Assata were propagated across the country as her participation in the BLA subjected her to a national “manhunt.” However, in 1973 on the New Jersey Turnpike, state troopers stopped Assata who was with her fellow comrades Zayd Shakur and Sundiata Acoli. It resulted in the death of state trooper Werner Forster and Assata’s friend Zayd Shakur. Both Assata and Acoli were taken into custody and framed for the murder of trooper Forster. While in custody, Assata escaped and received political asylum in Fidel Castro’s Cuba in 1984. Acoli, on the other hand, is still serving a lifetime sentence.

Since Assata’s escape, the U.S., in collusion with the media, has demonized her character and politics. She was placed on the F.B.I.’s Most Wanted List during the 1970s and 80s, and her recent placement on the F.B.I.’s Most Wanted Terrorist List in 2013

⁴⁴ Assata Shakur, *Assata: An Autobiography*. (Westport, Conn: L. Hill, 1987): 52.

raise critical questions about the state's preoccupation with her. Indeed, Assata herself asked: "“Why, I wonder, do I warrant such attention? What do I represent that is such a threat?”" Further, scholar-activist Angela Davis added: "What has [Assata] been made to represent? What ideological work has this representation performed?"⁴⁵

In this case, Assata Shakur embodies the alternative imaginaries of Black and Brown communities. Her memory for these communities represents a potential of radical change. For the state, however, that memory itself is a threat to the dominant political order. In being manufactured as a terrorist who is neither alive nor dead, Assata's ghost — the memory of her and her radicalism — continues to be haunting for the state. This paranoia produces a body that is neither only Black not only Brown but an object, or a terrorist, targeted for surveillance and destruction.

Not surprisingly, Assata influenced a generation of radical activists who raised hell to disrupt the state's colonial and imperial politics. In fact, she spent much of her life resisting state-sanctioned violence and struggling for the liberation of people from the Global South. In redefining the liberatory vision and memory of Assata Shakur through the language of terrorism, the state has severed the possibilities of forming unlikely and unexpected coalitions across geopolitical and biopolitical borders. The initial construction of Assata as the "cop killer" and now a "terrorist" generates the political and ideological capital to produce alarmist discourses for increased domestic policing and repression of Black radical movements. Her ubiquity and invisibility must be reckoned with if we are to reject the state's hegemonic narratives. Her presence and legacy embody the hopes of a

⁴⁵ Ibid., ix.

collective and the dreams of many, but the sovereign state's prerogatives limit such potentialities.

Islamists and Communists in the Streets, Unite!⁴⁶

I bring attention to the story of Assata as it led me to write my first seminar paper about her placement on the FBI's Most Wanted Terrorist List. Now, when the city of Minneapolis, and cities across the country are unsettled as a result of the George Floyd uprisings, I imagine myself returning to Minneapolis in 2013 with more clarity on the political moment we find ourselves in 2020.

In 2014, the Obama Administration launched Countering Violence Extremism (CVE), an anti-terror program designed to surveil Muslims and Muslim communities. Minneapolis was one of the three cities chosen for the pilot program. It specifically targeted the large Somali community in Minneapolis, which the state believed to be a suspicious community susceptible to radicalization. With new CVE funding and grants, local Islamic organizations in agreement with the state were now tasked with policing and identifying potential extremists within their communities. The behaviors and practices of Muslim youth, from their religiosity to their political inclinations, became suspect to both members of the community and the counterterror security state at-large. The security state found ways to intervene and disrupt Muslims who could not separate their religious life from their political life — or the sacred from the secular. CVE's purpose was rooting out unruly Muslims within Minneapolis as well as “unleashing the

⁴⁶ This is taken from the Hindu American Foundation's tweet on May 28, 2020 at 9:47 PM, which reads: “Communists and Islamists are taking over Minnesota's streets.”

powers of the secular modern [to] shape the concepts, sensibilities, and behaviors available to construct proper Muslim subjecthood.”⁴⁷

Minneapolis was always already a vulnerable site for an uprising to erupt. Too many layers of state violence were impacting people of color throughout the city. The introduction of CVE and the counterterrorism state exacerbated the already present tensions between Black and Brown communities and state officials. Additionally, the murder of George Floyd at the hands of local police broke the camel’s back, so to speak. The events leading up to the tragedy revealed that the War on Terror was not fought somewhere abroad in places of terror and violence. In fact, the George Floyd uprisings uncovered that the War on Terror was neither here nor there, but everywhere the power and authority of this modern/colonial world was seemingly collapsing. That is why, when the Governor of Minnesota sees the protests in the streets of Minneapolis as resembling Mogadishu and Baghdad, or when Donald Trump threatens to use the U.S. military to dominate domestic terrorists in the streets, what we are witnessing is a war, one the state has waged since its inception. Indeed, it is a war to defend civil society, which was built on the logic of white supremacy.

Unfortunately, white supremacy permeates all aspects of our life. It has conquered our psyche, our body, and our hearts. It has taught us that to be welcomed into humanity, we must annihilate ourselves, our traditions, and our native lands. In order to survive like that one English scientist, we must conquer like that one Roman general, and we must think like that one French philosopher. The system is not just anti-black; it is anti-

⁴⁷ M. Bilal Nasir, "Mad Kids, Good City: Counterterrorism, Mental Health, and the Resilient Muslim Subject," *Anthropological Quarterly*, 92, no. 3 (2019): 841.

indigenous, anti-Latinx, anti-Muslim, and anti-human. As we are more than what Europe has taught us to be; that is why when they describe us as terrorists, they are naming and targeting us for death and destruction.

The terrorist, whether materially or symbolically, is a figure that imagines the “not-yet-here” within circumstances not of their creation. However, it also characterizes a political imaginary that destroys the “here and now” for a “not-yet-here.” The terrorist threat produces a disruption to the ebb and flow of racial capitalism in illuminating the violence of the past and present. Moreover, the terrorist threat is speculative. Terrorists ultimately imagine an autonomous world beyond the colonial modernity wherein the subjugated have control of their own destinies. Communists and Islamists in the streets, unite!

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