From Virtual Internment to Actual Liberation: The Epistemic and Ontic Resistance of US Muslims to the Ideology of (Counter)terrorism–Islamophobia/Islamophilia

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ABSTRACT: This paper draws from my radical qualitative research on the link between Islamophobia/Islamophilia and (counter)terrorism in the US. For my book, *Decolonial Psychoanalysis*, I interviewed 19 US Muslims asking them about not only their experiences with Islamophobia but also, and more significantly, how they resist it. My conclusion, based on the analysis, is that US Muslims resist Islamophobia in at least two distinct ways: epistemically and ontically. These forms of resistance constitute what I call "actual liberation".

In "Virtual internment: Arabs, Muslims, Asians and the war on terrorism," Hatem Bazian (2004) primarily compares the actual internment of the Japanese after the Empire of Japan's attacks on Pearl Harbor in 1941 to the ongoing virtual internment of Muslims after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. Bazian (2004) particularly hones in on, and explicates, the logic behind both forms of internment, which he finds, more or less, identical while warranting that there are obvious differences. I would like to add another important, and intermediate, reference point: the FBI's COINTEL program, which was mainly used to target Black radicals like Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and Fred Hampton. Its contemporary equivalent is Domain Management.[1]

Bazian's article, which was published in 2004, is prophetic in several ways and his critical concept of "virtual internment" is extremely valuable for Islamophobia Studies. In 2004, Bazian essentially foresaw two key surveillance programs: Domain Management, the FBI's datamining system that became public knowledge in 2011 thanks to Arronson's investigative journalism for Mother Jones; and PRISM, the NSA's global surveillance program that Edward Snowden blew the whistle on in 2013 through Greenwald and MacAskill's reporting for *The Guardian*. Not mentioning the consequences for the freedom of the press in light of the current criminalization of both WikiLeaks founder (Julian Assange) and whistleblower Chelsea Manning.

Bazian (2004, 5–6) defines Virtual internment as:

> a quasi-visible but repressive, intimidating, and confining structure employed by the US administration and its allies on a global scale against individuals, communities, and organizations deemed unsupportive, and possibly hostile, in their worldview toward American and 'global' interests. . . the aim of this structure is to elicit the cooperation of members of targeted communities in fighting the 'war on terrorism' and in helping weed out the 'bad apples' in the mix, but the more important outcome is the collective criminalization of people: Arabs and Muslims. This approach is based on a philosophy of guilt by association, which targets whole communities as a way of, possibly, finding the 'terrorist' hiding among them.

What kind of structure is virtual internment? And how does this structure function theoretically on a global scale? Bazian (2004) theorizes that it is "a total structure which affects all levels of targeted communities" (p. 7) as well as "a systematic and oppressive program" (p. 7). I conceive of virtual internment as a panoptic mechanism, which functions according to what Michel Foucault (1977) calls "disciplinary power."[2] In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault (1977) was writing about the emergence of disciplinary power in Europe as a way of containing 'the plague' through the management of bodies, but we can easily replace 'the plague' with 'terrorism,' the master signifier of our time. Incidentally, terrorism is often metaphorically construed as a social epidemic (Kruglanski et al. 2007). When we look at terrorism through Foucault's (1977) genealogy of power, we quickly come to see terrorism studies as a discipline of not only knowledge but also power (Stampnitzky 2010). In other words, it is no accident that the terrorism industry is an outgrowth of terrorism studies, a State-centric discursive field concerned with disciplining the bodies of non-state terrorist actors. The disciplining of these actors through practices like enhanced interrogation techniques (or torture) goes to show one of the effects of framing them as objects of knowledge. These non-state terrorist subjects used to be leftist radicals from the Global North, now they are Muslim extremists from the Global South. So the field is plagued by not only a State-centric bias, but also a right wing and Islamophobic agenda (Brulin 2015; Herman 1996). Therefore, it is no coincidence that Benjamin Netanyahu essentially invented the field in the 1970s (Kumar 2012) as a way of whitewashing the ongoing ethnocide of Palestinians.

Whereas sovereign power was embodied in the figure of the monarch, disciplinary power is diffused throughout the body politic. In virtual internment, power is "visible and unverifiable" (Foucault 1977, 201). As a consequence of being (or looking) Muslim and of using the Internet, the virtually interned subject knows he or she is being spied on, but does not know whether he or she is being looked at at any one moment. "The Panopticon [or global surveillance, for that matter] is a machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad" (Foucault 1977, 201–02): on the Internet, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the NSA headquarters, one sees everything without ever being seen (p. 202). Virtual internment "is an important mechanism, for it automatizes and disindividualizes power. . . Consequently, it does not matter who exercises power. Any individual, taken almost at random, can operate the machine. . . Similarly, it does not matter what motive animates him [or her]" (Foucault 1977, 202).

From the perspective of Islamophobia, virtual internment functions on the basis of two paradoxical subject-positions: the invisibility of Muslims from public life—although that is being challenged by the presence of Representatives Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib in Congress—and their hypervisibility as terrorists (Shams 2018)—again, that is also being contested with the rise of right wing domestic terrorism. Virtuality is a function of the Muslim subject's "lateral invisibility," while internment is a function of his or her "axial visibility" (Foucault 1977, 200). As Foucault (1977) argues "this invisibility is a guarantee of order" for the virtually interned subject "is seen, but he [or she] does not see; he [or she] is the object of information, never a subject in communication" (p. 200). Nevertheless, visibility and invisibility are not necessarily always repressive, for they can also function as forms of resistance (Shams 2018). For instance, in terms of actual liberation, I conceive of two counter-ideological subject-positions: *lateral visibility* and *axial invisibility*. The former entails solidarity between Muslims and their non-Muslim allies, while the latter involves resisting the panoptic look through the Real Gaze (Lacan 2004).

The paradigm shift from virtual internment to actual liberation entails critiquing what I have labeled the *ideology of (counter)terrorism-Islamophobia/Islamophilia* (Beshara 2019), which sustains virtual internment. Foucault (1978) famously wrote, "Where there is power, there is

resistance" (p. 95). I add to his statement, "Where there is knowledge, there is liberation." While Foucault (1978) recognizes that resistance exists, he is unable to adequately theorize its true liberatory potential beyond the *panoptic look*, and for that we need the concept of the *Real Gaze* (Lacan 2004). If virtual internment is a function of disciplinary power, then actual liberation is a function of decolonial resistance. To conceptualize actual liberation as decolonial resistance, I will draw upon Jacques Lacan's (2004) notion of the Real Gaze (as opposed to Foucault's concept of the panoptic look) and I will also index Enrique Dussel's (2013) ethics of liberation among other conceptual tools.

I will now theoretically jump from Foucault to Lacan to mark my conceptualization of the virtually interned subject in terms of not only power and resistance, but also desire and *jouissance* (or enjoyment). To do so, let me at the moment turn to an excerpt from a qualitative interview study that I conducted with 19 US Muslims (18 years and older) from all over the country. The following is excerpted from my book, *Decolonial Psychoanalysis: Towards Critical Islamophobia Studies*.

THE HYSTERIC'S DISCOURSE: EPISTEMIC RESISTANCE, OR US MUSLIMS AS ETHICAL SUBJECTS

For Simon Critchley (2012), an ethical subject "is defined by commitment or fidelity to an unfulfillable demand, a demand that is internalized subjectively and which divides subjectivity" (Loc. 217). The hysteric here embodies, what Critchley (2012), calls "an ethics of infinitely demanding commitment" (Loc. 1444–63). The US Muslim, as the agent in the hysteric's discourse, is an infinitely demanding subject ($) who has traversed the fundamental fantasy (Lacan 2004, 273) "by calling into question the [(counter)terrorist] Other's desire" (Fink 1997, 214). The US Muslim "questions the authority of the master" (Neill 2013, 345), s/he "goes at the master [S_1] and demands that he or she shows his or her stuff, prove his or her mettle by producing something serious by way of [critical] knowledge" (Fink 1995, 133).

Hysteria in this context is not a clinical structure but a discursive position. The truth of the infinitely demanding subject ($) is the Real of divine justice as *objet a*, or object-cause of desire. The Arabic signifier for divine justice is *al-'adl*, which happens to be one of the 99 names of *Allāh* in *Islām*. Consequently, the infinitely demanding subject ($) is questioning the (counter)terrorist Other of the Law, or "the law-preserving function" (Benjamin 1978, 284) in particular, from the perspective of divine justice. The product of this exchange is critical knowledge (S_2) as surplus *jouissance*, in the form of "epistemic resistance" (Medina 2011). José Medina (2011) defines epistemic resistance as "challenging knowledge/ignorance structures" (p. 30); I define it as resistance through (critical) knowledge.

Abeer

The Islamophobia/Islamophilia fantasy is a constitutive frame that informs my exchange with Abeer; hence, Abeer's epistemic resistance via the phrase "internalized Islamophobia," which functions as critical knowledge (S_2). Frantz Fanon (2008) argues that the "inferiority complex" experienced by the colonized results from two things: "economic" inequality and "the internalization—or, better, the epidermalization—of this interiority" (p. 4, emphasis added). M. Fakhry Davids (2006) uses Fanon's argument, in *Black Skin, White Masks*, to come up with a Kleinian theory of "internal racism." Davids (2009) later shows that "everyday Islamophobia" is in fact "internalized" Islamophobia (p. 181). Fanon's psychosocial formulation of internalization as "epidermalization" follows the extimate logic of an exterior unconscious.

Abeer's critical conceptualization of "internalized Islamophobia" is undoubtedly a variation on the notion of "internalized oppression" (Collins 2000, 12) in *Black Feminist Thought*. The psychosocial notion of internalization can be traced back to Sigmund Freud, wherein it is a function of the superego. Bruce Fink (1995) links the superego to "the Other as *jouissance*" (p. xi) and he adds: "Clear examples of the internalization of the Other's discourse—other people's talk—are found in what is commonly called conscience or guilty conscience, and in what Freud called the superego" (p. 10). Even though the (counter)terrorist Other's discourse is internalized by US Muslims, it remains "extimate" (Miller 1988) to them. Jacques-Alain Miller (1988) writes, "Extimacy says that the intimate is Other—like a foreign body, a parasite" (p. 123).

In other words, internalization describes the psychosocial process of alienation, which through the exterior unconscious-conscious interior dialectic (Pavón-Cuéllar 2010) splits the subject (S) into ego and $ upon his/her entry into language. The antecedents to this Lacanian reading of alienation are the following notions: the master/servant dialectic (Hegel 2013), "class struggle" (Marx and Engels 2012), "*splitting*" (Freud and Breuer 2004, emphasis in original), "double-consciousness," and "twoness" (Du Bois 2003, 5). Certainly, "internalized Islamophobia" (cf. Zimbardo 2014, 72) may be the best way of describing what this entire psychosocial project is about: *everyday Islamophobia as the unconscious internalization of images/signifiers consciously produced by the Islamophobia industry*.

Alternatively, internalized Islamophobia can be conceptualized in terms of "second sight" or "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others" (Du Bois 2003, 5). For example, Abeer says, "*I can't* take my space up as a Muslim woman" (emphasis added.) The subject of the statement is represented by the pronoun "I," what Lacan (2006) calls a "shifter" or "the designation of the speaking subject for as long as the allusion, in its conjuratory intention no doubt, itself remained oscillating" (p. 448). The Muslim woman (ego) is the subject of the statement, but the enunciating subject is represented by the contraction "can't." The White American ($) who is afraid to be judged or attacked is the subject of the unconscious who has internalized Islamophobia.

Later, Abeer confirms her Radical thesis on "internalized Islamophobia" when she says, "I make *tawba* [repentance] from my hypocrisy you know bending to it bending to either reacting to it or being intimidated by it or you know um being you know influenced by Islamophobia." In other words, it is not possible to talk about Islamophobia without internalizing it in some shape or form: the master's discourse splits US Muslims into $ and a, and since there is no line of communication between the two ($ // a), enter fantasy ($ ◊ a). Traversing the Islamophobia/Islamophilia fantasy then depends on disrupting the (counter)terrorism discourse through both epistemic resistance and ontic resistance, as I will show in the next section.

Adam

When Adam says, "we all want justice for all," he is referring to Muslims desiring "justice for all." This desire, caused by divine justice (*objet a*), is about infinitely demanding justice not only for the victims of (counter)terrorism but also for the (counter)terrorists. Adam's infinite demand to the Master (signifier) for divine justice is performed through a strategy of "subversive overconformism" (Žižek 2008, 221). Adam overidentifies with the Law for the sake of justice or sticks to the letter of the Law "*against the fantasy which sustains it*" (Žižek 2008, 38, emphasis in original). The fantasy, of course, is Islamophobia/Islamophilia: "the obscene-*jouissant* underside of the Law" (p. 47, emphasis in original). Additionally, when Adam says, "no exceptions," Adam's logic is in line with the logic of Other *jouissance* (JA), which I have identified as divine-*jouissance*.

THE ANALYST'S DISCOURSE: ONTIC RESISTANCE,
OR US MUSLIMS AS POLITICAL SUBJECTS

In the previous section, I relied on the hysteric's discourse to conceptualize US Muslims as ethical subjects ($) motivated by an infinite demand for divine justice (*a*). As hysterics, US Muslims questioned the legitimacy of the (counter)terrorist Other (S_1) and, as a result, produced critical knowledge (S_2): epistemic resistance, or resistance through (critical) knowledge.

In this section, I will rely on the analyst's discourse in my conceptualization of US Muslims as political subjects; hence, I follow Critchley's (2012) recommendation of moving "from an ethics of infinitely demanding commitment to a politics of resistance" (Loc. 1444–63). This politics is grounded in what I call ontic resistance, or resistance through being (cf. Maldonado-Torres 2007). Ontic resistance is captured perfectly in the words of one of the research participants: "To exist is to resist. . . and to exist as a *ḥijābi* is to resist Islamophobia" (Aisha). The phrase, "to exist is to resist" comes from a graffiti slogan on the Palestinian side of the Israeli West Bank Barrier, which is known as the Apartheid Wall by Palestinians. The phrase exemplifies the Palestinian practice of *sumud* (steadfastness) as everyday resistance: "Being *samida* or *samid* requires that one does not allow oneself as a [Muslim] to be written out of history" (Rijke and van Teeffelen 2014, 91, emphasis in original).

According to Mark Bracher (1993), the analyst's discourse "offers the most effective means of achieving social change by countering the psychological and social tyranny exercised through language" (p. 68). The agent of the analyst's discourse is the Real Muslim (*a*), whose truth is epistemic resistance (S_2). The Real Muslim (*a*), having subjectified the cause of divine justice, gazes at the American analysand ($), causing his/her desire. The product is a new master signifier (S_1): not-(counter)terrorism, which I unpack in the final section vis-à-vis divine violence and liberation praxis.

Abeer

I characterize Abeer's strategy of "being visibly Muslim" as a form of *ontic resistance*. The partial objects subjectified by Abeer include the *ḥijāb* (as the Gaze) in the scopic drive and Arabic signifiers (as the Voice) in the invocatory drive. These *objets a* of visibility and audibility, or of being, are a source of *jouissance* for Abeer, and they attest to her subjectification: her "coming into being. . . where *it* [the drive] was" (Fink 1997, 215, emphasis in original).

Ahmed

For Ahmed, the label "Muslim American" is the (counter)terrorist Other's desire: "oh we're not accepted yet so we have to say we're Muslim American." His ontic resistance constitutes: "Calling yourself a Muslim." This 'calling' is what Critchley (2012) characterizes as "*naming* a political subject and organizing politically around that name" (Loc. 1485, emphasis added).

Ahmed is "not against assimilation," yet his ultimate "aim" is "to get rid of" his "Americanness." Ahmed hates or dislikes his "privilege" as "an American," but given the forced choice he is faced with, "unfortunately I I I didn't have a say where I was conceived I didn't have a say where I was born I didn't have a say to um what my nationality would be." Ahmed subjectifies his "privilege" by strategically using it against itself: "instead of pushing your own identity away you you find a way to bring your identity closer to you by using the privileges that you have being an American." Ahmed's strategy is informed by epistemic resistance. Like Abeer, Ahmed also indexes the critical theory of "internalized Islamophobia."

TOWARDS A RADICAL MASTER: FROM DECOLONIAL
PSYCHOANALYSIS TO LIBERATION PRAXIS

In conclusion, I will try to consider ways out of the deadlocks presented earlier in my essay symbolized by the ideology of (counter)terrorism-Islamophobia/Islamophilia, which sustains virtual internment as a panoptic mechanism. To do this, I will first argue for a shift from our current hate economy to an economy of "learned ignorance" (Lacan 2006, 409); in other words, a shift from phallic *jouissance* (Jφ) to Other *jouissance* (JA), or from mythical-*jouissance* to divine-*jouissance*. The result of this change will be a new ideology, or a new transmodern system (Dussel 2002), one that comprises both a counter-discourse (i.e., a new master's discourse) and a traversal of the fundamental fantasy (i.e., a new fantasy). I will end with a consideration of three "practices of hope" (Skrimshire 2008): politics of resistance, adversarial aesthetics, and ethics of liberation. These practices of hope are counter-hegemonic strategies against the discourse of (counter)terrorism (with its violent politics of fear), the fantasy of Islamophobia/Islamophilia (with its oppressive aesthetics of hate), and hegemonic subjectivity (with its Liberal-Conservative ethics of freedom), respectively.

Adversarial Aesthetics

Adversarial aesthetics "*literally* utilizes the [audio]visual medium against the [audio] visual regime" of Islamophobia/Islamophilia (Seshadri-Crooks 2000, 131, emphasis added). In other words, the key to disrupting Islamophobic representations in the politico-media complex is not through Islamophilic ones, but through Real representations of mundane Muslims. The *material Muslim* subject as Real critically humanizes the dehumanizing figure of the *conceptual Muslim* (i.e., both the 'good' Muslim and the 'bad' Muslim). This is why the answer to hate (Islamophobia) is not love (Islamophilia), but "learned ignorance" or "the ignorance that at the height of knowledge bows" (Soler 2016, 86).

The Ethics (and Praxis) of Liberation

Whereas the Lacanian model for ethics is tragedy: Antigone "pushes to the limit the realization of something that might be called the pure and simple desire of death as such. She incarnates that desire" (Lacan 1992, 283). For me, the model for ethics is satyr. Throughout the project, my aim with decolonial psychoanalysis, as one theoretico-methodological approach to critical Islamophobia studies, has been (and will continue to be) occupying this border between emancipation and liberation à la "border thinking or border epistemology" (Mignolo 2007, 455). Having named the US Muslim as one ethico-political subject around which political organizing can occur (Critchley 2012, Loc. 1485), the question of liberation praxis remains.

In conclusion, Dussel (2013) writes, "The ethics of liberation is an ethics of everyday life" (p. 211). It takes such a decolonial/transmodern ethics of everyday resistance to dismantle *everyday, or internalized, Islamophobia/Islamophilia*. The liberation principle is embodied in a "praxis of liberation," which is the "tactic and strategy" or "the fulfillment of an ethical, critical feasibility" (p. 413).

ENDNOTES

[1] Domain Management is "a data-mining system using commercially available information, as well as government data such as immigration records, to pinpoint the demographics of specific ethnic and religious communities—say, Iranians in Beverly Hills or Pakistanis in the DC suburbs. . . with counterterrorism as the bureau's top priority, agents often look for those threats in Muslim communities—and Domain Management allows them to quickly understand those communities' makeup." (Aaronson 2011)

2 Cf. Foucault's (2003) "governmentality" and "biopower"; Mbembe's (2004) "necropower"; and Deleuze's (1992) "societies of control."

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