

Of Trojan Horses and Terrorist Representations: Mom Bombs, Cross-Dressing Terrorists, and Queer Orientalisms

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ABSTRACT *This article employs anti-racist feminist theory to respond to a document published by the Department of Homeland Security United States in 2008. This document communicated the threatening possibility that women would use burqas or pregnancy prosthetics to hide bombs. Focusing on this report, the authors explore how the bodies of Muslim women have become spectacular in the post-9/11 period. Working at the intersections of gender, modernity, and visibility, they demonstrate that representations of Muslim women as threats is a new Orientalist discourse that justifies aggressive interventions against Muslim women, including new technologies such as backscatter X-rays.*

KEYWORDS *Media/Mass media; Feminist/Gender; Critical theory; Queer theory; Terrorism; Feminist media studies; Pregnant terrorists; Mom bombs*

RÉSUMÉ *Cet article s'appuie sur la théorie féministe antiraciste pour répondre à un document publié par le département de la sécurité intérieure des États-Unis en 2008. Le document avait comme but d'avertir le public de la possibilité que certaines femmes utiliseraient les burqas ou les prothèses de grossesse pour cacher des bombes. À partir de ce document, nous explorons la façon dont les corps des femmes musulmanes sont devenus spectaculaires dans les discours après 9/11. En visant la relation entre le genre, la modernité, et la visibilité, nous démontrons que les représentations des corps des femmes musulmanes constituent un nouveau discours orientaliste qui vient justifier les interventions agressives contre les femmes musulmanes, telles les technologies de rétrodiffusion de rayons.*

MOTS CLÉS *Media/Mass media; Feminist/Gender; Critical theory; Queer theory; Terrorism; Feminist media studies; Pregnant terrorists; Mom bombs*

In February of 2008, the United States Department of Homeland Security (DHS) released a threat assessment claiming that there had been an increase in female suicide bombers worldwide. In a document marked “For official use only,” the DHS asserted

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that the U.S. must remain vigilant even toward those women who would not normally be imagined to be capable of a terrorist attack. The Department of Homeland Security's report centred on pregnant women and the ease with which they might hide explosive materials under their clothes as well as the fact that pregnant women were unlikely to be suspected of violent behaviour. The three-page DHS report contained two full-colour photos of these possible "pregnancy prosthetics," including an image of an ambiguously racialized body dressed in a pregnant belly that could easily be removed (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Images accompanied by the caption "Pregnancy prosthetics—female suicide bombers have used devices that make them appear pregnant to hide explosive devices."



Source: Department of Homeland Security, 2008

The report itself asserted that the DHS had no intelligence suggesting that there was any threat posed by female suicide bombers to the "homeland" (DHS, 2008), nor have there ever been any attacks of this type on U.S. soil. In fact, authorities explicitly asserted that they had "no specific, credible intelligence" to support their claim, but that it was best for Americans to be cautious (Hennessey, 2008). Fox News and other commercial U.S. media outlets told the public that the "intelligence community" would begin to focus its attention on the "evolution of attacks...which exploit our social sensitivities" as terrorist groups were now recruiting single women, pregnant women, and women with small children who could easily pass through homeland security and border services (Fox News, 2010). According to anti-terrorist experts, men dressed as women could also hide their identities under the burqa (Pipes, 2006). Allegations that veiled women or men hiding beneath face veils or burqas presented a serious threat were justified on the grounds that the long and flowing material of the burqa would allow both men and women to conceal their gender identities as well as dangerous weapons.

Since the release of the DHS threat assessment in 2008, concern for the identity of individuals "hiding" beneath the burqa and niqab has continued to garner considerable media attention. From mediated responses to the 2012 Canadian Supreme Court ruling that a Muslim woman would have to remove her niqab to testify against the perpetrators who sexually assaulted her, to the outcry over an underage boy who wore a burqa to buy alcohol in Toronto, contemporary mediated representations of men and women wearing various forms of Muslim dress have continued to produce public

anxiety around *what and who might be hiding underneath these flowing fabrics* (Davidson, 2012; Mackinnon, 2012).

In this article, we argue that representations of pregnant female Muslim terrorists, and cross-dressing male terrorists in particular, produce new anxieties and fear around terrorist threats because of the *gendered* threats they pose. Representations of pregnant and cross-dressing terrorists are a *new Orientalist articulation*. That is, representations of the cross-dressing and pregnant terrorists borrow from old Orientalist grammar, and produce new gendered and raced logics. In his ground-breaking book *Orientalism* (1978), the postcolonial theorist Edward Said demonstrates that in literature, representations of Arab and Muslim countries and peoples are continually plagued by the same troubling stereotypes—where “the Orient” becomes a “semi-mythical construct” in which complex geographical and political situations are essentialized and reduced to a repetitive number of stereotypes meant to demonstrate that “these people over there were not like ‘us’ ” (Said, 2003, n.p.) and thus need “our” imperial intervention. Included in these narrow fantasies of the West are representations of Arab and Muslim femininities and masculinities limited to subjugated women, harem girls, terrorist men, and tribal warlords (1978). These caricatures persist in the form of U.S. news media headlines screaming about “the Arab threat and the Muslim menace, all of them written by political polemicists pretending to knowledge imparted to them and others by experts who have supposedly penetrated to the heart of these strange Oriental peoples” (Said, 2003, n.p.). Feminist scholars including Sherene Razack (2008) and Yasmin Jiwani (2006) extend Said’s work using intersectional feminist theory in order to argue that few representations of Arab and Muslim masculinities and femininities exist that interrupt the false binary of the “imperilled Muslim woman” and “dangerous Muslim man” (Razack, 2008).

The representations of terrorists we examine in this article follow a standard set in Orientalist discourses. That is, terrorists are hegemonically understood through a “doubling syntax” where the subject is both “pitiable and pejorative, or exoticized and threatening...designed to re-affirm white superiority” (Jiwani, 2006, p. 35). We argue that the representations of pregnant female terrorists and cross-dressing male terrorists are *new articulations* of these older Orientalist grammars since each subject—the pregnant terrorist and the cross-dressing terrorist—takes up a place in-between the ubiquitous image of the imperilled Muslim woman and the dangerous Muslim man (Moallem, 2005; Razack 2008). Drawing on the work of Jasbir Puar (2007), we argue that these new Orientalist articulations are queer by the ways in which terrorist subjects are represented as dangerous in and through *their gender and sexuality*. In the case of pregnant women, they are represented as terrorist through their reversal of the reproduction of the state, and in the case of cross-dressing men, they are represented as terrorist in the ways that they are depicted as failed, feminized forms of masculinity.¹ These new and queer articulations are productive in that they have served to justify the development of backscatter X-rays, as these Orientalist representations bolster support, and actively aid, the state in peeking beneath the veil.

By foregrounding this 2008 DHS threat assessment in our article, we ask two interlocking questions: 1) How might we understand anxieties around pregnant Muslim

women terrorists and “cross-dressing” male terrorists who wear burqas?; and 2) How does the state’s obsession with making Muslim bodies visible produce new practices and technologies of looking? To answer these questions, we conduct a discourse analysis of contemporary commercial U.S. news media reports, blogs, academic research as well as official government documents. In our research, we found a new and remarkably unitary message emerging about the necessity of scrutinizing Muslim women who cover their heads and/or faces at the intersections of questions about race, sexuality, and deviance. Although this message is generated from a number of different sources, the focus on racialized and veiled women’s bodies, their sexuality, and their assumed danger to the state remains singular through its relationship to the ways that it is used to further U.S. policies—both inside and outside U.S. borders—with regards to the War on Terror.

Pregnancy prosthetics and terrorism

The 2008 DHS document on the threat of pregnant terrorists was initially intended for law enforcement agencies (CNN, 2008) but, when leaked, gave rise to a rash of articles by mainstream U.S. media outlets asking whether Americans now had to fear “moms with bombs” in addition to other terrorist threats. These articles were accompanied by a mainstream mass media obsession with discovering whether a number of women committing acts that fall under the criminal definition of terrorism had been pregnant at the time of their attacks. For example, in the case of a suicide bomber from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka when a local test taken from the bomber’s scattered remains initially failed to yield a conclusive result as to whether she was pregnant at the time of the explosion, a blood sample was taken from the remains of her leg muscle and sent abroad in an attempt to definitely confirm whether she was indeed pregnant. Online coverage of this case included calls for autopsies of all female suicide bombers to find out whether they had been pregnant, a fact one might argue was no longer relevant once the explosion had taken place (“Suicide Bombers—Pregnant? Autopsy? We Need to Know,” 2008). Certainly, the notion of a pregnant suicide bomber excited grand claims about terrorism “most monstrous.” Such statements included assertions that now, the “people we’re least likely to suspect, the givers of life, might be people who are dying to kill” (Handwerk, 2004). Commentators from around the world weighed in to express their shock that pregnant women would commit terrorist acts. Oft-repeated refrains were about the sanctity of the fetus and this fundamental reversal of women’s ability to give life, as in the words of a commenter who asserted: “To abuse the beauty of the woman’s body to carry out evil acts of death is horrific” (response to Popkin, 2008). Academic research in the burgeoning field of “counterterrorism studies” concluded that these were instances of “abnormal” terrorism (Zedalis, 2004), while mainstream news media articles and responses to them espoused vicious racist rhetoric, asking whether there was no end to the “depravity for these people” and suggesting that if pregnant women could be suicide bombers, “babies with bombs in their diapers” would be next (response to Popkin, 2008).

The report of the risk of pregnant suicide bombers followed ongoing mediated concerns about the threat posed by men hiding beneath Muslim women’s religious

clothing (Pipes, 2007). Both of these panics—about pregnant suicide bombers and men wearing the burqa or niqab while committing criminalized acts—are generative. Rather than objects in need of saving by the U.S., instead, these women—and men who hide beneath women’s clothing—are presented as viable military targets. For Muslim women who cover, the upsurge in mainstream news media coverage of the burqa and niqab as a national security threat is especially harmful. Although there has been disproportionate surveillance of Arab and Muslim individuals since September 11, this DHS threat assessment specifically functioned to establish Muslim women as threats to the United States—and it does so by representing all women who cover as potentially harbouring deviant forms of queer femininities beneath their religious clothing (Richie, 2006). Mediated responses to the Department of Homeland Security threat assessment reveal the ongoing and overwhelming preoccupation with Muslim women, the niqab and the burqa post-9/11 (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Jiwani, 2010; Mahmood, 2005; Moallem, 2005; Razack, 2008). However, the leaked DHS assessment significantly altered popular concerns with Muslim women’s bodies—bodies that commentators argue are meant only for reproducing, not dismantling, the state. The upsurge in coverage by mainstream news media reporting on the DHS assessment established Muslim women as threats, and also produces new social and cultural anxieties around what and who is hiding underneath the burqa.

We find that multiple representations of duplicity converge in the DHS threat assessment warning of an increase in the use of pregnancy prosthetics to smuggle bombs, including duplicity and Muslim identity, duplicity and the female body, and duplicity and the queer body. As duplicitous bodies become a threat to national security (Hall, in press), new practices of looking at them are required. Shifting to represent the veil as a military weapon rather than as a simple barrier to transparency, sexist tropes around pregnant women as deceitfully trying to hide either paternal identity or pregnancy itself are referenced in producing a new Orientalist articulation of the pregnant terrorist as a dishonest—and therefore dangerous—terrorist subject.² This can be noted in the prototype featured in Figure 1, which suggests an ease with which women might “strap on” a fake pregnancy in order to terrorize the nation-state.³

Anxieties about the duplicitous queer body are referenced in the focus on cross-dressing male terrorists who conceal themselves beneath religious clothing. That is, the image of a veiled female and feminized terrorist is a new “sightbyte”⁴ for queerly racialized deviance. As queer figures, both the pregnant female and cross-dressing male terrorist produce anxieties about the “bombs” hidden beneath the burqa—both the potential weapon itself, and also the gender identity and sexuality that are perceived as deviant and hidden from the state’s vision. In this way, the anxieties resulting from women taking part in violence and men transgressing gender norms by wearing women’s clothing are used to justify a “haptic optics” that requires the state to reach out and touch Muslim bodies in order to see them, using new technologies to unveil them in the name of security. Following Deleuze and Guattari, we use the term “haptic” rather than “tactile” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987 [1980], p. 492). “Tactile” suggests a false binary between seeing and touching, whereas haptic is a term that allows for the possibility “that the eye itself may fulfill this non-optical function” (Deleuze & Guattari,

1987 [1980], p. 492). The term “haptic optics” (2007, p. 6) also reveals the intimate relationship between touch and vision. We show that it is in part the notion that we are able to read deviance off the body—and that concealing the body sartorially poses a risk to the nation-state—that produces whole-body imaging technologies such as backscatter X-rays aimed at stripping the body and revealing it beneath its duplicitous covering. In this way, technologies like backscatter X-rays further colonial projects as those companies marketing these scanners use the rhetoric of science to justify the state lifting up the veil and making the bodies of Muslim women visible while simultaneously generating increased profits for security technology companies.⁵

Terrorist femininities

Female terrorists fascinate the public. In order to make sense of women’s violence, in the mainstream U.S. news media, female suicide bombers are described using three typologies: “vengeful widows,” “romantic dupes,” and “perverse feminists” (Ness, 2008, p. 3). In a review of popular scholarship on the subject published in *Signs*, Claudia Brunner (2007) maintains that women’s political justifications for violent acts are routinely ignored or obscured by arguments that represent women as having been coerced or tricked into combat, as seeking a confused form of gender equality, or as attempting to shame men into joining terrorist groups. That is, women usually are not represented as conscious agents choosing to participate in war, but rather as individuals “drawn in as reluctant, if not victimized, participants” (Cunningham, 2003, p. 186). Given the associations drawn between Muslim women and both patriarchal culture and religious zealots in anti-terrorism discourse, the representation of Muslim female terrorists as dupes and victims is unsurprising. In fact, critical feminist scholars have thoroughly revealed the ways that Muslim women are singled out as needing protection from violent and hyper-patriarchal Muslim men, while Muslim men have been targeted globally by policing measures and securitization in the post-9/11 era (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Jiwani, 2006; Razack, 2008). Extending Gayatri Spivak’s (1988) famous critique of liberal feminism, in which she argues that feminism often sustains colonial legacies characterized by “white men saving brown women from brown men,” Razack (2008) argues that mainstream news outlets, law, and government policy in the U.S. and Canada maintain that Muslim women need to be saved from Muslim men, and Muslim men need to be saved from Muslim culture.

While the veil is associated with Muslim women’s vulnerability and oppression, it is also a piece of clothing historically associated with deviance because it creates a “barrier between the body of the Oriental woman and the Western gaze” (Yegenoglu, 1998, p. 39). The veil is a floating signifier. It has been differently associated with corporeal citizenship historically and in various contexts, with both nationalistic and racist connotations. In the case of Algeria and Iran, the veil has been used to represent resistance and submission, agency and passivity, in anti-colonial and pro-modernization state projects (Moallem, 2005). Given the inseparability of knowledge from power (Foucault & Gordon, 1980), the project of modernity played out on Muslim women’s bodies is also one of visibility, transparency, and control (Yegenoglu, 1998). In Orientalist terms, the veiled body is an object of mystery and defiance. Thus, it is predictable that the DHS assessment’s manufactured anxiety around Muslim “moms with

bombs” would be written on the bodies of veiled women. Borrowing from old Orientalist grammars, and producing new articulations of culturalized racism, the pregnant female terrorist is both imperilled and dangerous—an *object for saving and a subject worthy of destruction*. The anxieties produced by the DHS assessment are old Orientalist articulations in that they rely on the historical archive of the “doubling syntax” (Jiwani, 2006), where the Orientalized subject is perceived as weak and threatening, mysterious and monstrous. The historical tropes of a dangerous and yet salvable, veiled women present in Orientalist logic are reproduced, but in a *newly queer manner*. Neither an imperilled woman nor a dangerous man, the veiled pregnant female terrorist evokes new Orientalist discursive renderings of queer deviancy in her refusal of proper femininity in relation to motherhood and reproduction. While we do not aim to dismiss the historical use of the veil by women to smuggle weapons to resistance fighters, protect identity, gain anonymity, and resist the imposition of European clothes in projects of colonization—as Moallem (2005) brilliantly traces through the history of Iran, for example—we argue that as a “sightbyte” in the post-9/11 period, *the veil is transformed into a weapon*. That is, regardless of what is “hiding” beneath—be it a baby or a bomb—the veil itself functions as a threat to the nation in a way that signals an anxiety around racialized queer deviancy.

This new Orientalist articulation builds on representations of pregnant women as duplicitous. As women’s roles in the nation are designated as reproducers (mothers and caregivers of citizens), the pregnant suicide terrorist is a particularly queer figure. As Carole Stable argues in “Shooting the Mother,” pregnant women’s bodies are often rendered as opaque containers hiding the fetus from view (1992). While the contents of their wombs become highly visible, women’s bodies themselves are invisibilized. And yet they are deemed threatening as a result of their ability to conceal pregnancy as well as to conceal paternity (Hall, in press). These depictions of pregnant bodies as treacherous “containers” paved the way for representations of the pregnant terrorist body as a national security threat. Unsurprisingly, as the production of fetal imaging technologies must be linked to representations of women’s bodies as duplicitous vessels, below we will see how normative understandings of Muslim religious clothing as a form of opaque container produce new technologies aimed at visualizing Muslim women’s bodies.

According to the burgeoning and troubling field of counterterrorism studies, Muslim women are the next frontier of terrorism. Used by extremist groups to gain mainstream media attention and to avoid detection, veiled Muslim women are understood as the next major terrorist threat (Zedalis, 2004). According to Karla Cunningham, a political scientist at RAND:⁶

Women are able to use their gender to avoid detection on several fronts: first, their ‘non-threatening’ nature may prevent in-depth scrutiny at the most basic level as they are simply not considered important enough to warrant investigation; second, sensitivities regarding more thorough searches, particularly of women’s bodies, may hamper stricter scrutiny; and third, a woman’s ability to get pregnant and the attendant changes to her body facilitate concealment of weapons and bombs using maternity

clothing, as well as further impeding inspection because of impropriety issues. (2003, pp. 171-172, emphasis our own)

Anxieties that women will avoid searches due to their gender are explicitly articulated within counterterrorism discourse,⁷ even though it is well documented that Arab, Muslim, and Middle Eastern women are increasingly subject to street and airport profiling since 9/11, and Muslim women who wear the hijab, niqab, or burqa are disproportionately arrested by police and searched by airport security without just cause (Richie, 2006). Heightened by the possibility of a bomb hidden beneath the veil, the representation of veiled woman-as-terrorist functions as a salvation/destruction contradiction that is generative for the modern state. Importantly, in an era of increased border security, a veiled woman stands as a resister to modern projects of visibility and transparency. As we will demonstrate in the last section of this article, security technologies depend on the visibility, transparency, and even intelligibility of the body. In this context, the association of the veil with pre-modern patriarchal culture with mystery and terrorism intersects, producing Muslim women's vulnerability to heightened surveillance.

Queering female terrorists

In addition to the ways that Muslim female terrorists stand in between dominant representations in mainstream U.S. news media of Muslim bodies as either imperilled women or dangerous men, female terrorists, especially those who may be pregnant, pose a fundamental challenge to ascribed gender norms. Pregnant female suicide bombers are understood as particularly deviant given the gendered associations of femaleness with motherhood, child-rearing, and the reproduction of the state. Asking "What is queer about the terrorist?" Jasbir Puar (2007) argues that post-9/11, challenges to terrorist masculinities circulated rapidly. Here, we extend Puar's work to ask: What is queer about the female terrorist? Conforming to the representations of neither imperilled Muslim women nor dangerous Muslim men, terrorist femininities depend on their reversal of the reproduction of the state. That is, as female bodies are imbued symbolically in national discourses with the ability to give birth to the nation, Muslim women, in particular, are also racistly surveilled, in the context of Islamophobic population control rhetorics. Not only is the Muslim pregnant body a concern for white supremacist and eugenic logics, here, the pregnant female terrorist turns the narrative of the female body-as-reproducer on its head.

According to Nacos in the RAND-funded journal *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*,⁸ the "tough-as-male" female terrorist is a popular explanation that suggests that female terrorists must be lesbians because "everyone knows no 'real woman' would hijack planes" (2005, p. 226). That is, transgressing ideals of peace-seeking femininities, female terrorists are understood as always/already queer. Furthermore, Nacos maintains that the claims that female terrorists are not "real women" centre on mothers who choose "political violence over [their] own children" (2005, p. 226). Children are, as a result, not raised with either their mothers or their fathers. Rather, the kids of terrorist mothers are understood to be in an ontological process of "becoming terrorist." Reproducing a nation of terrorists, or maladjusted children, female terrorists are understood as particularly monstrous. The claim that terrorist women must be lesbians,

and thus not “real women,” is a lesbophobic response to the transgression of femininity and proper gender roles. Female terrorists are not “real women,” in part through homophobic responses to lesbians, who are heterosexistly (and incorrectly) imagined not to be able to reproduce the state as real women can and should. Rejecting life to embrace death, pregnant suicide bombers represent a queered form of femininity—one concerned with dismantling rather than reproducing the nation-state.

Of course, queer bodies also have been associated with duplicity. We understand the association of pregnant terrorists with queer duplicity as producing a new Orientalist articulation of deviancy that must be contained. Anxieties that queers might “pass” as heterosexual have historically produced a wide range of technologies that scientists claim will be able to definitively read homosexuality off the body. These include technologies claiming to be able to identify homosexuality from the size of one’s vulva (Terry, 1990) to contemporary studies asserting that one’s queer identity can be measured in the length of one’s fingers (Williams et al., 2000). It is no surprise that as queerness and racialization are “folded” into one another, to use the language of Jasbir Puar (2007), we see the development of backscatter X-rays able to scrutinize newly queered racialized Muslim female bodies.

Queer bodies historically have been understood as endlessly connected to death—from the AIDS epidemic to representations of queers as unable to reproduce life in the form of the nuclear family (Halberstam, 2005). Although Puar notes a turn to a biopolitics that slates some queers for life through gay marriage and gay consumer-citizenship, she additionally demonstrates that those queer bodies that remain slated for death occur where racialization and queerness intersect. As the state relies on the proliferation of queernesses to shore up its hold on heteronormativity, the figure of the racialized pregnant female terrorist serves as a productive foil to the white female body that “properly” reproduces the state in the national interest.

Significantly, absent from conversations about pregnant terrorists is any discussion of the desperate circumstances in which female suicide bombers might find themselves—no history or context of the conflicts that led to their decisions is given in the news reporting of these suicide bombers (Associated Press, 2006; “Suicide Bomber Was Pregnant,” 2006). For example, no context is given about the decades-long conflict between Sinhalese and Tamils in Sri Lanka in the description of the pregnant LTTE bomber (“Female Suicide Bomber Was Pregnant,” 2006), nor is any description given of the situation of the pregnant Palestinian woman living in the Occupied Territories who attempted to detonate her bomb (Handwerk, 2004).⁹

Cross-dressing and the burqa

Terrorism has been defined as “a synthesis of war and theatre.”

—Cynthia Combs (2006, p. 92)

While the pregnant female terrorist has gained widespread attention from corporate U.S. media, the veil as a “sightbyte” for deviance is also extended to include male terrorists. To document the current danger posed by the niqab and burqa to the West, the professor of Middle Eastern Studies Daniel Pipes highlights examples of men disguised in burqas to rob banks and detonate bombs. Pipes is well-known as an anti-

Muslim and anti-Arab commentator in the U.S. mainstream media and held a controversial position on the board of directors of the United States Institute of Peace that was personally endorsed by former President George W. Bush (Razack, 2008). Arguing for the forcible removal of religious clothing for Muslim women, Pipes argues: “[O]ne cannot have faceless persons walking the streets, driving cars, or otherwise entering public spaces” (2006). As he regularly asserts, the niqab and burqa must be banned in the name of national security.

In a blog post in 2006 entitled “Niqbas and Burqas as Security Threats,” Pipes cites an incident in February of 2006 where five Afghan soldiers were killed and four wounded after a suicide bomber who was disguised as a woman set off a bomb hidden under a burqa at an army checkpoint in Khost. Pipes also refers to the U.K. example of Yassin Omar, who was caught on closed-circuit television wearing a burqa. Omar allegedly tried to set off a hydrogen peroxide bomb at Warren Street Underground station. According to Pipes in a blog entitled “Ban the Burqa—and the Niqab Too” (2007), the *Daily Telegraph* described Omar as dressed from head to toe in a black burka and carrying a brown handbag. Pipes additionally references the case of Maulana Mohammad Abdul Aziz Ghazi, who Pipes describes as attempting to flee the Pakistani government after having donned “a black burqa and high heels” (2007).

While a wide variety of masked disguises are used to perpetrate criminalized acts such as bank robberies, the cross-dressing man gains overwhelming attention because he calls into question “proper” heterosexual masculinity. Unlike the use of a balaclava, the use of the burqa as a disguise calls into question both those threatening bodies hidden under the veil and the sexuality of the cross-dressing terrorist. Like the pregnant terrorist, the cross-dressing terrorist is used to represent a monstrously deviant form of gender performance. Neither an imperilled woman nor a normatively dangerous man, this form of feminized terrorism represents a refusal of hetero-masculinity where the purse and heels become signifiers of failed, feminized masculinity. Like the pregnant female terrorist, the feminized male terrorist turns the heteronormative imperative of the state on its head.

Borrowing from a historical archive of Orientalist representations, the burqa is represented as a symbol of modesty, sexual repression, the oppression of women, and a signifier of pre-modernity. In contrast, a man dressed in women’s clothing may be understood as sexually excessive. Thus, the veiled cross-dressing terrorist is a monstrous mix of shame and shamelessness. As a queer Orientalist articulation, one that depends on a reversal of heteronormative tropes in order to be threatening, the cross-dressing male terrorist stands in for the colonial trope of ambivalence. As a monstrous mix of salvation and destruction, the veiled terrorist male is perceived as both sexually excessive and repressive. Queered masculinities in the form of the feminized, purse-carrying, heel-wearing male Muslim subject provide the definitive proof of the dangerous and slippery nature of the veiled terrorist suspect. Such representations are productive for the state and its goals in the context of the War on Terror. The mystery of what is underneath the burqa—a fetus, bomb, or man—must be revealed by the state. New threats require new technologies of looking and the gender-queer terrorist subject produces new anxieties and requires unveiling.

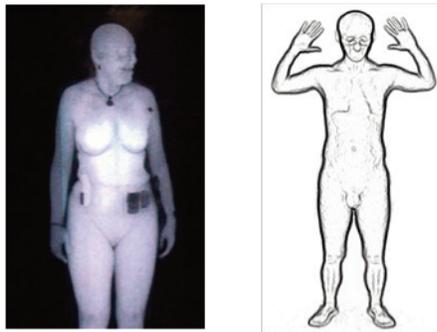
Importantly, other individuals who use cross-dressing as a method to secure access to sites of attack receive much less attention. For example, three suicide bombers, assumed to be coordinated by the Islamic Hamas movement in Hebron, dressed like religious Jews to conceal weapons (Gradstein, 2003). Yet a threat assessment has not been released suggesting that all orthodox Jewish religious garb is suspect. The anxiety surrounding Arab/Muslim terrorists who wear women's clothing (or carry handbags) to hide their identities reveals how suspect bodies are produced in and through their imagined ambiguous gender and sexuality as well as through racialization.

Backscatter X-rays and the visualizing of othered bodies

The recent focus on aberrant pregnant and cross-dressing veiled bodies as both queer and terrorist subjects is productive. New Orientalist understandings of the burqa as concealing who and what may be underneath generate a call for the unveiling of Muslim women in the context of ongoing unveiling practices. These articulations of Orientalized subjects also serve to legitimize the development of new technologies able to unveil at a distance. Specifically, the adoption of backscatter X-rays to by airports is one way in which modern projects of visibility and transparency are performed.

Following the signing into law of the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act (in 2004), the U.S. Department of Homeland Security expanded funding for whole-body imaging technologies (Klitou, 2008), requesting more than \$25 million for new visualization technologies. These technologies included whole-body scanners; each scanner costs between \$100,000 and 200,000 (Electronic Privacy Information Center, 2009).

Figure 2: Figure at left is produced by a backscatter technology to which the Transportation Security Administration has added a privacy algorithm; figure to the right demonstrates the capability of the backscatter scanner.



Sources: Transportation Security Administration, 2008;
Flatrock, 2005

Including both backscatter X-rays and millimetre wave technologies, whole-body imaging technologies yield clear images of organic materials, including human bodies. As a result, these technologies are able to visualize individual bodies naked beneath their clothes.¹⁰ Whole-body imaging technologies are marketed using the language of technological objectivity and neutrality.¹¹ In particular, they are marketed as free from

the discrimination that plagues real life, including racism. As their manufacturers assert:

The impersonality of machines can also filter out racism. Five years ago, the ACLU [American Civil Liberties Union] objected to body scans because they were administered selectively “based on profiles that are racially discriminatory.” ...All [the security officers] can see are X-ray images, which capture density, not pigment. To them, everyone is the same color. (Saletan, 2007)

And yet, far from neutral, in fact, these scanners help to demonstrate the ways that queer Orientalisms are being operationalized. Backscatter X-rays are utilized by the state in order to definitively render suspect bodies visible. That is, as Jennifer Terry has argued with respect to medicine (1999), scientists are continually devising new needs to definitively visualize queered bodies in order to pin down their deviant forms of sexuality. Backscatter X-rays are used in much the same way—to put queer Orientalisms into practice by definitively visualizing these othered bodies. These scanners have a disproportionate impact on Muslim communities as they violate the religious beliefs of some Muslims (as well as other religious groups) around bodily modesty in public (Flintoff, 2008).¹² Jasbir Puar (2007) argues that we, as a society, are increasingly preoccupied with a biopolitics that does not explicitly rely wholly on racial profiling. That is, Puar asserts that bodies are profiled not only according to their racialized and gendered identities, but also as a result of the “data they assemble, what are otherwise known as ‘data bodies,’ bodies materialized through information and statistics” (p. 175). Of course, Puar notes the ongoing connection between the data profile and the racial profile. Here, we can see how othered bodies are caught within the web of the racial profile disguised as an objective technological **profile**.¹³ Returning to the example of the pregnant terrorist, we argue that fetal imaging technologies scanning every woman to see if they were pregnant likely could not have been deployed widely in the ways that backscatter X-rays have been. However, these new body scanners achieve the same ends, a form of haptic optics in which the state is able to reach out, touch, and unveil bodies in the name of security, forcing them into the light of Western technological “progress.”

Narratives of unveiling are central to the project of modernity (Vivian, 1999), and this unveiling is partially achieved through the deployment of whole-body imaging technologies. Here, a haptic optics strips bodies naked before the state in a form of intimate violence. Of course, this documentation and surveillance of othered bodies is not new. From the measuring of Saartje Baartman’s posterior to the medical obsession with measuring the nipples and vulvas of queer bodies (Terry, 1999), new technologies aimed at reifying othered identities have a long history (Browne, 2004; Cole, 2001; Lalvani, 1996; Magnet, 2011). The violence of this surveillance often involves intimacy, from the measurements documented by Bertillon (Magnet, 2011) of the tiniest crevices of the bodies of criminalized individuals to the trophy photographs of Abu Ghraib showing torturers in intimately violent embraces with those they tortured. In this way, backscatter images of veiled bodies can be understood as a form of technological

scrutiny and surveillance that may prevent the mobility of Muslim communities, given the way that they can be interpreted to violate religious laws.

Describing the intensification of the surveillance of turbaned bodies post-9/11, Jasbir Puar (2007) notes that turbans are increasingly X-rayed, an act she describes as “a surveillance event that does not dismantle or disaggregate the coherent body bit by bit; rather, it is a rematerialization of the body, a splaying of the body across multiple registers that adumbrates the terms of intimacy, intensity, and interiority” (p. 200). Backscatter X-rays aimed at visualizing queered bodies through a form of haptic optics intimately terrorize and touch particular bodies. In this way, this intimate violence becomes a form of “tactile knowing” (Taussig cited in Puar, 2007, p.194) that disproportionately targets those bodies imagined to carry new threats. Such technologies simultaneously address current preoccupations with pregnant Muslim bodies as well as the veiled bodies of both Muslim men and women.

Conclusion

Yasmin Jiwani (2010) argues that as the support for the War on Terror begins to wane, one must expect representations of Muslim men and women to shift. As military interventions are re-articulated as re-construction missions, the national security measures at home require new justifications. Centring our article on a Department of Homeland Security assessment, we argued that the pregnant female terrorist has become a new threat to national security. Asserting that conceptualizing veiled bodies as a risk to national security relies on the maintenance of traditional as well as new, queer Orientalist articulations, we found that representations of Muslim femininities begin to incorporate not only the imperilled Muslim woman, but also the dangerous female or feminized terrorist. Critically unpacking how the threat of duplicity operates across differently marked bodies, we extended Puar’s (2007) analysis of queer terrorist masculinities, suggesting that terrorist femininities are also queer. The anxiety produced by the DHS assessment concerning pregnant and cross-dressing terrorist bodies can only be understood when we consider the “folding” of racialization into sexuality. The increasing focus on “moms with bombs” is important in that it reveals how pregnant terrorists, having the bodily capacity to reproduce, function as queer subjects when they are understood to refuse this “natural” call to motherhood. Furthermore, the emphasis placed on cross-dressing terrorists provides another “sightbyte” for Arab and/or Muslim deviance, destruction, and monstrosity in ways that justify ongoing attacks on Arab and Muslim bodies—both domestically and abroad. This new understanding of veiled bodies as threats because of who or what may be hiding beneath the burqa provides the state with a justification for using new technologies such as backscatter X-rays to peek beneath the veil.

Beginning with a Homeland Security assessment that warned of women hiding bombs in pregnancy prosthetics and under burqas, we challenged the way that the burqa has come to be understood as a disguise for both male and female terrorists. Focusing on the failed hetero-femininities and masculinities represented by pregnant and cross-dressing terrorists, we suggested that new Orientalisms justify new practices of looking. Importantly, they call for new technologies, including the widespread deployment of whole-body imaging technologies such as backscatter X-rays. These tech-

nologies are a form of “intimate violence” in that they serve to fix particular bodies in place, containing them in ways that deprive them of their human right to mobility. Although these practices of looking hide behind the rhetoric of science and claim to be free from systemic forms of discrimination, racialized bodies (especially veiled bodies) are disproportionately targeted “at home.” Moreover, the articulation of veiled bodies as destructive is a generative project for Global North states that are heavily invested in military aggression “elsewhere”—an elsewhere reliably populated by Orientalized bodies. As these dangerous maternal bodies are rendered suspect, including as a result of their ability to reproduce the state, we see how representations of terrorist femininities produce Muslim women as not only objects in need of saving, but as viable military targets.

Notes

1. Following Foucault, we argue that the state is not unitary, but rather the enormity of its power comes from the fact that it is, to borrow Paul Rabinow’s useful summation, “both an individualizing and a totalizing form of power” (Foucault and Rabinow, 1984, p. 14). While we “resist the idea that the state is a consistent identity/apparatus over time” (Robertson, 2004, p. 25), we also argue that the state is a key actor at significant moments in history.
2. We would like to thank Rachel Hall for this theoretical point, described fully in her forthcoming book *The Transparent Traveler: The Performance and Culture of Airport Security* (NYU Press).
3. These “strap on” pregnant bellies are a staple of contemporary Hollywood cinema, raising interesting questions as to the overlap between security and entertainment technologies. These are technologies that are often linked, as is noted by Jennifer Terry in her excellent article titled “Killer Entertainments,” analyzing the relationship between the military-industrial complex and entertainment (2007).
4. Paula Treichler attributes the continued importance of 9/11 in the U.S. national imaginary to the compelling nature of what she terms the *sightbyte*—the collapse of the Twin Towers themselves (2008). This collapse is an image that is often described as a scene from a blockbuster disaster movie brought to life. Here, we are arguing that the *sightbyte* for Muslim/Arab deviance is the veiled body (communication to authors).
5. The state’s preoccupation with unveiling women has a long history, as is noted in Bradford Vivian’s excellent essay describing the long-standing French preoccupation with banning the hijab in public spaces (1999), as well as in Malek Alloula’s canonical work *The Colonial Harem* (1986).
6. The RAND corporation is a non-profit think tank that provides research aimed at influencing policy and decision-making processes. RAND was formed by the United States Army in 1946 and remains the most vocal and well-funded military lobby group. It has been widely criticized for its right-wing leanings, especially during George W. Bush’s presidency and, most notably, for its decades-long centrality in the U.S. military-industrial project.
7. From the use of new technologies such as backscatter X-rays that reveal bodies beneath clothing to invasive pat-down searches, women (as well as trans people and people with disabilities) are increasingly stripped and checked. In fact, the number of women filing sexual harassment complaints due to security pat-downs has risen starkly (Magnet & Rodgers, 2011).
8. It is important to point out that this RAND-funded journal is not an autonomous body, but funded by the U.S. government along with other private donors and historically connected to the U.S. military. This journal’s published research findings, supporting the War on Terror, and inability to present dissenting opinions with regard to the United States’ missions in Afghanistan and Iraq must be pointed out here.

9. In *Frames of War*, Judith Butler (2009) notes that those bodies that are not considered grievable (in ways that are intimately connected to identity) also often do not have the difficulty of their circumstances considered meaningful causes for action such as suicide bombing. And yet, as described by the theorist Pal Ahluwalia, it is important to note that suicide bombing is a weapon “perfectly suited to the television age” in an information-saturated world (2010, n.p.). While of course we do not support suicide bombing as a weapon of war, it is still important to ask questions as to why it is so often framed as completely inexplicable.
10. Conflicts of interest in the use of these technologies in U.S. airports are widespread. For example, Michael Chertoff, former Secretary of Homeland Security, went on record arguing that these technologies were essential to U.S. security. He did not declare that he heads up the Chertoff Group (Ridgeway, 2010), which represents one of the primary manufacturers of backscatter X-ray scanners, Rapiscan. His company has already received more than \$25 million dollars from the TSA for these scanners, as it is a primary distributor of backscatter X-ray scanners (Magnet & Rodgers, 2011). Of course, the supposed objectivity of adopting these scanners was called into question by the fact that Chertoff was using his political influence to make sure that his pet product found a market.
11. It should also be noted that many other individuals and groups have expressed anxiety and rage that the state now requires citizens to be subjected to a strip search in order to travel (Magnet & Rodgers, 2011).
12. Puar (2007) calls the field of Surveillance Studies into question for not adequately highlighting the connections between the data profile and the racial profile.

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