

***Sensible Interventions:  
Cultural Resistance Post-9/11***

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***SENSIBLE INTERVENTIONS:  
CULTURAL RESISTANCE POST-9/11***

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## INTRODUCTION

*Sensible Interventions* is anchored in the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in America and their cultural legacies, most prominently in the forms of cultural resistance. It conjoins 9/11 and oppositional practices by probing the politics of the attacks and their repercussions, and simultaneously, by investigating 9/11-inspired artistic resistance and its agents, targets, modes, and motivations.

Like so many other fields such as politics, global finance, and the military, the domain of culture has sustained wide-ranging effects from the attacks, but it has also been, in a strange way, galvanized as well. Scanning through the myriad of American cultural objects with any kind of 9/11 connection, one can quickly see that, whether they merely contain brief 9/11 references or actually portray the catastrophe as their primary theme, these cultural responses (including films, television dramas, documentaries, political cartoons, music, and video games), generally adhere to several conventional themes and functions: first, to eulogize the firefighters, other emergency workers, and the victims through the prisms of heroism and patriotism; second, to create immediacy with both imagined and real descriptions of panic and fears inside the towers and the hijacked planes; third, to enable acts of mourning while providing healing and catharsis through personal accounts by survivors and victims' families. This category also includes the numerous fiction and nonfiction works that chronicle how the attacks have altered personal lives. Fourth, these cultural expressions seek to explain and inform by detailing the inner workings of globalized terrorism, al-Qaeda, and anti-terrorism efforts; and finally, to critique the Bush administration, post-9/11 paranoia, and threats to civil liberties among other woes.

Nestled among these cultural responses are also works that deviate from these main classifications. These objects might share some of the antagonistic vehemence with those works in the last category of critique, but they also exhibit something more. Four such objects serve as the fount of curiosity for this study: the novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the hip hop album *Sonic Jihad*, the Canadian television situation comedy *Little Mosque on the Prairie*, and the collection of studio photographs entitled *Taliban*. Because of their diverging genre, medium, themes, and circulation, thus located far off from each other on any schematic of 9/11 objects, their visibility is diminished, operating somewhat inconspicuously as isolated points in a constellation with more illustrious and better-known objects. But taken together, their potential as critical artistic interventions becomes prominent. This dissertation distills their

oppositonality, exploring them at the confluence of aesthetic forms, political ardor, and commercial circulation.

Foregrounding artistic endeavors – literature, music, television program, and photography – and fastening them to politics also forces this inquiry to step into the quagmire that is the tumultuous relationship between politics and the arts. Are the arts only a supplementary element in oppositional movements,<sup>1</sup> or as Boris Groys asks: “Does art hold any power of its own ... ?” (12)<sup>2</sup>. To consider this knotted relationship between politics and the arts, the 9/11 and resistance nexus is further extended by a third component, that of the theoretical works by Jacques Rancière. His thoughts have great relevance here because, although his works traverse different topics and disciplines, they do converge and return time and time again to that exact relationship between politics and aesthetics. The qualifier “sensible” in my title signals Rancière’s presence in this study, as the word is echoic of his particular way of theorizing politics through his best-known concept, the distribution of the sensible. I will chart his arguments shortly, but for now the notion of the sensible can be inaugurated here by highlighting two definitions of the word “sense,” as Rancière himself explains: first, sense as in the realm of sensations and what is apprehended and perceived by the senses, and second, sense as in meaning and the process of making sense and establishing the coherence of something. “Sensible interventions” signify my four objects’ oppositional undertakings at the level of sensory presentations and at the level of meaning and signification, as well as the interplay between the two senses when an object breaches the coherent and determinate connection between the pair.

The word “intervention” indicates a disruption and a contestatory activity hostile to established norms, attitudes, discourses, and visualization. These interventions are “sensible” according to Rancière’s paradigm, but the adjective itself does not necessarily suggest acts of wisdom or prudence. Neither exalting nor dismissing cultural resistance, this study also confronts resistance’s parasitic nature, complicity, and entanglements in the power it hopes to transgress. This last concern is, no doubt, guided by Michel Foucault’s formulation of the relations between

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<sup>1</sup> Gene Sharp has listed 198 non-violent forms of political defiance in his popular book *From Dictatorship to Democracy: A Conceptual Framework for Liberation*, which has become the bible for any aspiring resistor. While he did suggest painting, music, theatre, and literature (items 26, 35-37, 122 and 178) and while many of the other acts he identifies no doubt require creativity and can mutate into artistic works, critical artistic interventions remain in the background, relegated it seems to merely complement existing oppositional movements. For the complete list of these 198 methods, see pages 69-76 of Sharp’s *From Dictatorship to Democracy: A Conceptual Framework for Liberation* (Boston: The Albert Einstein Institute, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> Although this dissertation examines different media that reflect several academic disciplines, the citation style I am using is the MLA (The Modern Language Association) system, which is commonly associated with literature/language departments.

resistance and power (95). In all, “sensible interventions” point to a convergence of 9/11, cultural resistance, and Rancière, where artistic practices counter 9/11’s cultural legacy through the multiple dimensions and definitions of the sensible.

The first central question for this project is: in what ways have the arts been understood and deployed as oppositional practices in the 9/11 context? To address this question, my examination identifies the diverse sites, targets, and methods of resistance through my four case studies. The discoveries from this central question also enable me, in reverse, to show what these contestations reveal about the disputed cultural legacy of 9/11 and the breadth, capability, and stumbling blocks of cultural resistance. The second main question unites all three elements of the dissertation – 9/11, resistance, and Rancière – by asking how Rancière’s concept of the sensible can help advance both post-9/11 cultural politics and oppositional practices. To answer this question, I demonstrate how particular cultural productions from the fields of literature, music, photography, and television, work to challenge and push the boundaries of the post-9/11 sensible order. These cultural expressions can also intimate the possibilities and contours of sensible dimensions as a different approach to post-9/11 politics and resistance.

Throughout the dissertation, the prefix “post” is often attached to 9/11. This refers to a temporal sequencing, as I analyze and call attention to the effects and ramifications of the attacks rather than the actual event itself. *Sensible Interventions* comes more than ten years after the catastrophe whose meanings and significance have evolved, as the war on terror itself had progressed under the former Bush administration and is now continuing under the Obama presidency. Terrorism, too, has advanced with other attacks occurring in Madrid, London and Bali. While being attentive to that original 9/11 moment, my focus also lies in the aftermath.

The “post” designation also does not imply that 9/11 represented a historical rupture. The claim that 9/11 was a turning point in American history is one that has been challenged by scholars who have identified 9/11’s multiple lines of continuity with America’s political past.<sup>3</sup> This non-rupture viewpoint, however, does not minimize the catastrophe’s significance, especially as the attacks, the war on terror and the two subsequent military campaigns have introduced new targets of, and motivations for, cultural resistance.

This introductory chapter will first identify some of the key theoretical and thematic focal points in post-9/11 cultural politics, surveying in the first three sections those leading indicators

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<sup>3</sup> For the debate assessing whether 9/11 represented a historical rupture or continuity, or a tipping point, see Martin Halliwell and Catherine Morely’s edited volume *American Thought and Culture in the 21st Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008).

that have driven the discussions. Embedded in these central debates is a reflection on the role of resistance and critical artistic expressions in response to 9/11. Following this overview, I will introduce my four cultural objects and establish their convergence with and deviations from these major 9/11 themes, and their separate resistance projects as individual objects. The next section will outline how these four objects amalgamate to contest collectively the realm of the sensible, primarily through audibility and visibility. This major shift to the sensible is aided by Rancière's works which crisscross this dissertation in numerous ways. Some of these junctions will be clarified in this segment and will be pursued even further in the next chapter. I will conclude this introduction with a discussion of the dissertation's own intervention in 9/11 scholarship and provide a chapter-by-chapter outline.

### **Aesthetizing Catastrophe**

The sequence of visual images immortalizing 9/11 is firmly fixed: planes soar towards the towers and strike them with precision. Explosions ensue. Trapped workers protrude from broken windows and flail their arms for help. The towers collapse while ash-coated New Yorkers flee the scene. Deemed sublime, inconceivable, and incomprehensible, these real-time images of a catastrophe immediately created a clash of perceptions and heterogeneity of sensory experiences. They are extraordinary scenes, defying the banality of prosaic images from everyday city life, and yet disturbingly familiar to the artificial aesthetics of Hollywood disaster movies and some popular video games. This mirroring of visuals immediately gives prominence to the aesthetic impact of the attacks, not in the sense of Karlheinz Stockhausen's remark that the incident was the greatest work of art, but in the sense of how such images circulate in a society already abounding in spectacular images and virtuality.

The raw material reality of the event was juxtaposed to America's pre-9/11 society of the spectacle, with a passion for semblance rather than substance, its de-materialization of "real life," and its hyperreality. In what has become a classic 9/11 text, "Welcome to the Desert of the Real," published in 2002, Slavoj Žižek explores this intertwining of the de-realization of reality with the Real, suggesting that the events of 9/11 have exposed America to its own insulated and artificial universe – its deceptive and selective sense of reality that has sheltered most Americans from the horrors, terrorist or otherwise, that are ravaging countries elsewhere – and ushered it

into “the Real world” (389).<sup>4</sup> The spectacle of 9/11 both made real fantasized spectacles – those semblances of catastrophes that Hollywood had already staged – and momentarily lifted the lull of those spectacles (387).

Embedded in these themes of semblance and the Real is also an explicit connection of terrorism and violence to capitalism and globalization. This can be seen in some of the more obvious indications: the instantaneous disseminations of the images of terror via well-entrenched globalized media networks; the symbolic targeting of the World Trade Center as the center of global financial capitalism, or as Žižek would prefer to describe, the center of “virtual” capitalism where financial activities are severed from the sphere of material production (387); and finally, the parallel development of terrorism and capitalism as effects of globalization, given the similar global functioning and reach of present-day terrorist organizations and multinational companies (38).<sup>5</sup>

As Žižek has already alluded to, this link between terrorism and capitalism also entangles Guy Debord’s concept of the spectacle. In Retort’s *Afflicted Powers: Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War*, published in 2006, the power of the image and the control for the realm of appearance are explicitly related to post-9/11 international politics, both in terms of jihad and American imperial power.<sup>6</sup> As Retort points out, the terrorist attacks occurred within America’s own symbolic economy called spectacle (25). In that sense, the terrorists took their cue from the culture they hoped to annihilate, mounting a violent negation of capitalism and the spectacle, but still remaining encapsulated within the same logic, as the attacks maximized the media apparatus of an image-obsessed society. To phrase it more simply, the image haters themselves became image makers, enforcing the reign of the spectacle. This entrapment, however, is not the predicament of the terrorists solely; the post-9/11 form of empire, too, is mired in a battle of images and the modern production of appearances. One of the central themes of *Afflicted Powers* is the post-9/11 militarization of neoliberal capitalism, and of equal importance, its deployment under the terms of the spectacle. A “deep and perplexing doubleness,” indeed, states Retort; on the one hand, there exists “a new round of conquest and colonization,” or more accurately what

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<sup>4</sup> There are several versions of “Welcome to the Desert of the Real”: one is the short essay which appeared in *South Atlantic Quarterly* 101.2 (2002): 385-389; the other is the book version with the same title published by Verso in 2002. My first three references are from the article; the final reference is from the book.

<sup>5</sup> See previous footnote.

<sup>6</sup> Retort is a collective of some 30 to 40 “antagonists of the present order of things,” based in the San Francisco Bay Area. Its main writers are: Iain Boal, T.J. Clark, Joseph Matthews, and Michael Watts. See the preface of *Afflicted Powers* (London: Verso, 2006).

they call “primitive accumulation,” using a phrase coined by Marx (11); and on the other hand, the state now functions in and through the regime of image and is implicated in the war of appearances.

While eagerly establishing these global realities, Retort is not content with merely proffering a diagnosis of post-9/11 symptoms; they have plotted, tentatively and cautiously, some coordinates of an opposition. It is unsurprising that *Afflicted Powers* has become, according to one enthusiastic reviewer, “the one indispensable guide to our contemporary conjuncture for anyone hoping to formulate and develop modes of radical resistance” (Glass, 225). What program of resistance, then, both in terms of protest movement in the streets and critical aesthetic practices, does Retort envision as a riposte by the Left to both empire and jihad? Before an opposition can even be articulated, Retort argues how both empire and jihad are implicated in modernity, which is ultimately the real target of resistance; for it is modernity and its twin, “democracy,” that have become the watchwords of the aforementioned resurgent US imperialism (174). Concomitantly, revolutionary Islam – al-Qaeda in particular – as Retort details is born “in revulsion” from many features of modernity (180). If the task of Left politics following 9/11 is to be anchored in an opposition to modernity, then it finds itself curiously, and with extreme discomfort, on the same side as revolutionary Islam. Retort, however, is adamant in the formulation of a resistance that can both oppose modernity and be in contrast to revolutionary Islam. What the situation calls for, Retort writes in awkward prose that reflects the challenge and complexity of such a project, is a “non-orthodox, non-nostalgic, non-rejectionist, non-apocalyptic critique of the modern: that ought now to be the task of Left politics. Otherwise the ground of opposition to the present will be permanently ceded to one or another fundamentalism” (177).

With resistance thus framed against modernity and envisioned through negations or in what opposition *cannot* be, Retort invests its hopes in the ongoing struggle against globalization, in what they call the “movement of movements,” one that is marked by pluralism, by its shifting battlegrounds and deployment of new tactics, and by its “lack of interest in scripts of salvation.” Retort affirms: “This is the ‘multitude’ we place most faith in – and precisely *because* its politics depend so little on the new apparatus of spectacle. In this, as in so much else, it is al-Qaeda’s antithesis” (192, italics in original). But this faith in empire’s countervailing force, Hardt and Negri’s “multitude,” is not without hesitation. As a political force, the multitude has emerged into and out of defeat, most notably in the failed anti-war demonstrations in the lead-up to the

invasion of Iraq in the spring 2003, Retort reminds us. Against these post-9/11 challenges, what might be the potential of resistant aesthetic practices? In an exchange with *October*, Retort states simply that while it is possible for art to reply to the extremity of this juncture, the existing art world has very little to offer (“Exchange” 12). Not one to abandon all hope, the collective, however, did present an installation (consisting of their broadsheets plastered on a wall and a video projection of Picasso’s *Guernica*) in Okwui Enwezor’s second Seville Biennial in 2006, which focused on art’s engagements with global politics.<sup>7</sup>

Retort, of course, was not the first to address this string of post-9/11 concerns: empire/globalization, jihad, modernity, the Left’s oppositional repositioning, and the role of aesthetic practices in response to these challenges. Susan Buck-Morss’ *Thinking Past Terror: Islamism and Critical Theory on the Left*, published three years earlier in 2003, tackles these exact same topics but with a different inflection.<sup>8</sup> Retort and Buck-Morss do, however, converge in their assessment of art’s oppositional role. Whilst they see art’s subversive potential, they cite its current irrelevance and impotence. Despite this, Buck-Morss points to artists who are utilizing alternative strategies of critical practice and escaping the “gated community of the artworld” in exchange for their social relevance. In their works, these artists share the themes and gestures of disappearance, escape, and self-erasure as a challenge to the ontological emphasis of the artist identity in contemporary art (70-72). With them as models, Buck-Morss reaffirms art’s critical role, arguing that: “Artistic practice might contribute to a general reactivation of social

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<sup>7</sup> For more details on Retort’s installation, go to <http://retort.ludd.net/msg00691.html>, accessed July 10, 2012.

<sup>8</sup> Much like Retort, Buck-Morss, in *Thinking Past Terror*, speaks with a certain political urgency regarding what she sees as “the mutation of a new, global body-politics” (21). In the terrorist attacks, not only was the violence staged as a spectacle for viewers in the US but the same images were also played and replayed before a global audience, igniting drastically different affect and effects. Such situation is not just the daily reality of globalized media but reflects equally the condition of global immanence, by which Buck-Morss – borrowing the notion from Hardt and Negri – refers to a reality that our common global space is “overdetermined, contradictory, and intractably diverse.” In view of this immanent global sphere, Buck-Morss poses three interlocking questions: what does critical thinking look like within this immanent world; what would this criticality mean for a critical global public sphere; and most importantly, how might the process of this critical thinking foster a transglobal Left that might be capable of contesting, among many woes, global economic exploitation and injustice, as well as power inequalities. Deviating from Retort, Buck-Morss claims the answer to all three questions lies in a critical exploration of Islamism, a discursive field made up of the various political and oppositional discourses articulated through Islam. While Retort traces the emergence of a revolutionary and vanguardist Islam, rejects its terror, and posits a Left resistance against it, Buck-Morss calls for engagement with politicized Islam. According to her, this way of thinking beyond one’s own discursive terrains and intellectual traditions (hers being the Frankfurt School) is what democracy on a global scale requires (4). Doing so would initiate a rethinking of politics within the changing conditions of a global public sphere, which in Buck-Morss’ envisioning, consists of people who, though speaking different political languages, are united by their target of resistance and unified goals (4-5). If Retort had, by 2005, witnessed the rising of the multitude in its spatially-separated, globally-united, and yet futile opposition against the war in Iraq, Buck-Morss, writing in the fall of 2002, was still investing her faith in the resistance potential of a critical global public sphere.

imagination, circulating via the new media's unprecedented power – nothing less than a grass-roots, globally extended, multiply articulated, radically cosmopolitan and critical counter-culture" (72). Here, Buck-Morss' rather affirmative tone and her positive qualifiers for this critical counter-culture contrast interestingly, as Loren Glass argues, with Retort's drafting of the Left's oppositional project – aided by art or not – which could only be imagined by what it is not through an invocation of "nons": "non-anathematizing, non-regressive, and non-fundamental" (Glass 228; Retort 185).

Unlike Retort and Buck-Morss, formulating a new Left opposition is neither the explicit motivation nor the theme of W.J.T. Mitchell and his various texts on the visual history of the war on terror. But Mitchell has amplified both Retort and Buck-Morss' claims by painstakingly probing this realm of images and detailing the damning visual evidence of the violent reality of neo-liberal capitalism under the conditions of spectacle, as described earlier by Retort. These are images that bring the "unspeakable and unimaginable things into view," claims Mitchell in *Cloning Terror: The War of Images, 9/11 to the Present* (68), published in 2011.

With the catastrophe of 9/11 and the ensuing war on terror having bequeathed a trail of images that travels from Ground Zero to Baghdad, to Fallujah, and to Abu Ghraib, Mitchell ventures beyond the art world to examine images from popular culture, such as newspaper photographs, cartoons, and murals, and identifies their intertextuality. His surveying of these images is affixed to another phenomenon: clones and cloning. As Mitchell explains, the onset of this age of terrorism in the fall of 2001 came closely on the heel of an ongoing national debate in the US about cloning and stem cell research. Besides their temporal proximity, other kinships exist between this emergence of international terrorism and the technical revolutions in the biological sciences.<sup>9</sup> While the insertion of the cloning theme allows Mitchell to discuss simultaneously the implications of biotechnology, and biopolitics and terrorism, it is in his

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<sup>9</sup> Mitchell calls this convergence "cloning terror," by which he refers to, first, the paradoxical, if not tragic, process by which the war on terror leads to more retaliatory terror, "cloning" more terrorists while trying to extinguish them; second, the reproduction of images, with digital images "cloning" themselves and circulating rapidly in a process enabled by the internet and digital photography; third, the cinematic representation of terrorists as clones, with terrorists often portrayed as "a headless or at least faceless automaton, masked and anonymous"; fourth, the doubling and mirroring of the enemies, which creates an uncanny symmetry between figures of the empire and the terrorist, as illustrated by an anti-war cartoon featuring "Uncle Osama" as the graphic clone of Uncle Sam; fifth, proliferation of atrocity photographs and videos (beheading and dismemberment of Americans, for example) and the recurrence of the hooded figure in various genres of photography, from the hooding of Saddam Hussein's statue with an American flag in Baghdad, to the image of the Hooded Man of Abu Ghraib, and to artistic responses to the Hooded Man. One final affinity between terror and cloning is the syndrome he calls "clonophobia," the terror and horror of the process of cloning itself that reflects deeper "ancient anxieties about copying, imitation, artificial life, and image-making" (xiv).

discussion of the Abu Ghraib archive and the Hooded Man photograph (in which he details the image's resemblance to the iconography of the Passion of Christ), that one senses his aim for resurrecting these images of the war; that endeavor being to jolt the public's memory and to avert historical amnesia, as the American public has yet to acknowledge responsibility for these acts of war committed in their name, argues Mitchell (xvi).<sup>10</sup> Confronting these photographs, especially the Hooded Man, means reaching beyond their meanings and operations and asking as spectators what it means to live with them and the world they depict, according to Mitchell (152). What has hampered the acknowledgement of responsibility – given that the release of the photographs in the spring of 2004 caused a scandal but did not lead to wider political effects – seems to be what Mitchell describes as “a peculiar combination of ignorance and idealism, blindness and innocence” on the part of Americans (“Cloning” 206). Here though, lies the potential for aesthetic practices.

In highlighting this American ignorance and innocence, Mitchell turns to two artworks, which either directly show the Abu Ghraib photographs or adopt the iconic hooding sign and theme, thus extending the life of those original images and offering a critique in the process. In this way, Mitchell's usage of Lawrence Weschler and Naomi Herskovic's *American Innocence* (2007) and Hans Haacke's *The Stargazer* (2004) as oppositional materials reaffirm Buck-Morss' earlier claim that artistic practice might assist in reactivating social imagination. Reactivation in this case, however, occurs through a haunting, as these two artistic renderings contain spectral traces of the original Abu Ghraib scene of torture; they are images that have the potential to haunt the public's memory by extending the visibility of the original photographs.

### **From Images of War to War of Images**

The war on terror has produced spectacular military images of “shock and awe” from the battlefield, but away from the war scenes, a different kind of warring has also developed over images of war victims. This last category of people – victims of the war on terror – and their effacement from public view are some of the concerns in Judith Butler's *Precarious Life: The*

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<sup>10</sup> By the time Mitchell's *Cloning Terror* was published in 2011, the war had already been downgraded to “Overseas Contingency Operations.” Mitchell, of course, had been studying these images for some time. Chapters of *Cloning Terror* were written either during or shortly after the Bush administration. Earlier versions appeared as stand-alone articles, such as “Cloning Terror: The War of Images 2001-2004” in *The Life and Death of Images: Ethics and Aesthetics*, ed. Diarmuid Costello and Dominic Willson (London: Tate Publishing, 2008) 179-207; “The Unspeakable and the Unimaginable: Word and Image in a Time of Terror,” *ELH: English Literary History* 72.2 (2005): 291-308. All my references are from the book, with the exception of the final one, which came from the “Cloning Terror” article.

*Powers of Mourning and Violence*. Their erasure can be approached, first, through a discussion on framing, the establishment of boundaries that regulates “a sphere of appearance” which conditions “what ‘can’ be heard, read, seen, felt and known” (xx-xxi) (this theme will be discussed in depth in my next chapter and in chapter five); second, such an inadmissibility of victim images into the public sphere, as governed by framing, is then related more broadly: “The question that preoccupies me in the light of recent global violence is, Who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives? And, finally *What makes for a grievable life?*” asks Butler (20, italics in original). Emphasizing our shared corporeal vulnerability, Butler is prompted by what she sees as a differential allocation of grievability, given that certain non-American losses – Afghan and Iraqi deaths from US military campaigns, for example – remain unseen in the media, therefore unthinkable and de-realized, and more importantly, ungrievable. This becomes a nullification, which, in Butler’s mind, robs these victims of their status as “humans.” In contrast, the 9/11 victims were recognized nationally in America with their lives honored in public obituaries, such as the “Portraits of Grief” series in *The New York Times*.<sup>11</sup> Their names are engraved on national memorials, and their deaths have been commemorated every year on September 11 in official ceremonies.

This unequal distribution of recognition and grievability is closely intertwined with issues of representation, both concerning an absence of representation and the modes of representation. The framing establishes what images – war casualties inflicted by the US, as just mentioned – are excluded, thus rendering certain groups of people faceless, but it also determines what images must be included and how they might be instrumentalized, as ways of humanization or dehumanization. In discussing these forms of war-related media representations, Butler turns to Emmanuel Levinas’s notion of the “face,” a word which, paradoxically, does not literally refer to a human face but operates more as catachresis; it suggests a series of displacements and actually points to “a scene of agonized vocalization” and “the extreme precariousness of the other.” Through a misrepresentation of sorts, the face is related to human suffering and the cry of human suffering (133-134 and 144). Butler claims: “To respond to the face, to understand its meaning, means to be awake to what is precarious in another life or, rather, the precariousness of life itself” (134).

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<sup>11</sup> These profiles of 9/11 victims first appeared in *The New York Times*, but they became so well-received that they were reprinted in a book entitled *Portraits 9/11/01: The Collected “Portraits of Grief” from The New York Times*; the series is also an interactive archive available at <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/us/sept-11-reckoning/portraits-of-grief.html>, accessed April 20, 2013.

While this Levinasian “face” introduces disjointedly a figure that is not exclusively a human face and reflects more elaborately on a relationality with an Other through an affirmation of that Other’s precariousness, it nevertheless communicates what is human (xviii-xix). Butler relates this metaphoric face to several media representations of the (literal) human faces of the Other, such as images of Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein, both of whom have mutated into the face of terror and tyranny, respectively. (One is also reminded of the facelessness of Abu Ghraib’s Hooded Man, just discussed by Mitchell). Then, there are images of the faces of Afghan girls who dropped their burkas following the US invasion in 2001 that removed the Taliban from power. And yet, these Afghan images of celebration and liberation are capitalized to symbolize American triumph, Butler argues (142).<sup>12</sup> These faces are instrumentalized to personify evil or military victories, and in them, one can no longer apprehend what is human, or more precisely, human precarity. In the case of bin Laden and Hussein, their faces have become the targets of war; and in the case of the Afghan girls, their faces have become the spoils of war (143). Butler asks:

Where is loss in that face? And where is the suffering over war? Indeed, the photographed face seemed to conceal or displace the face in the Levinasian sense, since we saw and heard through that face no vocalization of grief or agony, no sense of the precariousness of life ... Most importantly, though, it seems we have to ask what scenes of pain and grief these images cover over and derealize. (142 and 143)

Through Butler, one can now identify two forms of power that are operative in this war of images: one that functions through an effacement, an elision of images that consign some to non-existence; and a second that forces faces to be symbolically identified with the inhuman, and as a result, forecloses the viewer’s ability to see and apprehend Levinas’s scene of suffering, precarity and agony (147).

Much more mundane and conventional powers and politics of representation, such as stereotyping, seem also to be at work in this struggle over images. Dominating the copious archive of 9/11 and post-9/11 images are faces and bodies of suspected enemies/terrorists, Arabs,

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<sup>12</sup> Unveiling, of course, is a key trope in Orientalist discourse and imaginary. As Michelle Aguayo argues: “Unveiling the Muslim woman both literally and metaphorically has been a fantasy and mission taken on by both Western men and women and currently has worked to ground the war on terror.” See her “Representations of Muslim Bodies in *The Kingdom*: Deconstructing Discourses in Hollywood,” *Global Media Journal* (Canadian Edition) 2.2 (2009): 46-47.

and Muslims, identities that have been connected tenuously in the wake of the attacks. It is this common penchant of yoking together Muslims at large, Islam and terrorism that steers much of the debate over visual representation; this issue of representation has also been magnified by the war-incited process of enemification, a discourse of evil, and the legacy of Orientalism. These matters, too, are instigations of resistant aesthetic practices.

In view of 9/11 and military violence, Butler, via Levinas, focuses on the precariousness of the Other. This primacy of the Other contrasts greatly from both the official and popular discourses of the time, in which the issue of alterity, in this case Arabs and/or Muslims, is entangled in the process of enemification in the war on terror. This battle over perceptions endures, one in which the identities of both “us” and “them” are formulated and solidified dialectically. As James Der Derian sees it, this post-9/11 relationship between “us” and “them” occurs “... along a wide spectrum of familiarity and friendliness, indifference and tolerance, estrangement and hostility. It can result in appreciation or denigration, accommodation or separation, assimilation or extermination” (328). On one end of the spectrum, extermination is reserved for the absolute enemy: the terrorist, whose media representation through the term evil has already been highlighted by Butler. A discourse of evil, too, operates in tandem with such representations.

A hallmark of Bush’s public speeches in the immediate days following 9/11 was his unrelenting accentuation of “evil,” and more specifically, a repeated depiction of a post-9/11 world as “good versus evil.”<sup>13</sup> As part of this discourse of evil, America is portrayed as an innocent country that was attacked “out of the blue” (Croft 85) and a country that must wage a global war against terrorism in response. Without an evil enemy threatening “our way of life,” the war on terror would be a difficult policy program to defend.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> “The evildoers,” “evil people,” “the evil ones,” “instruments of evil,” and “the cult of evil” were all descriptions used by Bush. Here are some specific examples: his utterance on September 25, 2001, “And make no mistake about it: this is good versus evil. These are evildoers. They have no justification for their actions. There’s no religious justification, there’s no political justification. The only motivation is evil.” Bush made the statement following a meeting with former Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi. For the complete transcript see [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/sept11/president\\_057.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/sept11/president_057.asp), accessed July 9, 2012. Also consider his comment on October 24, 2001: “They (the terrorists) are so evil and so dark and so negative.” For more examples, see George W. Bush, *We Will Prevail: President George W. Bush on War, Terrorism and Freedom* (New York: Continuum, 2003).

<sup>14</sup> For detailed analyses of the rhetorical construction of the 9/11 enemy, see Richard Johnson, “Defending Ways of Life: The (Anti-)Terrorist Rhetorics of Bush and Blair,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 19.4 (2002): 211-32, and Richard Jackson, “Constructing Enemies: ‘Islamic Terrorism’ in Political and Academic Discourse,” *Government and Opposition: A Quarterly of Comparative Politics* 42.3 (2007): 394-426. For insights into the narrative construction of the catastrophe itself, see chapter two of Stuart Croft’s *Culture, Crisis and America’s War on Terror* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

What this discourse of evil invites is not sustained political debates, negotiations and diplomacy, but military actions and retaliation. That rationale was expressed by the former British Prime Minister Tony Blair on October 2, 2001, when he spoke at the Labour Party Conference: “There is no compromise possible with such people, no meeting of minds, no point of understanding with such terror. Just a choice: defeat it or be defeated by it. And defeat it we must.”<sup>15</sup> With evil and extermination thus fastened together rhetorically, this combination has animated the popular visual imagination and generated wider implications for the representational politics of Muslim bodies. Enmity depends on a propagation of images and stereotypes, and it is unsurprising that popular culture is replete with images of terrorists corresponding to universal archetypes of the enemy, such as barbarians, beasts, and torturers.<sup>16</sup>

Media researchers Brigitte L. Nacos and Oscar Torres-Reyna point to the full-page, “heavily red-tinted” facial shot of bin Laden published in the first post-9/11 issue of the popular US weekly news magazine *Time* which, in their view, augments the al-Qaeda leader’s personification of evil, thus dovetailing President Bush’s characterization of him as evildoer (48).<sup>17</sup> That same image, but lacking the hellish color, dominates the cover of the news magazines’ next issue on October 1, 2001; this time, the photograph is only accompanied by the magazine’s name-logo, plus a three-worded declaration: “TARGET: BIN LADEN.” No other text appears on this unencumbered cover. One single photograph, thus, conveniently and economically represents both evil and extermination; two abstractions that eventually converge on that very same photograph.

No doubt even before 9/11, there existed a visual heritage of hegemonic representations of Arabs and Muslims in Western media, and much of it could be considered essentializing representations and negative stereotypes. As many scholars have pointed out, long-standing Orientalist cultural stereotypes have been revived as a consequence of 9/11, underscoring the persistent hostility of Western media towards Islam and Muslims.<sup>18</sup> From moving images in

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<sup>15</sup> The full text of the speech was printed in *The Guardian*, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2001/oct/02/labourconference.labour6>, accessed July 9, 2012.

<sup>16</sup> If “a failure of imagination” was how The 9/11 Commission described the US intelligence community’s inability to foresee and prevent the terrorist attacks, the expression is also appropriate to depict the absence of creativity among the popular-culture and official images of the 9/11 public enemy. Most of these dehumanizing images and figures are regurgitations of the archetypes of the enemy already documented in Sam Keen’s *Faces of the Enemy: Reflections of the Hostile Imagination* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986).

<sup>17</sup> According to Nacos and Torres-Reyna, that red-tinted photo of bin Laden appeared in the September 24, 2001 edition of *Time*, on page 55. The photo was unavailable in the magazine’s electronic archive.

<sup>18</sup> See Edward Said’s “Orientalism Once More,” *Development and Change* 35.5 (2004): 869-79. His earlier works on this topic include David Barsamian’s *Culture and Resistance: Conversations with Edward W. Said* (Cambridge:

Hollywood films, television news and dramas to still photographs in popular American newspapers and magazines, from political cartoons to public posters, images of Muslim bodies proliferate, but most are considered negatively conceived. Researchers have scrutinized these unsympathetic representations, which they contend that all hold fast to several common stereotypes. In a different context that is not exclusively focused on media stereotypes, Sherene H. Razack states that three allegorical figures have come to dominate the war on terror: “the dangerous Muslim man, the imperiled Muslim woman, and the civilized European” (5). The relationship and dynamic of this trio is, no doubt, one that has been famously and tersely described by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak as “White men are saving brown women from brown men” (296).<sup>19</sup> How have these three figures, which Razack transplants to the fields of law and national social policies, been translated into media images in the past and in the post-9/11 present?

In *Reel Bad Arabs*, for example, Jack Shaheen catalogues more than 900 Hollywood films to identify the various stereotypes of Arabs on screen even before 9/11.<sup>20</sup> Focusing on the news genre, Nacos and Torres-Reyna examine American news media’s post-9/11 portrayal of Muslims, both living within the US and abroad; among their emphases are visuals in the news, both moving and still pictures. In one specific case study of the two popular weekly news magazines *Time* and *Newsweek*, Nacos and Torres-Reyna suggest, following their qualitative and quantitative content analysis, that Muslim males in general had been “overwhelmingly” depicted as “terrorists, suspected terrorists, sympathizers of terrorist groups, or otherwise utterly evil.” Muslim women had been shown mostly as victims and often as battered by Muslim men.

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South End Press, 2003); *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981). For a more general study on the representation of Muslims in the news media in Britain and elsewhere, refer to Elizabeth Poole and John Richardson, ed., *Muslims and the News Media* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006).

<sup>19</sup> Spivak’s phrase was articulated in a different British colonial context, but this rescue paradigm has been applied as a parallel to the post-9/11 American military intervention in Afghanistan to save Afghan women from the Taliban, as several scholars have pointed out. Consult for example Miriam Cooke’s “Saving Brown Women,” *Signs* 28.1 (2002): 468-470; Carol A. Stabile and Deepa Kumar’s “Unveiling Imperialism: Media, Gender and the War on Afghanistan,” *Media, Culture & Society* 27.5 (2005): 765-782; and page 41 of Butler’s *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004).

<sup>20</sup> According to Shaheen, Hollywood has systematically portrayed Arabs through five archetypes: villains (quintessentially evil and mostly anti-American); sheikhs (ostentatiously oil-rich, lecherous and ogling Western blondes or attended by harem maidens); maidens (humiliated, demonized, eroticized, and as “Bundles of Black”); Egyptians (always linked to “mummies and money”); and finally, Palestinians (irrational, terrorizing, or as terrorists, and as a people to be exterminated), see pages 14-27 of *Reel Bad Arabs*. Rather than taking on Hollywood as a whole, many researchers have also concentrated on representations of Muslims in a single film. For example, Michelle Aguayo has provided an analysis of the post-9/11 film *The Kingdom* (2007), see her “Representations of Muslim Bodies in *The Kingdom*: Deconstructing Discourses in Hollywood,” *Global Media Journal* (Canadian Edition) 2.2 (2009): 41-56.

Moreover, this negative depiction of Muslim males was more pronounced in the context of the war in Afghanistan (46).

As these aforementioned texts demonstrate, while stereotypical and negative representations of Muslims abound, so does the critique of such reductive representational strategies. Given that the critique of stereotypes is always in danger of becoming a stereotype in itself, and therefore diminish its own criticality, this question of Muslim stereotypes and negative representation requires different forms of critical interventions that would outflank the issue of stereotypes. As I will soon demonstrate, this task would fall on creative expressions that confront the hostile discourse and imagination through an alternative strategy of laughter, conviviality, and illegibility.

### **Crossing Disciplines**

The post-9/11 politicization of artistic practices is a topic that has impacted multiple disciplines. Besides involving those disciplines that have been traditionally engaged with the relationship between politics and the arts, such as art history, literature, cultural and media studies, the entanglements of creative productions and 9/11 politics have also energized debates in disciplines such as International Relations and security studies. Take as a starting point the “special issues” relating to art and visual culture that have been published by the *Review of International Studies* and *Security Dialogue* in recent years. For the *Security Dialogue* special issue, which considers the power of the image and its complex relations to reality in the framework of global security, this emphasis on artistic endeavors – cartoon, photography, film, television drama, art, and video game – seems to arise more out of a necessity, given culture and visual culture’s impact on post-9/11 securitization and militarization. The editors keenly recognize how visual culture can both “sustain and disturb,” with some aspects of visual culture “aiding and abetting securitization and militarization and some serving as a domain of critical practice and counter-memory...” While visual culture is entangled in new military strategies, it is simultaneously enabling critical practices to challenge those strategies, stress the editors (Campbell and Shapiro 132-133). Although the word resistance is never mentioned, the editors do acknowledge the oppositional force of aesthetic objects.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> See Campbell and Shapiro’s introduction, “Special Issue on Securitization, Militarization and Visual Cultures in the Worlds of Post-9/11,” *Security Dialogue* 38.2 (June 2007): 131-137.

The themed issue of *Review of International Studies* places an even stronger accent on artistic endeavors as forms of intervention in global politics. In the introduction, the guest editors make an impassioned case for the importance of art in the study of International Relations. Starting with the assumption that “art matters, ethically and politically; affectively and intellectually,” the editors assert that artists’ visions of the world are “insightful, and consequential” and what they think and make is “profoundly interesting and important” (Danchev and Lisle 775). In their assessment, artistic endeavors have the potential to bring different understanding/insights of the world, and they also have an interventionist function. The editors quote Picasso’s words that “painting is not made to decorate apartments” but rather, “it is an offensive and defensive weapon against the enemy”; they then issue the call “Let us mobilize it [art]” (Danchev and Lisle 777). In this sense, art is a highly valued resource.<sup>22</sup>

Others in the field of International Relations have articulated similar sentiments. In a series of articles, Roland Bleiker has examined art’s relevance in International Relations scholarship, particularly in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks. According to him, 9/11 produced not just a breach of security, but also a breach of human understanding, creating a gap between the violent experience and the apprehension of it by one’s existing conceptual and descriptive grid. Furthermore, he claims that contemporary security threats, terrorism in particular, have become so complex and transnational and yet the conventional means of strategic and policy analyses to address these threats have not changed (“Art, Emotions” 48). He sees aesthetic sources responding to these and other issues in several ways: first, artistic insights have the potential to shed light on that breach of understanding following 9/11, for artistic representations might capture emotional dimensions that are missing from other analyses; second and specifically to International Relations, the arts, thus positioned as an alternative source of insight, can create opportunities to broaden understanding of political and security issues.<sup>23</sup> While not suggesting that one should turn from the challenges of world politics and turn to poetry reading and art gazing, Bleiker says: “The key, rather, is to draw upon the innovative nature of the aesthetic to rethink deeply entrenched and often narrowly conceived approaches to understanding and solving world political problems” (“Learning” 417). To put his thoughts and

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<sup>22</sup> See Danchev and Lisle’s introduction in *Review of International Studies* 35.4 (October 2009): 775-779.

<sup>23</sup> For Bleiker’s articles on art’s relevance, see “Aestheticising Terrorism: Alternative Approaches to 11 September,” *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 49.3 (2003): 430-45; “Learning from Art: A Reply to Holden’s ‘World Literature and World Politics,’” *Global Society* 17.4 (2003): 415-28; “Art, Emotions and Global Terrorism,” *Social Alternatives* 23.2 (2004): 48-53; and “Art after 9-11,” *Alternatives: A Journal of World Policy* 31.1 (2006): 77-99.

questions more bluntly, how useful exactly is art for these fields and what is art's added value epistemologically? Can one, through aesthetic sources, gain (emotional) insights into political puzzles?

These various International Relations scholars do not articulate a unified project for the arts and for artistic oppositional practices relating to 9/11; they do, nevertheless, seem to approach aesthetic engagements with greater enthusiasm than the art specialists themselves. If Retort and Buck-Morss both pointed to the oft-perceived feebleness of art, these political scientists seem more hopeful of what artistic endeavors may accomplish: facilitate understanding of 9/11, shed light on global security challenges and terrorism in particular, and invigorate stale political thinking, to name but a few possibilities. The divergence between these disciplines is not just one of optimism or the lack thereof expressed by their representatives, but one of different conceptualizations of politics and the arts. International Relations scholars sometimes efface creative projects' formal distinctiveness, complexities, and autonomy, thus exploring only aesthetic objects' political content, pronouncements, and didacticism. This overlooks the tensions between direct activism and aesthetic virtuosity. Additionally, for these International Relations and security studies scholars, politics and the arts remain two separate realms so that artistic practices can be mobilized and undergo a smooth passage from their own domain to aid the other. My study, using Rancière's particular notions of politics and aesthetics as the theoretical guide, seeks to complicate such easy passages between politics and the arts. Reinforced by Rancière's works, this project aims to intervene into the stalemate over post-9/11 politicized artistic practices. My aim here is not to dampen Bleiker and others' enthusiasm for art's power, but to be attentive simultaneously to an object's political engagement, aesthetic form and other significant challenges such as commercial circulation and profitability.

### **Artistic Interventions**

The previous three sections identify some of the key thematic, theoretical and textual nodes in post-9/11 cultural politics, progressing from Žižek's Real to Retort's capital and spectacle; from Buck-Morss' critical counter-culture to Mitchell's images of torture; from Butler's invisible images and dehumanizing faces to ubiquitous figures of dangerous Muslim males and imperiled women in the media. These issues provide strong impetus for creative interventions that spark both optimism and gloom for scholars in different fields.

Against this backdrop, this dissertation presents a multimedia collection of cultural

expressions – a best-selling novel, a political hip hop album, a television situation comedy, and a compilation of studio photographs – which can be envisioned as artistic resistance, for they not only engage with the aforementioned key themes of 9/11, but also counter the many cultural responses to 9/11 that conform to the conventional grid of trauma, immediacy, and eulogy. Enlivening and advancing the key issues of 9/11, my multimedia objects reflect both the heterogeneity of the field of culture and the practice of resistance. Resistance is by nature a creative and dynamic process that crosses many disciplines depending on how/where that resistance is manifested, which medium is being utilized and the chosen target of resistance. Take the simple act of naming. Cultural resistance goes by many different labels depending on the academic discipline in which one finds oneself: critical artistic practices, socially-engaged or politically-engaged art practices, and subversive art seem accepted terms for art historians.<sup>24</sup> Cultural studies, on the other hand, speaks of creative dissent, consumer resistance, and cultural activism, while media studies works with well-discussed concepts such as adbusting, culture jamming, and Third Cinema. Textual resistance has a long history in literature, and has been prominent in recent decades through the emergence of post-colonial, feminist, and ethnic literatures. What binds all these traditions is that force of resistance this dissertation aims to crystallize: a desire to change the state of play and to challenge power, whether that power is globalization, patriarchy, the culture industry, or in this specific case, perceptual and sensory constraints.

My four 9/11 objects consist of different media that are located in several traditional academic disciplines (media, cultural, art/visual, and literary studies). Consequently, an interdisciplinary approach is a given. This eclectic selection aims to highlight the broad category that is cultural resistance, which incorporates a multiplicity of oppositional practices in terms of their forms, agents, scales, public visibility, strategies, and goals.<sup>25</sup> I have categorized my objects as cultural resistance in that they, as both cultural and artistic expressions, seek to resist and contest dominant meanings, discourses, affects, and representations, whether consciously or unconsciously. Given that the designation of cultural resistance itself is rather unstable, and my objects are also fluid in terms of their different media, agents, visibility, and scale, to name just a few dissimilarities, it is more important to assess these objects and their resistance in their

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<sup>24</sup> For a helpful overview of the history of the politicization of art, see Will Bradley and Charles Esche's edited volume *Art and Social Change: A Critical Reader* (London: Tate Publishing, 2007) and Gerald Raunig's *Art and Revolution: Transversal Activism in the Long Twentieth Century* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007).

<sup>25</sup> For a primer on the concept of cultural resistance, see Stephen Duncombe's edited volume *Cultural Resistance Reader* (London: Verso, 2002). Duncombe's approach, however, is highly idealized.

specific context and use their categorization as cultural resistance as a helpful starting point. The reference to culture points to these objects' general circulation within the realm of popular culture, as well as their subject matters. Resistance here refers to my objects' self-asserted ontological and potential operational status and my own descriptive and analytical designation rather than a link to a political resistance movement. Not all of the objects ally themselves specifically with broader social struggles. Resistance here also does not presume their reception as resistance objects by their spectators, or any efficacy. Although not the main analytical preoccupation of this dissertation, the issue of spectator is acknowledged and will be addressed more intently at different stages, especially in chapter three on hip hop music and in the conclusion.

Viewing them with a casual glance, an initial inspection may not designate my objects – with the exception of the hip hop album *Sonic Jihad* in which confrontation is outspoken and self-declared by the artist – as explicitly oppositional; these objects might have even passed unnoticed as resistance, as cultural resistance often can be maneuvering unobtrusively in liminal spaces. Resistance here might sometimes feel tentative, fragmentary, inchoate or even confined to just a potentiality. And yet, a tangible resistant energy persists in them, emitting a sudden outburst of defiance at one moment and a surge of antagonism at another. Sometimes it is the producers' intent that directly protests against prevailing attitudes, as in the case of *Little Mosque on the Prairie*; sometimes it is their glaring contrast to the formulaic aesthetic of enemy images that distinguishes them as counter-images, as in the case study of the Taliban soldier studio photographs. And it is also in the way a novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, overshoots the canonical themes and expected pathos of 9/11 and attempts to dismantle the certitude of post-9/11 discourse and identities. This study crystallizes these and their other resistance features. It neither idealizes them nor views them with Retort's gloomy prognosis, but evaluates them and inserts more imagination in our conceptualization of what resistance is and *could* be.

While Žižek, Retort and Buck-Morss position and envision resistance firmly within the tradition of the Left, my four objects cannot be so easily compressed into a Left or Right categorization. While *Sonic Jihad* clearly exhibits Leftist revolutionary fervor, the hip hop artist Paris himself, when away from the microphone, does not necessarily march down a narrow revolutionary road. *Little Mosque on the Prairie* seeks more "accurate" representations of Muslims and Islam, an endeavor which cannot be attributed solely to the Left or Right; the politics of the Taliban photographs, as indicated by the photographer who found the images, are

ambivalent at best and opportunistic at worst and, in any case, the images can function as a counter measure against both the spectacle and the evil/extermination discourse. This underscores the fact that resistance projects might share Leftist vocabulary and targets as merely a starting point but never fully align with its values and ambitions, posing the question whether fidelity to the Left is necessary when it comes to envisaging resistance.

With the exception of the Taliban photographs, the objects were produced in the West, and all of them have an Internet presence, suggesting globalized distribution and circulation. This positioning also reveals an unresolved geographical disorientation that characterizes 9/11's cultural legacy. While these four objects circulate widely outside the US and have as their settings locations such as Lahore, the Canadian prairie, and Kandahar, they exhibit a strong counter tug back to the US with their references to and critique of the former Bush administration, post-9/11 America, American identity, and the war on terror. In other words, they cast their gazes toward the US but they are not always US-centered or -based, reasserting their own varied geographical assumptions and local perspectives. This local/transnational and inward/outward bifocal quality is very much in line with many effects of 9/11 – military, political, and cultural – that defy clear geographical delimitation. This is prominently seen, for example, in the extraterritoriality of the Guantánamo Bay detention camp for terrorist suspects and the transnational juridical entanglements of a global war on terror campaign.

Although the objects are dissimilar, they are connected, with one trailing off on one issue and the other extending it. Take the theme of empire as an illustration. Just like *Retort*, both *Sonic Jihad* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* denounce the post-9/11 militarization of neoliberal capitalism, but neither coupled this to the regime of image and the war of appearances. It is the Taliban photographs that deepen this issue, but not as the incriminating visual evidence of imperial violence akin to Abu Ghraib. They show neither acts of atrocity nor torture and will unlikely have the capacity to nudge the public's conscience and force viewers to acknowledge complicity; an admission that Mitchell believes must still occur. But they do, once again thinking along with Mitchell, raise the question of what it means to live with these photographs that depict one of the prime "enemies" of the war on terror and the precarious world and lives they represent.

*Little Mosque on the Prairie* mounts its resistance through self-representation by showcasing its own versions of modern Muslim men and women, none of which are dangerous or imperiled, respectively. As a matter of fact, most of the Muslim characters in the show have

assimilated quite successfully into their fictional Canadian lives. In contrast to Buck-Morss' call for a critical exchange with Islamism, *Little Mosque* chooses to depoliticize Islam completely and focuses instead on Islam's religious ideals. Rather than bringing into play politicized Islam's oppositional possibilities, the show offers a post-9/11 road map of sorts for Western Muslims to meet the challenges of living in a modern and secular world, which requires certain creative maneuvering to fulfill their religious duties.

While *Taliban* and *Little Mosque on the Prairie* contest dominant representations of the enemy and Muslims, *Sonic Jihad* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* both frustrate the creation of an "us." These two case studies feature figures who hold multiple cultural and national affinities and allegiances, complicating any fixed categorization and absolute demarcation of identities. Addressing the fundamental mechanism of enemification and hostile imagination, these four cases jointly put the process of consolidating "them" and "us" in disarray. As a result, Bush's well-known "us versus them" or "enemy versus friend" divide is impossible to uphold. Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilizations" paradigm, which gained currency and was adopted by some American media outlets after 9/11 as an explanatory framework for the attacks (Abrahamian 531), also becomes problematic in view of these four objects. Huntington's hypothesis, published back in the early 1990s, differentiated a handful of civilizations ("Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic," among others) with stark cultural differences and predicted that the source of international conflicts would no longer be chiefly ideological or economic, but cultural. "The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics ... The most important conflicts of the future will occur along the cultural fault lines separating these civilizations from one another," wrote Huntington in an article published in 1993 (22 and 25). My four objects, however, bring to the fore lives and communities – on a micro level at least – more open to dynamic cultural intermixture, a blurring of lines, interdependence, and cooperation rather than demarcation, antagonism, and opposition.

### **Resisting Collectively**

Though heterogeneous and independent on their own, these four objects are mutually reinforcing, converging on the same targets, tactics, and themes at times, and dispersing to confront other issues. They engage with and extend all the debates already articulated by the key authors in the previous sections. On an individual basis, they might serve as "the points, knots, or focuses of resistance," to use Foucault's imagery (96), which are scattered over the field of 9/11

objects. But taken as a collective, they operate quite differently from the established approaches to 9/11 and resistance.

Current conceptualizations, discussions, and practices of resistance – whether resistance refers to traditional street protests, the more playful and carnivalesque interventions of cultural resistance, and aesthetic resistance that specifically instrumentalizes the arts – are frequently affixed to that mammoth target and enemy: the neo-liberal capitalist world order. The resisters include environmentalists, socialists, anarchists, trade unionists, and artists who are pursuing various aims through a multitude of anti-capitalist/anti-imperialist/anti-globalization movements. Popular targets are the most visible symbols of global capital: multinational corporations, the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. These developments, succinctly surveyed and scrutinized in Louise Amoore’s canonical edited volume *The Global Resistance Reader*, link resistance – in its various expressions from material to aesthetic – to the contestations of the inequalities and exclusions of global finance, the globalization of production and cultural flows (1-6).

While many of the contemporary resistance movements were already active before 9/11, the terrorist attacks in 2001 have offered global protests new impetus with, in the words of Retort, America’s “new round of conquest and colonization.”<sup>26</sup> The war on terror at home and its new anti-terrorism measures, most notably the intensification of surveillance mechanisms, racial, ethnic and religious profiling, and summary detentions, have also spawned protests over the curtailment of civil liberties.<sup>27</sup> Relatedly, a new front for resistance is also emerging against the exercise of “sovereign power” on the bare lives of terrorist suspects and combatants in places such as Guantánamo Bay and Abu Ghraib and against these detainees’ indefinite detention.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> The activities of these global resistance movements and their developments are simply too complex to detail here. It will suffice to list some of the texts covering the aforementioned issues. Books that have taken into consideration post-9/11 politics are *Implicating Empire: Globalization and Resistance in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century World Order* edited by Stanley Aronowitz and Heather Gautney (New York: Basic Books, 2003); *Transforming Globalization: Challenges and Opportunities in the Post 9/11 Era* edited by Bruce Podobnik and Thomas Reifer (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005); Part III of Francis Robert Shor’s *Dying Empire: U.S. Imperialism and Global Resistance* (London: Routledge, 2010). For a non-traditional account of the global anti-capitalist movements, refer to *We are Everywhere: The Irresistible Rise of Global Anticapitalism* (New York: Verso, 2003). For discussions linking creativity, culture and political resistance in relation to neoliberal globalization, see the special issue entitled “The Poetics of Resistance” in *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy* 6.2 (2010).

<sup>27</sup> For a study on post-9/11 violence and racial profiling aimed at Arabs, Muslims, and South Asians, see Muneer Ahmad’s “Homeland Insecurities: Racial Violence the Day after September 11,” *Social Text* 20.3 (2002): 101-115.

<sup>28</sup> For resistance against sovereign power in the contemporary world, see the introduction “Life, Power, Resistance” in *Sovereign Lives: Power in Global Politics* edited by Jenny Edkins, Veronique Pin-Fat, and Michael J. Shapiro (London: Routledge, 2004).

My four objects, however, while paying attention to these common points of resistance, go beyond them and introduce a drastically different target: the sensible order. Woven into these objects are preoccupations with post-9/11 visibility, audibility, and legibility; in other words, they are also fighting their battle at the sensible level, over perceptible and sensory materials. This theme of the sensible can be seen in broad terms as in a realm of the bodily and what can be perceived by the senses, as opposed to cognition and rationality. More specifically, the sensible concerns what is seen/unseen, audible/inaudible, and how these forms of visibility and audibility relate to and impact the community. These four objects seem to be attentive to the fact that power is never only wielded through empire and discerned through its obvious effects of exploitation and oppression, but it sometimes finds its acme through a governing of perception and visibility, designating, as I will elaborate through Rancière's thoughts, what one can see, hear, and say, and who can be seen, heard, and speak.

Power, against which my objects are struggling, is not necessarily only concentrated in and articulated by the state and its apparatus, but it is more diffused and consensual, operating through creations of meanings, significations and perception. This form of power helps to formulate what and how meanings are made from sensible givens and what would become conceivable and possible. This can be explicitly normalizing, disciplinary or subtly restricting fields of possibilities both in terms of thoughts and physical actions. Like other forms of domination, however, this sensible ordering is never secured and can be exposed of its contingency and interrupted to present other modes of visibility and audibility. Such is the task of my cultural objects which amplify the role sense occupies in the wake of a catastrophe. They are not one-off, collective, and visually dramatic forms of resistance, like street demonstrations, but struggles in a protracted battle in the visual, textual and sonic realms. These four objects, with two of them focusing on audibility and two on visuality, all confront a given perceptual field, a certain common sense that governs relations between meanings and the visible/audible. It is a pre-determined conceptual and representational framework, or what Butler might call "the sphere of appearance" which determines what we can see and know (*Precarious* 146). It is about *conditions* of representation/visibility that regulate who/what can appear and what can be heard, indeed, what is to become "reality." Having the potential to offer alternative sensible and perceptible experiences and different modes of visibility, these objects seek to alter this sphere of appearances by broadening the fields of what can be seen and heard, and what is perceivable and thinkable.

To help me navigate through this sensible order, I turn to Rancière's writings on politics and aesthetics, starting with his notion of the distribution of the sensible; a concept which scrutinizes the partitions and configurations that determine what is visible and audible, and as a result thinkable, within a particular field, be it material or discursive. Rancière provides the theoretical pivot that shifts 9/11 and post-9/11 politics into the realm of the sensible and the perceptible. When speaking of the sensible, Rancière is not referring to disaster-induced forms of visibility and audibility, but rather a more general configuration and distribution of the sensible order as part of the structuration of the community. This is a form of governing that establishes an "aesthetic" division in the sense that the partitioning results in certain bodies becoming visible, while others remain invisible, and certain voices being deemed speech and audible, while others are designated as merely noise and illegitimate. His broader theoretical framework serves as the vital backdrop against which the particulars of the 9/11 sensible can be discerned.

Rancière has not written a great deal on 9/11, publishing only two brief essays: "Prisoners of the Infinite," which is extracted from the longer piece "September 11 and Afterwards: A Rupture in the Symbolic Order?"<sup>29</sup> When asked in 2010 whether he was considering writing more on 9/11, perhaps in conjunction with the tenth anniversary of the attacks, his response was simply "no."<sup>30</sup> In these two essays Rancière looks at the structuring of the community in relation to the symbolic but he did not expand on how that process of symbolization – the ways of defining the catastrophe through the symbolization of American togetherness, unity and goodness – has a sensible dimension that governs what kinds of bodies can/should be seen and where, and what voices must be heard. This dissertation addresses this gap by theorizing the role of sensible distributions in the wake of 9/11, thus extending Rancière's line of thinking on 9/11 by using his own concepts.

In addition, Rancière's general reorientation of politics towards the sensible – emphasizing the aesthetic dimension of politics and being alert to the perceptual coordinates and forms of visibility and audibility that are operating in politics – fosters a closer intermingling between politics and art, which consequently advances different impetus, method, and impediment for artistic interventions. As I will detail in the next chapter, his own signature

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<sup>29</sup> 9/11 did also receive some attention in Rancière's *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*; see the chapter "The Ethical Turn of Aesthetics and Politics," in particular page 114. "September 11 and Afterwards: A Rupture in the Symbolic Order?" appeared in *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, pages 97-104. Henceforth, the titles of these books will be abbreviated as *AD* and *DS* in the references. For the complete list of abbreviations, see Appendix I on page 178.

<sup>30</sup> I posed this question to him during his guest lecture at the University of Amsterdam on September 22, 2010.

conceptualization of aesthetic dissensus overturns Retort's adjudication over the art world's current impotence and corroborates Buck-Morss' mindful optimism of art's relevance.

### **Advancing 9/11 Studies**

As the previous sections attest, this dissertation intersects and enlarges some of the key discussions of both 9/11 and cultural resistance. Much thought is also devoted to Rancière's theories and their intertwinements with both 9/11 and artistic resistance. The aims and contributions of the study can be summarized thus: first, in terms of 9/11 studies, to move beyond themes of trauma, commemoration, and patriotism and focus on cultural objects that express oppositionality. Not only that but also to modify the existing conceptualization of post-9/11 politics with a heavier accent on the sensible. This has the consequence of engendering my second contribution, which is to extend resistance studies by shifting the target of resistance from empire and neoliberal capitalism to this different realm of the sensible. Third, in terms of Rancière scholarship, to appropriate his general framework on the sensible and displace it to 9/11, to build on his own limited writings on 9/11, and lastly, via his idea of dissensus, to analyze artistic interventions more critically.

Finally, mimicking my four resistant cultural objects, the dissertation mounts its own oppositional project by inserting this group of previously under-studied cultural materials, thus enlarging and reconfiguring the 9/11 collection of cultural objects under exploration. If 9/11 readers and special issues of academic journals are anything to go by, a cluster of 9/11 objects is currently enjoying canonical status, both in terms of general popularity and academic interests.<sup>31</sup> While two of my chosen objects have received some popular acclaim – *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, already a *New York Times* bestseller, has been adapted into a major Hollywood movie, starring Kate Hudson and released in 2013, and *Little Mosque on the Prairie* has also

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<sup>31</sup> In the field of 9/11 literature, Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* remains the indisputable darling of academia. Other novels in the canon include Ian McEwan's *Saturday*, John Updike's *Terrorist*, Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*, Deborah Eisenberg's *Twilight of the Superheroes*. Even ten years after the attacks, the special anniversary issue of *Modern Fiction Studies* entitled "Fiction after 9/11" devotes several articles to Foer's and DeLillo's novels. For 9/11 hip hop music, some of the often-cited songs are: "Bin Laden" by Immortal Technique, featuring Mos Def, Jadakiss and Eminem; "Why" by Jadakiss; "Raise Up (USA Flag Remix)" by Petey Pablo; and "Welcome to New York City" by Cam'ron with Jay-Z and Juelz Santana. For television, while many American television series, police dramas in particular, offer stand-alone episodes on 9/11, the best-known shows that persistently engage with 9/11 or related themes are: *Rescue Me*, a dramedy on the FX Network and *Homeland* on the cable channel Showtime. In the situation comedy genre, *South Park* has featured a few episodes with references to 9/11 and bin Laden. In terms of a canon for 9/11 and 9/11-related photographic images, Richard Drew's photograph of a man falling from the burning Twin Towers, no doubt, is the most iconic. The photographs from Abu Ghraib have definitely received significant academic scrutiny, as Mitchell's writings already testify.

attracted media coverage, but mostly in Canada – none of them have received extensive, much less exhaustive, academic consideration. Their scholastic low visibility might be seen as an illustration of an academic trend that converges on certain objects but excludes others from the field of 9/11 studies. This project is an attempt to reconfigure that partition. It heightens these objects' visibility and draws out their significance and contributions to 9/11 and cultural resistance, but does not solicit their canonical status. To do so would reinforce the power of canonization that polices inclusions and exclusions. Instead, this study recognizes these four cases in the hope of animating the collective creativity on how we can continue to explore 9/11 anew, even with a chasm of more than ten years.

### **Chapter Overview**

Chapter one establishes the theoretical foundation of the dissertation by considering Rancière's works on the relationship between politics and aesthetics, beginning with his discussion on the political community and ending with his conceptualization of aesthetic dissensus. In order to avoid the danger of reductionism, Rancière's thoughts are surveyed in great detail because his important concepts, such as dissensus, are often embedded in a long line of argument and should not be merely extracted without specifying their original context. Rancière's realm of the sensible and the perceptible is also connected to the specific events of 9/11 and elaborated from a different angle through Butler's term "sphere of appearance." The chapter concludes by clarifying Rancière's influence on the dissertation, marking both its impact and limits.

Chapters two and three identify the key sites of post-9/11 resistance by exploring disruptions relating to national identity, patriotism, and the war on terror. Both chapters also orient post-9/11 politics toward the aesthetic by considering the issue of audibility, or what can be heard. In chapter two, I examine how Mohsin Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* challenges the divide of "us versus them," the dominant refrain of the post-9/11 era, by focusing on the figure of the foreigner and its precarious position in America following 9/11. Highlighting issues of national identity, cultural affiliations, and enemification, Hamid's novel features a transplanted and excluded Pakistani protagonist, Changez, whose alternative encounter with the terrorist attacks denies the naturalization and normalization of patriotism and mourning. In the post-9/11 moment, when the enemy and the terrorist are often envisaged as absolutely external and other, Changez is an ambivalent character who is more American than Americans themselves but also a possible enemy of the state. This and other identity disorientations, as a

result of the catastrophe, generate spaces for resistance against prevalent post-9/11 identity categorizations, spatial demarcations, narrative constraints, and a dominant and conventional memory of the disaster. The novel also provides a pathway into the post-catastrophe sensible order that privileges certain victimized or heroic bodies and their narratives. Utilizing the unconventional form of a dramatic monologue for his novel, Hamid highlights the struggle over audibility and inaudibility by allowing Changez to be the sole speaker of the novel, while relegating another character to inaudibility. Thinking along with Rancière, I emphasize this aesthetic of the political; an approach that sees politics as a conflict centering upon the perceptible or sensible.

Building on this, chapter three continues to explore the aesthetic borders that delimit the sphere of appearance by considering the post-9/11 hip hop album *Sonic Jihad* by the American political rapper Paris. Transitioning from the voice and audibility of a character in a novel, this case study considers the literal and ferocious voice of resistance through Paris's sonic attack against Bush's war on terror, and 9/11's military and cultural legacies. Themes from the previous chapter such as national identity, cultural affiliations, and enemification are expanded through an African-American artist who contrasts his national identity with other forms of subjectivity and identification, demonstrating an internal alterity that hampers any facile attempts to distinguish between post-9/11 friends and foes, citizens and aliens, the included and the excluded, terrorists and patriots. Unlike Changez who is more American than Americans themselves, Paris is an American who refuses to be an American and aligns symbolically, instead, with the terrorists. Dissociating himself from the post-9/11 patriotic fervor, Paris restages Bush's war on terror and nationhood and offers an alternative sonic experience of America through the history of black oppression and through his own global and diasporic affinities. Paris's highly politicized music also points to that troubled interface between politics and aesthetics which lies at the heart of artistic interventions. I offer Rancière's thoughts on aesthetic dissensus, efficacy and intellectual equality as a way to reflect on Paris's politics and its blind spots.

Moving beyond the realm of audibility, chapters four and five address the issue of visibility by investigating the multiple catastrophe-induced ways of seeing. To do so, these two chapters concentrate on two iconic and controversial figures in the war on terror: Muslims and Taliban soldiers. The previous questions concerning oppositional identity, both national and cultural, are now complicated with the added dimension of Islam. The object of inquiry in chapter four is the Canadian situation comedy *Little Mosque on the Prairie*, a series that

showcases the everyday, mundane experiences of a Muslim community by translating those experiences into the beloved and easily recognizable television format. This premise offers resistant possibilities as the show contests hitherto hostile terrorism-related televisual representations and inserts a more banal mode of seeing Muslims and Islam. I situate Muslim figures within a wider Rancièrian regime of visibility and detail a new visibility and visuality anchored in what I will call “oppositional banality.” I also question later in the chapter, however, whether this oppositional process of visual normalization also enfolds Muslim identities and Islam too conveniently and uncritically within the bounds of national loyalty.

Disrupting the post-9/11 visual realm by inserting alternative ways of seeing is also central in the final case study which reflects on counter visualizations of the enemy in the war on terror: the Taliban. Chapter five investigates a collection of studio photographs of Taliban followers taken in 2001 by Afghan photographers in studios in Kandahar. Representing the faces of the enemy, these snapshots and portraits are produced away from the battle scene but it is very much against a broader context of war that they circulate and gain their oppositional significance, as they challenge mainstream media visualizations of the Taliban as the terrorist-enemy. Besides troubling the Taliban’s expected militant identity and masculinity, these images also problematize the post-9/11 “us versus them” divide by inviting a more compassionate, and thus countering, form of viewing that no longer sees them as the enemy. This sympathetic visuality, however, is also scrutinized by returning to Rancièr’s notion of aesthetic dissensus, for the final time, in order to assess how a dissensual way of viewing the Taliban may countervail the controlling of the perceptible and the sensible.

In the conclusion, I cast a final glance on all four case studies, pinpointing their moments of convergence and divergence, as well as my main arguments. These concluding pages also enlarge the scope of this dissertation by entering into the broader discussion on the role of the spectator in artistic manifestations of resistance. This invites a brief consideration of Rancièr’s notion of the “emancipated” spectator and my own critical assessment of his thoughts.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Theorizing 9/11, the Sensible, and Resistance

*Sensible Interventions* establishes a nexus between 9/11, cultural resistance, and the sensible; three elements that are each a complex matter on their own. All carry with them to this juncture their particular politics, histories, and academic mediations that configure their interconnections in intricate ways. The relations between 9/11, culture, and resistance have been broadly sketched in the introduction: the ontology of terrorism that terrifies and haunts a social body, the (televised) spectacularity of the catastrophe itself, the spectacularization of wars, and the process of enemification that ignites a hostile imagination. All these components generate cultural effects that turn the domain of culture into the receptacle of 9/11's major repercussions, acting as the site where meanings, affects, representations, and memories are engendered, propagated and, as I argue in the dissertation, resisted. But how are the sensible and the perceptible embroiled in these discussions?

Catastrophes and terrorism are, after all, on a very basic level, phenomena that fully captivate all sensory faculties. Not only did the toppling of the twin towers provide staggering images that transfixed visuality, but the scene also afflicted audibility (thundering noises of approaching jetliners, deafening sounds of explosion, fire truck sirens); tactility (shards of glass that pierce victims' skin); smell and taste (ash and dust clouds that choke nostrils and throats). Indeed, most people experienced 9/11 only through television, but the hyper-abundance of imagery – both televisual and printed, plus survivor narratives – has provided the imagination with enough details and stimulants for sensing the disaster vicariously. Amid this immersive and demanding sensate encounter, visuality undisputedly dominates with the attacks themselves, and is then perpetuated in a second act with the two wars that boast “shock and awe” as a strategy and hallmark. Away from the battleground, the war on terror, too, calls on all to become vigilant citizens who must quicken all their sensory faculties, and in particular a “watchful visuality,” in order to spot, sense, feel, and even anticipate suspicious circumstances and behaviors and report them.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, this tripartite catastrophe-terrorism-war conjunction insists upon a closer

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<sup>32</sup> For valuable insights on the “vigilant” or “watchful visuality” of the war on terror, see Louise Amoore's “Vigilant Visualities: The Watchful Politics of the War on Terror,” *Security Dialogue* 38.2 (2007): 215- 232. For a more extensive discussion on the politics of catastrophe and sensing the unexpected, see Claudia Aradau and Rens van Munster's *Politics of Catastrophe: Genealogies of the Unknown* (London: Routledge, 2011), especially chapter six “Aesthetics of Catastrophe.”

investigation into the sensible and the ways in which the myriad of sensorial dimensions of 9/11 has pullulated in an afterlife through cultural responses and artistic interventions.

This chapter begins by introducing Rancière's works on the sensible to provide a broad framework through which the events of 9/11 can be elucidated and rearticulated. Rancière's own piece on 9/11 and the symbolic serves as the starting point, but this realm of the sensible and the perceptible is then further elaborated from a different prism, through Butler's analysis of the post-9/11 "sphere of appearance." Without forgetting the issue of resistance, the question of artistic intervention is reinserted into the debate mid-chapter by asking how can the sensible be resisted. This necessitates a brief return to Rancière and an investigation into his concept of dissensus as a possible act of resistance. I end the chapter by marking the limits of Rancière's works on the dissertation, chiefly at the level of methodology, and by expounding on my own analytical comprehensiveness to contextualize my objects' specific medium, modes of resistance, and significance against the history of opposition in their own field.

### **Rancière and the Sensible**

Although Rancière's works have covered many fields and yielded a number of key thoughts, the singular idea of the distribution of the sensible (*le partage du sensible*) has become his best-known concept and one with which the writer is most identified. It forms the central thread that has travelled through most of his books, appearing in his earlier ones such as *On the Shores of Politics* (1995) and *Dis-agreement* (1999), and later in *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible* (2004), and more recently in works such as *Aesthetics and Its Discontents* (2009), *The Emancipated Spectator* (2009) and *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* (2010).<sup>33</sup> Spanning these years and books, this concept has progressed as Rancière himself ventures through the domains of history, philosophy, politics, aesthetics, and cinema. For this preliminary segment, my explorations of this concept are taken from his earlier works, *Dis-agreement*, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, and "Ten Theses on Politics" (which has been reprinted in *Dissensus*), in which he offers more extensive discussions and distinct definitions of the concept. The aim is to provide an outline of this idea, its relationship to traditional conceptualizations of politics and Rancière's own unique notion of politics through aesthetics. Later in this chapter and

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<sup>33</sup> Henceforth the titles of these books will be abbreviated in references as follows: *On the Shores of Politics*, *OSP*; *Dis-agreement: Politics and Philosophy*, *D*; *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, *TPA*; *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, *AD*; *The Emancipated Spectator*, *TES*; *Dissensus*, *DS*. For the complete list of abbreviations, please consult Appendix I on page 178.

as the dissertation progresses, my analysis will begin to engage with the concept specifically through issues of audio and (tele)visual representations, thus giving more prominence to aesthetic concerns. As a result, I will concentrate more on his books *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, *The Emancipated Spectator*, and *Dissensus*.

In “Ten Theses on Politics,” the concept of the distribution of the sensible appears in the context of a political community and how it organizes modes of human being-together or being-apart. Rancière, as well as many other commentators, have all pointed to the fact that the French word *partage* means both that which separates and excludes, as well as that which allows participation (*DS* 36), suggesting both exclusion and inclusion.<sup>34</sup> The sensible, as I have briefly described in the dissertation’s introduction, indicates what can be apprehended by the senses (*TPA* 85). The distribution of the sensible points to a structuration of the community that partitions places and ways of participation in a given community. It concerns how the division of the community operates as it fractures into various groups, social positions and functions; a division or organization which simultaneously reveals exclusions and inclusions, and therefore, a division between who might be visible and invisible, whose voices might be audible and inaudible, and what statements are sayable or unsayable in this common world. To put it more directly, the distribution of the sensible might be seen as a distribution of bodies, voices, and roles in a given field and a determination of those bodies’ capacities (Tanke 2). What is significant to know is whether such a governing is based on equality or inequality. Rancière has detailed two opposing forms of this distribution: the police order and politics, the former being based on inequality and the latter on equality (*D* 28-42).

The police mode of governance is neither repression nor control over the population but the enforcement of that exact partitioning of the sensible. The concept is not to be equated with “state apparatus,” which Rancière claims is linked with a presumed opposition between state and society, with the state seen as machine-like and repressive (*D* 29). For Todd May, the historical reference point for Rancière’s police order/regime might be Foucault’s idea of governmentality, which encompasses practices concerned with the health, safety, welfare, and productivity of a given population (*Political Thought* 41 and “Ethics” 23). The police mode of distribution, within Rancière’s model, assigns bodies to their places and specifies their roles according to their presumed capacities and aptitudes. “The principle of this kind of being-together is simple,”

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<sup>34</sup> For a lengthier discussion on the two meanings of the French word *le partage*, see page 2 of Joseph J. Tanke’s *Jacques Rancière: An Introduction* (London: Continuum, 2011).

writes Rancière in *Dis-agreement*, “it gives to each the part that is his due according to the evidence of what he is. Ways of being, ways of doing, and ways of saying – or not saying – precisely reflect each person’s due” (27). What this mirrors is Plato’s logic of the proper, “a logic that requires everyone to be in their proper place, partaking their proper affairs,” says Rancière in an interview (Panagia 115). In that sense, the police distribution is not a repressive force per se, but a totalizing account of the population. The policing occurs on two levels: the constraining and governing of the sensate life of an individual and the overall sensible fabric/order of the community.

This allocation concurrently signals a form of exclusion in that, while it defines one’s capacity and one’s place and share in the community, it also limits one’s possibility to stray beyond the given apportionment and conquer different tasks, spaces, and times that are not assigned in the first place. It is a distribution/inclusion that actually signals a simultaneous exclusion. This distribution stipulates a hierarchy of places and functions. As the police distribution of the sensible allocates the various parts of the community, determining who has a share where and who does not, it already delimits in advance the sphere of political appearances and participation, revealing the aesthetic nature of politics that Rancière stresses.

In contrast to the police, Rancière introduces the term politics to specify activities that are antagonistic to policing and can interrupt this police distribution of the sensible. In the political community, such activities reconfigure what is given in the sensible with the appearance of Rancière’s famous “the part of those who have no part,” or those who have no part in the community’s configuration. As a result of their appearance, the police order is modified. Rancière argues: “Political activity is whatever shifts a body from the place assigned to it or changes a place’s destination. It makes visible what had no business being seen, and makes heard a discourse where once there was only place for noise” (*D* 30).

What political activities manifest is a different logic; a logic of equality that undermines the harmonious police distribution, under which there exists a perfect count and an alignment of bodies. As Rancière stresses in thesis seven of “Ten Theses on Politics,” under the police regime’s perfect fit of functions, places and ways of beings, “there is no place for any void” (*DS* 36). Politics, however, disturbs this with the polemical emergence of the part of those who have no part, which introduces a sense of impropriety and re-counting as opposed to proper distribution and counting. With their destabilizing presence, two possibilities arise: first, their appearance is a display of the logic of equality, for they enact the equality of any speaking being

with every other speaking being; second, if everyone is equal, then forms of exclusion are not natural but purely contingent (*D* 30). The appearance of the non-part thus contests the contingency of those police partitions that determine one's belonging, capacity and roles in society. As a result, the perceptual coordinates of the community are also modified.

Even with this preliminary sketch of Rancière's foundational thoughts on the political community, it can be surmised that he focuses intently on the aesthetic dimension of the political experience. This description of aesthetics in Rancière's system of thought needs to be understood in two ways: first, he uses the term narrowly, referring to the aesthetic regime of art, which is a specific system for defining and considering art (*AD* 27-44). I will detail this later in this chapter and in chapter five. For the second application, which is also more general, aesthetic is conceptualized along the word's own Greek origin *aistheta*, or perceptible things. As he elaborates in *The Politics of Aesthetics*, this aesthetics can be seen as "the system of *a priori* forms determining what presents itself to sense experience. It is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience" (13 and 82).

This second approach to aesthetics via the perceptible reflects Rancière's overall idea of politics envisioned through the distribution of the sensible. What this means is that political life – rather than its traditional and expected manifestations such as parliamentary debates, presidential campaigns, and elections, examples that most people would immediately conjure up when speaking of politics – has more to do, for Rancière at least, with a configuration of the perceptible or sensible: it has to do with what can be seen or heard, with what it is *possible* to see and hear, and with whose voices count (Robson 82 and 88). Rancière is fond of using the phrase "aesthetic of the political" because he views politics as primarily a battle about perceptible and sensible material (Guénoun and Kavanagh 11). Politics – whether referring to the aforementioned expressions of conventional political life, or as in the specific term politics which Rancière has introduced in *Dis-agreement* as an opposing force to the police order – can be seen to circle precisely around "what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time," according to Rancière (*TPA* 13).

Rancière's insights in *Dis-agreement* emerged from his intellectual engagements with classical texts from Plato, Aristotle and others. "The part of those who have no part" (*la part des sans-part*) is derived from Aristotle's description of the Athenian *demos* as that category which

“had no part in anything.” As Tanke has also pointed out, the codified hierarchy of Plato’s *Republic* serves as the prototypical distribution of the sensible (Tanke 43 and 48). Rancière’s analysis in *Dis-agreement*, of course, did mention more recent history such as the French workers’ movement and the thoughts of Joseph Jacotot in the early 1800s.<sup>35</sup> In the ancient Greek context, however, what was at stake was the issue of political participation; who is ruling and who is being ruled, who is qualified to take part in the city’s affairs and according to what qualification: virtue for the *aristoi*, wealth for the *oligoi*, and freedom (exactly their absence of qualification) for the *demos* (D 6). These issues of participation, qualification and equality will take on drastic reconfiguration in a different political and emotional landscape, as I will now relate them to the events of 9/11, which have their own specific historical context and complexity.

### **9/11 and the Sensible**

In most of Rancière’s writings, several elements of this sensible order are underlined again and again: visibility/invisibility, audibility/inaudibility, the reconfigurations of spaces and of time. It is these four components that this study also addresses when speaking of the interactions between 9/11 and the sensible. Against this backdrop, how does one begin to conceptualize 9/11 politics through the framing of the sensory world itself?

When writing on 9/11, Rancière focuses on the symbolic order and points to the rise of ethics that has created a particular form of consensus, which is not about an agreement between different parties in view of national interests, but a concordance “between the political constitution of the community and the physical and moral constitution of a population” (DS 100). As discussed earlier, Rancière’s depiction of the police structuration of the community is also affected by consensus, in which there exists an agreement between (presumed) bodily capabilities, occupations, places, and visibilities in the public sphere. In the 9/11 context, he claims there exists a consensus between America’s moral principle (the symbolic) and its concrete mode of being (the real). Therefore, the answer to the question Rancière poses in his essay’s title “September 11 and Afterwards: A Rupture in the Symbolic Order?” would be a resounding “no.” As he stresses: “... no rupture occurred; there was no revelation of a gap between the real of American life and the symbolic of the American people” (DS 99). This

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<sup>35</sup> Jacotot was the subject of Rancière’s book *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, which I will discuss in chapter three in relation to the hip hop artist Paris.

ethical turn has overtaken both politics and law, underscoring the fact that, as Rancière suggests, “more than just a juridico-political community, the United States is an ethical community united by common religious and moral values” (*DS* 100). Certain aspects of the country’s post-9/11 military retaliatory operations can also be seen in this ascendancy of ethics over the politics proper and the rule of law, not only in the initial name “Infinite Justice” given to those operations and in Bush’s refrain of America’s Good against al-Qaeda’s Evil, which I detailed earlier, but also in the juridical limbo of war prisoners and their “indefinite” detention.

What Rancière did not expand on, and what I argue, is that this symbolic capture of 9/11, this ability to register the attacks through the symbolization of American togetherness, is solidified through a distribution of the sensible that structures the field of visibility and audibility with the appearance of certain bodies and rhetoric, while excluding others. Rancière’s emphasis on visibility and audibility has to do with the general and material appearance of bodies and the emergence of speech acts in public life, but what I focus on in the post-9/11 context, are mediated forms of visibility and audibility: what bodies may/may not appear on television, on magazine/newspaper covers, and in photographs; what sounds and noises may/may not be heard on radio and in music albums. With Rancière’s sensible in mind, I will pursue the following questions briefly here and in the coming chapters: what were the primary sensorial coordinates through which one could engage with this catastrophe? How did time and space configure one’s place in America? In other words, what activities and what spaces (where those activities were carried out) created a sense of post-catastrophe collective belonging, participation, and a sense of one’s place in the community? Moreover, what kinds of bodies became visible? What forms of speech could be heard? If post-9/11 politics has more to do with perceptible/sensible materials, and indeed as a battle over those materials, then the questions are not just what was seen and heard, but also what was *possible* to be seen and heard?

What helped set the perceptual/visibility/audibility boundaries are acts of mourning, remembrance, and patriotism as befitting of American togetherness and that “United We Stand” resolve. The following description in the national daily *USA Today*, penned by staff writer Rick Hampson, highlights how that tripartite grid of mourning, remembrance and patriotism inspires, invites and defines collective civic belonging and post-disaster participation:

In the hours that followed [the attacks], the nation exhausted its symbolic vocabulary of grief and remembrance. People lowered flags, sang God Bless America, planted trees, rang bells, read names, lit candles, gave blood, banged

drums, played bagpipes, released balloons, recited poems, fired salutes, held flowers, and flashed headlights. *And they came together to do it.* (qtd. in Nussbaum 7, italics mine)

Visual images and narratives of these public expressions of mourning, memorializing, and national unity were what dominated nightly television news, newspapers, and magazines in the immediate moments after 9/11, and even ten years later in commemorative issues of popular magazines.<sup>36</sup> Perceptual and visual boundaries are also discernable in the 101 9/11-related covers of American magazines, compiled by the American Society of Magazine Editors to mark the 10-year anniversary of the attacks. The titles included in this survey are: *People, Time, Newsweek, US News, The New Yorker, Sports Illustrated* and more, dating between 2001 to 2011. These are national magazines that are stocked in just about every grocery store, gas station, bookstore, and library in America. If these magazine covers can be joined and seen as a pervasive visual landscape of what people *can* see in their everyday activities of buying groceries, getting gasoline, and ambling in a bookstore/library, then it is instructive to observe what figures have dominated these covers: Bush, bin Laden, and the former New York City mayor Rudolph Giuliani, who served as the mayor at the time of the catastrophe. Equally prominent are heroic figures of firefighters (most often photographed in their bulky and hefty uniform) and victims' families. The American flag is ubiquitous, serving as the centerpiece, the backdrop, and the prop in the photographs; it sometimes provides the hues – red, white and blue – to color and decorate the pages. Even when the covers consist of a drawing rather than a photographic image, the themes of mourning and patriotism are still palpable.<sup>37</sup>

It was the terrorist body, the mourning/suffering body, and the patriotic body that appeared and *could* appear; it was the sounds and personal stories of grief, national unity, hope, pride, and American values, both in formal speeches from national leaders and informal utterances from the men on the street, that were heard and *could* be heard. Bin Laden's body could appear, though not as a legitimate and accepted member of this community but as the threat and the target for extermination. It was primarily this grid of mourning, remembrance, and patriotism that temporarily defined in the immediate aftermath of the attacks the various boundaries of the perceptible and the thinkable, plus ways of participation, belonging and acceptance. So much so that some Muslims, Arabs, and South Asians, fearful of backlash, had to

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<sup>36</sup> See for example the 10-year anniversary commemorative magazine *Remembering 9/11: A Tribute to Heroes*, published by *USA Today*.

<sup>37</sup> To view these magazine covers, visit <http://www.magazine.org/asme/covers.aspx>, accessed July 20, 2012.

inflate their patriotic fervor by donning red-white-and-blue turbans and headscarves. This was no longer just an assimilative tactic for minorities but an act of survival.<sup>38</sup> Mourning, remembrance and patriotism became the dominant ways of sensing and making sense of 9/11; they were the markers that determined visibility and audibility.

This production of the given sensory realm can also be related to the concept of framing. I turn to Butler's writings again to underscore the specificities of the 9/11 context. In discussing post-9/11 politics and the public sphere, Butler, in *Precarious Life*, identifies the emergence of a "frame" for the understanding of violence – terrorist violence on September 11, 2001 and US military violence thereafter – which delimits what is perceivable. Butler writes in *Precarious Life*:

... a frame for understanding violence emerges in tandem with the experience, and that the frame works both to preclude certain kinds of questions, certain kinds of historical inquiries, and to function as a moral justification for retaliation. It seems crucial to attend to this frame, since it decides, in a forceful way, *what we can hear*, whether a view will be taken as explanation or as exoneration [for the attacks] ... (4-5, italics in the original)

This frame is operative on several levels: one, visually as it relates to media representations; two, rhetorically on the usage of controversial terms such as terrorists and acts of terror; and three, narratively on how one begins to tell the story of 9/11 (4-5). Such a frame no doubt establishes interlocking perceptible boundaries, governing what bodies might appear in view via the media outlets, as in visibility for 9/11 victims and "evil" perpetrators, and invisibility for victims of US violence, as discussed earlier in my introduction. The frame also stipulates which speakers, statements, questions, and analyses are precluded by way of stigmatization and labeling (anti-American or terrorist-sympathizing), and thus rendering certain criticisms unsayable. As a result, dissent is quelled. As Butler stresses: "The public sphere is constituted in part by what cannot be said and what cannot be shown. The limits of the sayable, the limits of what can appear, circumscribe the domain in which political speech operates and certain kinds of subjects appear as viable actors" (xvii).

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<sup>38</sup> For a focused discussion on how South Asians took pains to express their American allegiance after 9/11 and other related issues, see chapter four "The Turban is Not a Hat" in Jasbir K. Puar's *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

This framing, when seen in narrative terms, also determines when the telling and explanations of the attacks might begin and by whom: with a first-person narrative point of view and starting on September 11, 2001 would solidify US as a victim of violence that came “out of the blue” and initiate a line of reasoning grounded in revenge and retaliation. In other words, where the story begins already determines the protagonists, villains, victims, plots, and climax of the story. Overall, this frame, operating at multiple levels, can condition what presents itself to perception and knowledge, thus configuring the post-9/11 public sphere of what can be seen, heard, discussed, debated and understood.

Rancière and Butler, no doubt, have very different starting points: Rancière is concerned with the police distribution of the sensible that delimits an individual’s sensate life – functions, places, ways of being – and how that distribution reveals who can have a share or not (visually and audibly, for example) in the sensible fabric of the community. Butler, on the other hand, is alert to what she sees as the post-9/11 rise of anti-intellectualism, acts and tactics of censorship, and forms of media representations that frame the public sphere and how they relate to the precarity of others. Both, nevertheless, seem to arrive at a similar juncture: the policing and controlling of a field of appearance, whether that field is a material domain (a public sphere with political actors) and/or a symbolic/discursive space (images, ideas, statements, narratives), can lead to the foreclosing of certain lines of inquiry and the constraining of forms of relations between subjects or between objects. Butler, once again, argues:

One way a hegemonic understanding of politics is achieved is through circumscribing what will and will not be admissible as part of the public sphere itself ... To produce what will constitute the public sphere, however, it is necessary to control the way in which people see, how they hear, what they see. The constraints are not only on content ... but on what ‘can’ be heard, read, seen, felt, and known. The public sphere is constituted in part by what can appear, and the regulation of the sphere of appearance is one way to establish what will count as reality, and what will not. (xx)

This governing of Butler’s sphere of appearance and Rancière’s police order, however, is never secure and can be challenged. For Butler, in the context of post-9/11 American military campaigns and the erasure from public view of their victims, the inclusion of the previously unseen has wider implications. The framing of what will or will not appear in public life, as well as specific dominant media representations of one’s enemies, dictate one’s responses, affect, and

responsibility towards these faces and the faceless. As she urges: “Certain faces must be admitted into public view, must be seen and heard for some keener sense of the value of life, all life, to take hold” (xviii).<sup>39</sup>

For Rancière, the police order has more to do with partition, circumscription, and delimitation; these are challenges that would require forms of disruption of the distribution of the sensible and a reconstitution of the sensible world. As discussed earlier, Rancière’s concept of politics takes on this exact interventionist role. In the political community, the appearance of Rancière’s famous “the part of those who have no part” can reconfigure what is given in the sensible with their polemical verification of equality through the assertion of a yet-to-exist right. This disruptive process, what Rancière has called dissensus, does not bring about a government or institutional change, neither does it guarantee an elimination of the inequalities in the police order but it alters sensorial coordinates, and thus the aesthetic division of the community (*TPA* 3 and *DS* 2). If the order of the police regime is fueled by the logic of the proper that partitions different domains with corresponding activities and capacities, determines visibility and speech, and ultimately binds bodies to their places, then dissensus is propelled by a logic of equality that exposes the contingency of all these distributions.

The aesthetic dimension, once again, lies at the heart of the political experience, and also in acts of defiance, dissent, and interventions, now envisioned as a reframing of perceptual spaces and the disruption of belonging. In Rancière’s earlier works on politics, this aesthetics of politics already begins to narrow the relationship between politics and art. These two fields, often envisioned by others as separate domains, continue to be entwined in Rancière’s later books. Their relationship is then explored by reversing the previous question of “how is the political aesthetic?” to ask “how is aesthetics political?”. This returns us to that knot between politics and art: can the arts only be instrumentalized for politics, accompanying other traditional acts of political struggles, or can it claim some political power of its own? In view of Rancière’s thoughts, a related question is also whether art itself can intervene and perform dissensus, and how.

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<sup>39</sup> Butler’s thoughts on framing and grievability will return again in my last chapter when I consider a collection of photographs depicting Taliban soldiers.

## Rancière's Artistic Interventions

For Rancière, art's political capacity is not gained by being an instrument of politics, with art expressing messages that denounce the state of the world (*AD* 23). Art, however, is political because its practices and forms of visibility can intervene in the distribution of the sensible; its political potential lies in its ability to suspend the normal and daily coordinates of sensory experiences (*AD* 25). To see how Rancière reaches this conclusion, one has to take a quick detour to consider his analysis on the evolution, or more forcefully, the revolution of art's specificity.

According to him, what is considered art has more to do with a specific regime of identification, or a particular way in which art is recognized as art. What is highlighted here is a specific relationship between artistic practices, forms of visibility, and modes of intelligibility that jointly allow one to designate an object as art or not, as opposed to any intrinsic features that designate an object as an artwork (*AD* 28). Rancière has specified three regimes that designate how art operates and functions within the community or how it relates to other practices; in other words, where and how art is distributed within the larger partition of the sensible of the community. These three regimes, the ethical, the representative, and the aesthetic, mostly define three functions for art and its relation to other activities, and do not refer to three historical ages (Dasgupta, "Art" 73), although the "aesthetic revolution" that changed the identity of art can be dated to the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (Tanke 73). It is in the third regime that art gains a new potential to enact dissensus.

In the ethical regime, works of art are judged in terms of their intrinsic truth and their ethical effects and impact on individuals and the community. Under such a distribution, works of art do not enjoy any autonomy. In the representative regime, art follows the logic of mimesis and is concerned with imitation. Works of art are subjected to a hierarchy of genres and are assessed on qualities such as skill. A concordance must be achieved between subject matter and representation, in that certain subjects must be represented in specific ways (*DS* 15 and *AD* 28-29). If Plato's *Republic* can serve as a reference for the ethical regime, then the second regime reflects the framework of art in Aristotle's *Poetics* (Rockhill and Watts 9).

In the third regime, art breaks with the normativity and hierarchical relations of the other regimes, rejecting ethical immediacy and representational mediation. Art comes to be identified by its singularity and is associated with a specific sensorium, one that is foreign to the ordinary forms of sensory experience (*DS* 15-18). "Foreign" is in the sense that it deviates from quotidian

and functional sensory encounters. Art is art in this regime not because it has met the criteria for technical perfection (as in the representative regime), but because it is linked to a specific form of sensory apprehension; a “free appearance” that reflects a certain indifference and a lack of concern for purpose and its fulfillment. Such an artwork “does nothing, wants nothing and offers no model for imitation,” says Rancière. It does not play a role in religious or civic rituals, neither does it boast higher aims for the moral improvement or mobilization of the individual or the community (*TES* 69). As Rancière explains:

It stands thus in a twofold contrast to its representative status: it is not an appearance drawn from a reality that would serve as its model. Nor is it an active form imposed on passive matter. As a sensory form, it is heterogeneous to the ordinary forms of sensory experience that these dualities inform. It is given in a specific experience, which suspends the ordinary connections not only between appearance and reality, but also between form and matter, activity and passivity, understanding and sensibility. (*AD* 29-30)

Confronted with this “free appearance,” a term borrowed from Schiller, the spectator finds him/herself in a state of “free play,” says Rancière. This “free play” is not the ludic and the humorous, but runs along the Kantian analysis of aesthetic experience in which “free play and free appearance suspend the power of form over matter, of intelligence over sensibility,” according to Rancière (*AD* 27-31). It has to do with a “free play” of the faculties: intellectual and sensible. No longer does the hierarchy of the active intelligence over the passive sensibility apply.<sup>40</sup> What art possesses in the third regime is a kind of freedom from intentionality, functionality, instrumentalization, and the strict matching of content and form, which are the coordinates that establish daily sensory experiences.

When works, however, are thus severed from these previous constraints, they also lose their previous distribution in the sensible. What belongs to art and what belongs to everyday life begin to blur. “Any profane object could get into the realm of artistic experience. Correspondingly, any artistic production could become part of the framing of a new collective life,” explains Rancière (“FPA” 21). A curious paradox emerges. While art now has its own specificity, its own separate sphere of experience or free appearance, it also does not have a

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<sup>40</sup> For the sake of brevity, I have summarized Rancière’s explanation of “free appearance” and “free play.” For his full discussion, which incorporates ideas from Schiller and Kant, see *AD* 27-32; *TES* 64-69; *DS* 115-119 and 176. The standard reference Rancière uses to describe this free play of the spectator and free appearance is Schiller’s own scenario involving the statue *Juno Ludovisi*.

specific place in society as before. It faces a tension between being art and fusing with other forms of life's activities, or as Rancière claims, "art is art insofar as it is also non-art, or is something other than art" (*AD* 36). Steven Corcoran has described this paradoxical logic as: "A always consists in blurring the boundaries between *A* and *non-A*" (*DS* 3, italics in original). Interestingly enough, it is exactly these two possibilities that become, according to Rancière, the two politics of aesthetics: first, art safeguards its autonomy and refuses to become part of the normal, ordinary forms of sensory experience. Although this commitment to its own specificity leads to a withdrawal from life, it is this autonomy from other forms of activity that yields the artwork's political potential. Second, art seeks its own abolition as it transforms its forms into the forms of the common world. As direct engagement, or "art-becoming-life," aesthetic experiences become similar to other forms of life experience rather than being separated (*AD* 35 and 46). These two politics lead to a contrast between one type of art that is committed to retaining its purity and avoiding all political intervention, but in doing so becomes exactly political, and another type of art that initiates politics by eliminating itself as art through the act of self-suppression (*AD* 40). More importantly for Rancière, critical and political art has to negotiate between these two politics that press art towards "life," and at the same time, claim aesthetic autonomy from other everyday sensory experiences (*AD* 46).

With this necessary and quick detour, it is now time to consider artistic interventions and aesthetic resistance. As these previous pages have demonstrated, the "politics" of art, for Rancière at least, has little to do with the political message of the artwork or the political intention or leaning of the artist. Politics and art are not two separate entities, thus allowing the activities in one to be mobilized for the other. They are related in that Rancière's politics, as I argued in the first section, has to do with the reconfiguration of a specific space and the reframing of spheres of experience, while art with its practices and forms of visibility can also organize and intervene in the distribution of the sensible and its reconfiguration. Therefore, as Corcoran puts it directly, within Rancière's conceptualization "politics has an inherently aesthetic dimension and aesthetics an inherently political one" (*DS* 2). If the politics of art has to do with the two politics – autonomy and art-becoming-life – what exactly is "political art" for Rancière and how does it relate to resistance? If dissensus is the process of transforming the sensible by the appearance of the non-part, dissensus in the artistic context operates in a similar way.

Art can breach the sensible due to the aesthetic sensorality which already suspends those

rules that govern normal sensory experiences and introduces free play. The two politics that Rancière has identified are crucial here; artistic intervention can draw on both of these politics to create dissensus. Political art is neither autonomous art nor art-as-life alone, but one that would play and exploit the tension between these two politics; it would be a shuffling between the clear political legibility that arises from art being directly utilized for political projects (i.e. art-becoming-life) and the sensory foreignness (of autonomous art) that is also present to disrupt that exact political meaning. Rancière describes such political potential in this way:

Suitable political art would ensure, at one and the same time, the production of a double effect: the readability of a political signification and a sensible or perceptual shock caused, conversely by the uncanny, by that which resists signification. In fact, this ideal effect is always the object of a negotiation between opposites, between the readability of the message that threatens to destroy the sensible form of art and the radical uncanniness that threatens to destroy all political meaning. (*TPA* 63)

Or as Sudeep Dasgupta has summarized trenchantly: “Critical art is to be understood in the oscillation between pure form and pure meaning” (“Spare Image” 8). An element of legibility (i.e. political intelligibility) and another of illegibility (i.e. sensory foreignness) are what can create a rupture in the sensible order and its established framework of perception. This form of dissensus prompted by artistic works will be considered closely through my discussion of the Taliban photographs in the final chapter, in which the issues of illegibility and foreign sensory experiences will be worked through.

### **Rancière’s Effects and Limits**

With this theoretical framework in place, it is now necessary to pinpoint the junctions and fissures between Rancière’s theory and my objects. In all, Rancière impacts this dissertation on two levels: first, he shifts the conceptualization of 9/11 politics to the sensible, thus initiating a line of inquiry into ways in which my objects enact resistance by broadening sensory parameters; and second, he introduces a specific form of resistance through dissensus whose disruptive value will be examined through my first case study *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, which underscores the polemical verification of equality through speech, and through my final object of Taliban photographs, which analyzes aesthetic dissensus.

As the following chapters will soon establish, my objects offer forms of perception, not

from the perspective of the included, but the excluded; they introduce new bodies and voices into the existing post-9/11 regime of perception and signification dominated by mourning, remembrance and patriotism. They sense and are making sense differently of Muslims, Islam, enemies, and even American togetherness and belonging. While they separately challenge the various themes of 9/11, they do jointly question the visible and audible parameters of 9/11, contesting what can be seen, heard, and thought. As a result, the practices of dissent in this dissertation are no longer firmly situated in traditional and predictable contestations against sovereignty, global economic exploitation, and various forms of oppression.

Despite this productive encounter with Rancière's theory, there are also chasms, most conspicuously due to my choice to examine different interventionist artistic expressions. Viewing politics through the sensible would suggest a multiplicity of interventions, or moments of dissensus, capable of breaching the sensible order, regardless of whether they have that added dimension of being art objects or not. Rancière, of course, does specifically look at dissensus in an artistic context, which is firmly anchored in his discussion of the aesthetic regime. Rancière's theory, on this specific issue, is very much engaging with the field of contemporary art. In discussing artistic interventions, Rancière usually culls his illustrative objects – art installations, photographs, video works – mostly from the confines of international art exhibits and biennials. Much like Retort and Buck-Morss, an emphasis is given to the art world. Concerning literature, Rancière is fond of using the works of Flaubert and Mallarmé, and for films he turns to Sergei Eisenstein and works of Portuguese filmmaker Pedro Costa. There exists a rarely-changing collection of artworks with which Rancière advances his arguments, a set that is introduced with predictable repetition. His vision of dissensus in the artistic context is very much bounded by his specific art objects. Consequently, his discussions on the actual ways in which creative objects alter the distribution of the sensible in practice through dissensus are limited in scope because only a narrow kind of fine arts is being explored.

In contrast, my project scrutinizes many different forms of artistic and creative practices. My four objects deviate from the traditional high art context in which Rancière's objects circulate, but they do display formal creativity and aesthetic significance. My demarcation of “art” is thus much more fluid and less restrictive than Rancière's own. I will not attempt to categorize these objects as high art, popular culture, or entertainment art, since they do traverse these boundaries. It is more constructive to locate them through their specific production and authorial context, and circulation. These four objects possess very dissimilar forms of visibility

from Rancière's fine arts because they are mass-culture and mass-commodified objects, thus enjoying broader reception and public reach. They operate through the popular genres of hip hop, *Bildungsroman*, television situation comedy, and studio portrait photography. Assisted by these familiar (if not well-loved) genres, my objects feature conventional themes and formulas that are readily and easily legible and relatable. Their necessary entanglements with market mechanisms, syndication, global circulation, and television ratings, to indicate but a few, present questions and concerns that Rancière does not address. More significantly, they devise their own interesting and parallel paths into reconfigurations of the sensible that Rancière does not choose to travel. Being informed by Rancière's theory and yet displacing it to other objects is my own form of intellectual dissensus that pays no heed to any police distribution of the sensible that stipulates which critical theories must match up with which objects.

Practically speaking, our different choice of artistic objects means his theory becomes limiting also at the level of methodology. Focusing on art, Rancière's two politics – art as life and autonomous art – guide an analysis towards the play between form and meaning. I applied this methodological orientation explicitly when considering my final case study of photographs and more implicitly with the other objects. My objects may seem more attuned to the common sensory experiences of everyday life, functioning and utilizable as forms of entertainment, rather than interweaving elements of legibility and illegibility that may yield sensory disruptions to the dominant order. I will, however, explore in the next four chapters how they negotiate sense and meanings and operate as “sensible interventions.” Besides the broader questions for the dissertation, steering my thinking are also these specific Rancière-inspired questions: How does the object's political and resistance content and signification resonate with its sensible attributes? Does the oppositionality diminish or co-exist with the object's formal creativity? Do these objects have the capacity to be both politically relevant and aesthetically complex? Or must they instead, curbed by their functionality and commercial status, compromise both their politics and aesthetics?

Situated outside Rancière's sphere, these case studies also require more analytical preciseness to contextualize their specific medium, forms of resistance, and significance in their own field. My multi-media objects dictate this multi-directional approach, which must highlight the medium-specificity of the object itself. The dissertation, however, is not trying to survey how each of these media, taken as a whole, is engaging with 9/11. Medium-specificity is vital only in the sense that the object's medium impacts the methodology. This study is conducted under the

institutional inspiration and influences of the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis, and owing to this, my general methodology orientates toward the process of cultural analysis in its object-focused approach (Bal, *Travelling Concepts* 3-21). This attention means objects are not seen as “isolated jewels” but as things engaging, as “interlocutors” within the culture of their origin. “It is not the artist or the author but the objects they make and ‘give’ to the public domain that are the ‘speakers’ in analytic discussion,” argues Mieke Bal (*Travelling Concepts* 9). Specifically, my close analyses are conducted with attention focused on written and spoken words, sounds, visual signs and visuality, as dictated by each object. For the novel, the inquiry considers the plot, characters, narrative voice and structures; for the hip hop album, the lyrics, rhyme and rhythm, supplementary sonic features, album cover art, liner notes, and audience reception are explored. For the television show, I discuss, among many features, the plotline of a few key episodes, characters’ developments, Muslim/non-Muslim relationships through the whole series, camera shot selections, position and movement of actors, studio sets and costumes (Rose, *Visual Methodologies* 51-53); for photography, the social and geopolitical context of the collection, the identity of the sitters, as well as framing, angle, color, foreground/backdrop, and the photographic surface (Rose, *Visual Methodologies* 13-27 and 39-41). The objects’ genre also informs my investigation since the various genres all contain specific features that guide their meanings, oppositional or otherwise.

In addition, my analysis also explores the external discourse that accompanies the object. I discuss how the object is presented to the audience through marketing/promotional strategies, interviews with authors and producers, and its websites. In the case of hip hop, I also highlight the conditions of production. *Sonic Jihad* was produced through an independent record label in resistance to the mainstream music industry, so claims the artist Paris. As the album engages with politics through its lyrics, it also articulates an anti-mainstream market politics by promoting self-organization and production. In the case of the Taliban photographs, its politics of resistance is also situated in the entanglement of local aesthetics and global distribution and circulation.

Carefully taking stock of these objects’ different media also means comprehending them through the academic disciplines under which they generally fall (literary, media and cultural studies) by aligning with the ways in which these multiple disciplines have envisioned and studied resistance in the past. These discipline-based traditions of opposition evince the heterogeneity so characteristic of cultural resistance. This wide angle extends beyond Rancière,

who does not seem to acknowledge the traditions, strategies, and potentials of many other popular forms of oppositional artistic endeavors that are thriving outside the contemporary art scene. One also senses a general attitude of skepticism in Rancière towards resistance. In a 2007 interview with *Artforum*, Rancière contends that he would rather talk about dissensus than resistance (Carnevale and Kelsey 3).<sup>41</sup> This has much to do with the fact that he has a very specific conceptualization of politics through the sensible, and for him, the police order and power is not about ideology, a certain masking or illusion that can be challenged by knowledge or truth. If that were the case, artistic interventions would easily proceed by aggressively unmasking and exposing the domination, power, and ills of the order and reasserting some truth behind the appearance. This approach poses one main problem for Rancière, in that such an exposure presupposes a hierarchy between the enlightened artist and the ignorant audience who cannot see the hidden and need the artist – conferred with mastery, expertise and knowledge – to guide them. This goes against the grain of Rancière’s advocacy for intellectual equality, in particular one between artists and spectators (this will be explored in depth in chapter three and in the conclusion). Perhaps Rancière’s explanation of his own research methodology intimates what he sees as domination, and hence, helps us envisage what may be moments of resistance for him:

I always try to think in terms of horizontal distributions, combinations between systems of possibilities, not in terms of surface and substratum. Where one searches for the hidden beneath the apparent, a position of mastery is established. I have tried to conceive of a topography that does not presuppose this position of mastery. (*TPA* 49)

Possessing a starting position and presupposition of one’s mastery, then, would likely be Rancière’s critique of many forms of artistic oppositional expressions, within or outside the art scene, that seek merely to expose, unveil, and transmit some political message. While not championing all modes and aspects of cultural resistance, I nevertheless stay more alert and open to the multifarious expressions, origins, motivations, and possibilities of artistic resistance, cautiously tracing and treading their winding trajectories of dissent.

For example, the field of literature as a form of protest serves as one of the theoretical and conceptual wellsprings for this dissertation. By detecting resistance within an object, what I am

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<sup>41</sup> For the complete interview “Art of the Possible: An Interview with Jacques Rancière” see the March 2007 issue of *Artforum*, pages 256-69. The page number listed here refers to an electronic version of the same interview available at [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m0268/is\\_7\\_45/ai\\_n24354911/](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0268/is_7_45/ai_n24354911/), accessed July 13, 2012.

suggesting is that its content, form, and other attributes – whether intentionally or unintentionally wrought by its author, marketing strategies, or producers – articulate an oppositional message and experience that can potentially open up a space for resistance. This conceptualization of resistance is very much influenced by resistance practices found in textual resistance in colonial and post-colonial writings and in the tradition of American ethnic literature.<sup>42</sup> Contesting colonialist authority, domination, and power, the various and dynamic forms of literary resistance by both novelists and literary theorists have appropriated the colonizers’ language and subverted colonizers’ texts such as histories, fictions, and anthropological accounts, which were utilized in the first place to fictionalize, define, categorize and subjectify the colonized.<sup>43</sup>

Deviating from the post-colonial context, literary resistance has also often been attributed to oppositional narratives by marginalized women and ethnic minority writers, who contested what they saw as patriarchal and phallogocentric traditions of Western literature. These forms of counter narratives target not only domination and power through their themes of gender and racial revolt, but they do so by contesting prevailing literary canons, established genres, narrative structures, and textual representations of women, and ethnic and sexual minorities. Their purpose is often to change perceptions and to insert themselves into the field of appearance through counter-history, counter-narrative, and counter-image (still and moving). These, too, are the preoccupations of my objects, which wrestle with issues of representation (Muslims, Islam, enemy) and indeterminate identities as a way to expose and counter prevailing ideas, norms, and attitudes.

This project also interacts with the two related fields of cultural studies and media studies.<sup>44</sup> The concept of resistance for these fields has been traditionally related to the capacity

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<sup>42</sup> For the category of American literature, I am thinking specifically of works by authors such as Maxine Hong Kingston and Thomas King.

<sup>43</sup> Barbara Harlow’s earlier but much-criticized work *Resistance Literature*, for example, has identified a particular category of literature which complements a wider political struggle against colonial power, with narratives serving as an explicitly politicized tool in national liberation struggles. See pages xvii and 29 of her *Resistance Literature* (New York: Methuen, 1987). Her notion of a clear binary opposition between colonizers/oppressors and post-colonial writers, as well as between power and resistance, is problematic and, as such, has yielded more questions for the project of anti-colonialist literary resistance itself. That long-running debate on the nature, traditions, sites, and theorizations of post-colonial literary resistance is too extensive to be dealt with here. For an overview, consult part three of *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* edited by Bill Ashcroft et al. (London: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>44</sup> Due to its limited scope, this dissertation does not engage with the tradition of resistance within New Media, which has become an important focus within resistance studies. The relations between resistance and New Media can be discussed, first, with media – global communications and information apparatus – as a target of resistance; and second, with New Media technologies as a weapon of resistance for activists. Social media, for example, has become a new and faster means of organization for protesters. Other oppositional tactical media practices include reverse-engineering, hacktivism, denial-of-service attacks and digital hijack. To explore these ideas, see Rita Raley’s *Tactical Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), which builds on David Garcia and Geert Lovink’s 1997 canonical text “The ABC of Tactical

of consumers and spectators to resist and appropriate the meanings and operations of the cultural commodities produced by mainstream capitalist industries. Dick Hebdige's earlier explorations of youth subcultures, with consumer resistance practices such as bricolage, detail a process of resistance reflected in behaviors, ways of speaking, musical taste and collective fashion styles that contest the process of normalization and the dominant system of social order (Storey 81). An opposition between commercial producers and consumers of cultural objects is seen in John Fiske's theory of popular culture, which emphasizes the consumers' capacity and resourcefulness in counter-translating meanings and constructing pleasures from cultural products for their own purposes (Jenkins xv). In this sense, the numerous and creative ways that consumers/viewers resist and reinterpret intended messages and functions, or evade the constraints of meaning, stipulated by the producers become acts of resistance against the media and the culture industry.<sup>45</sup>

In my study, this form of resistance – coming from viewers and spectators and focused on utilization – is also addressed, although it does not serve as the main axis. Where possible and medium-appropriate, viewers' experience of the cultural object will be discussed by using the informal audience commentary on YouTube, as in the case of the hip hop album *Sonic Jihad*. This viewer/consumer-focused addition is meant to provide some contextual depth but not a full exploration of the spectators' experiences or how they might perform their own acts of resistance by rejecting or misreading the intended message and use of an object.

With this multi-media and interdisciplinary mindset, I explore and combine all these points to chronicle how my four objects are negotiating and operating at the various interstices between their commercial status, political zeal, and aesthetic creativity to express oppositionality. Overshooting the canon examined by Rancière, they jointly formulate an intricate conceptualization and comprehension of cultural resistance with their array of tactics, targets, aims, and even blind spots.

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Media," which is available at <http://www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-1-9705/msg00096.html>, accessed July 20, 2012. Also refer to Raley's "Border Hacks: The Risks of Tactical Media" in *Risk and the War on Terror*, edited by Louise Amoore and Marieke de Goede (London: Routledge, 2008). Extremely helpful, too, is part I of Alexander R. Galloway and Eugene Thacker's *The Exploit: A Theory of Networks* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

<sup>45</sup> For a closer look at the tradition of resistance within media and cultural studies, refer to Dick Hebdige's *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Routledge, 1979); John Fiske's *Understanding Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 2010). The key theoretical inspiration for these and other everyday forms of resistance is, of course, Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

## CHAPTER TWO

### An American Tale from the Margins: Decentering 9/11 Narratives

There is a curious body wandering in the post-9/11 public sphere: the hyper-patriotic foreigner. A cover-page cartoon from *The New Yorker* magazine has captured the predicament of being a foreigner in America after 9/11: a wide-eyed and turbaned taxi driver slumps with apprehension in his taxi cab which is decorated with a dozen American flags and a “God Bless America” sticker. This performance of hyper-patriotism marks foreigners as patriotic bodies, rather than potential terrorist suspects. If not to ward off harassment and intimidation from the natives, the patriotic spirit is also an inclusion device that the foreigner must utilize in order to participate in the public sphere and experience possibilities of national belonging. When the prevailing identity categorization is reduced by Bush to “them versus us” and “enemy or friend” binaries that suggest the absence of a neutral ground, where exactly do those with multiple national, religious, and ethnic affinities find themselves?

In Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Changez, the Pakistani protagonist, neither mourns for 9/11 nor waves a flag. As an emigrant living in America after the attacks, he does not mobilize patriotism as a way to deflect his foreignness in order to secure a sense of national belonging; he is an unpatriotic non-mourner. Commencing with the themes of contested post-9/11 identities, community, and audibility, this first case study explores Hamid’s novel in the context of resistance by pursuing its form and content to demonstrate how its non-conforming elements open up spaces of resistance against various manifestations of post-9/11 ideological, thematic, narrative, and sensory constraints. Featuring a protagonist whose life is formed by diaspora, national ideology, American empire, and the terrorist attacks, the novel confounds the certitude of post-9/11 discourse and identities – as articulated by Huntington’s clash of civilizations hypothesis or the “friend or enemy” distinction by Bush – with Changez’s identity-in-progress as an oppositional model.

Although a written text, Hamid’s novel also foregrounds the act of one character (Changez) speaking up and making himself heard, while simultaneously accentuates another character’s inaudibility. This stark contrast between audibility and inaudibility functions as an analogy of a post-9/11 sensory landscape that, too, designated certain voices to be audible while others not, and as a result, prescribing what one can or cannot hear in the public sphere. Hamid’s strategic literary manipulation over whose voice can be heard, and more importantly, how to

respond to that voice, actually raises resistant possibilities, as I will soon argue, against the domination of the post-9/11 sensory realm by specific American bodies and narratives.

The chapter continues first with a detailed overview of the novel's critical and popular success, its "countering" positioning within the canon of 9/11 novels, and its academic reception. My analysis then proceeds with two sections that probe Changez's multiple national identities and affiliations to explore how they might transgress distinct categorizations. This is followed by two more sections that consider Changez's role as the sole speaker of the novel, initially through Rancière's thoughts on speech acts made by subjects who exist outside the community, and also through my own arguments on how Changez's own dominant audibility is reversed and becomes resistant against the broader 9/11 context.

### **The Oppositional 9/11 Novel**

The setting is a café in Lahore, Pakistan; the time is a few years after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York. Two men are sharing a pot of tea: one is a Pakistani and the other is an unidentified and jittery American man. Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* opens with this simple premise of what would be a quotidian encounter in less turbulent times of international relations. This moment, however, is marred by a certain disquietude and a latent hostility in a post-9/11 world reverberating with declarations of cultural purity and political demarcation. Confronting this world of clear enemy lines, the novel, says the author himself, plays with shadows or a series of indeterminates – such as the ambiguous identities of Changez and the American character, and the fate of Changez's girlfriend Erica – which actually reflect more accurately a post-9/11 world of uncertainties. Hamid explains:

In their conversation [between Changez and the American], one guy is looking at the other wondering, 'Are you out to get me? Are you a regular guy?' The novel tries to capture the tension that currently exists between the West and the Muslim world. The novel plays with that sense of ambiguity and doubts and suspicion that we have right now.<sup>46</sup>

Hamid's depiction of post-9/11 politics through the ambiguous and the undetermined seems to have resonated with readers and critics alike. Published in 2007 and translated into 31 languages, the novel is a model of border-crossing in itself not only in the sense that its protagonist Changez is a transnational subject, but also in the way the book itself, like so many in the globalized

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<sup>46</sup> The interview is available at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=uTW5qtA6hVc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uTW5qtA6hVc), accessed May 3, 2013.

literary industry, traverses linguistic and publication divides. The novel was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize and climbed up to the number four spot on *The New York Times* Best-Seller List. Hamid, as well, shows transnational affinities and shares similarities with his creation Changez: he grew up in Lahore and in California, had an American Ivy League education and has worked in London and New York as a management consultant, according to his own website at mohsinhamid.com. The book was also adapted into a movie with the same title and opened the Venice film festival in August 2012.<sup>47</sup>

The novel contains two simultaneous plotlines: first, the chance encounter between Changez and the unidentified American in Lahore, which serves as the main story. The second plot unfolds as a personal tale that Changez tells his American companion of his young adult life and his relationship with Erica in New York. Both storylines are narrated through Changez's first-person point of view, but the main storyline in Lahore has an extra dimension of being an extended monologue spoken by Changez, with the American listening. These two plots are related to the two temporalities of the present and the past, with Lahore and New York City serving as the two locales respectively. Without exception, each chapter opens with the present storyline in Lahore, then shifts to the past in New York. As the chapter progresses, this organizing boundary remains porous as the past and the present often intersect each other, with the sights and sounds of Lahore and New York triggering quick back-and-forth shifts between the two temporalities. But always, the story line would return to the present again by the chapter's end in a cyclical movement. With every episode, one learns more and more about Changez while the American listener remains an enigma. The one-day encounter between Changez and the American also traverses the boundaries of day/night as the more agreeable afternoon tea and cultural exchange that opens the book extends well into a night of foreboding danger by the book's conclusion.

In order to consider *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* as a resistant project, it is important to examine briefly how literary works have engaged with 9/11. When seen against some common trends and themes, one can pinpoint the oppositional qualities of Hamid's novel. Although literary fiction's responses to 9/11 have been diverse, similarities are aplenty. First, literary representations of 9/11 focus primarily on the attacks in New York City and not so much on the crashes at the Pentagon and in Shanksville, PA (Keniston and Quinn 1). Second, works that

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<sup>47</sup> For a review of the movie, see [www.guardian.co.uk/film/2012/aug/29/reliquant-fundamentalist-review](http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2012/aug/29/reliquant-fundamentalist-review), accessed October 6, 2012.

appeared shortly after the disaster often aim to represent the event and the emotional responses to the catastrophe directly (Keniston and Quinn 3). These works, Frédéric Beigbeder's *Windows on the World* in particular, offer a sense of intimacy with and immediacy to a disaster which, despite the unrelenting and unremitting instant replays, still remains a spectacle that is only experienced for most people from a distance through the television set.

These novels have protagonists who are placed inside the collapsing towers (*Falling Man*) and/or within the vicinity of the World Trade Center (*A Disorder Peculiar to the Country*). Some also touch on survivors' experiences as they cope with post-traumatic stress and guilt (*The Good Life*). A handful of works even seek to imagine the minds of terrorists by presenting terrorist-characters as a way to speculate their inner life, motivations, and radicalization.<sup>48</sup> By living vicariously through these characters, readers gain a sense of participation and a measure of identification, erasing the physical and emotional distance between them, the spectators of the disaster and the victims/survivors of the terror of 9/11. Trauma is unsurprisingly the major theme, with characters, all New Yorkers, struggling to mend their jolted lives amid a post-catastrophe city.

This second trend is closely linked to the third one, which has been described as the domestication of 9/11 (Gray 134). Surveying well-known novels such as *The Emperor's Children*, *The Good Life*, *A Disorder Peculiar to the Country* and *Falling Man*, Richard Gray argues that many 9/11 novels register the cataclysmic effects of the disaster and the vulnerability of life, and even hint at the dawning of a new post-9/11 age, but they never move beyond familiar literary structures. While novelists depict traumatized characters and worlds that have been altered ineradicably by 9/11, they have not generated a new kind of imagination. Instead, they fold the unfamiliar drama of the catastrophe into the all-familiar and popular themes and structures of romance, marriage/marital infidelity, and family trauma. As Gray argues: "The [9/11] crisis is, in every sense of the word, domesticated ... all life here is personal; cataclysmic public events are measured purely and simply in terms of their impact on the emotional entanglements of their protagonists" (134).

These fictional works might bear witness and acknowledge 9/11, carefully recording its physical and emotional toll on their characters, but ultimately 9/11 serves merely as a backdrop,

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<sup>48</sup> These works include Martin Amis's short story, "The Last Days of Muhammad Atta," which is available at [www.martinamisweb.com/excerpts.shtml](http://www.martinamisweb.com/excerpts.shtml); John Updike's *Terrorist* (New York: Ballantine, 2006); and Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (New York: Scribner, 2008).

as the characters, strangely invigorated by the trauma, retreat into the domestic sphere to fall in love and have extramarital affairs, to confront an acrimonious divorce, to heal from past personal traumas, and to tend to the minutiae of everyday life. In effect, by diffusing the political into the personal, they depoliticize the disaster. For Gray this link between the catastrophe and the retreat into the domestic is “tenuous,” for it is reducing “a turning point in national and international history to little more than a stage in a sentimental education” (134).

When read against these common traits of well-known 9/11 novels, Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* both conforms to and contests these developments. On the one hand, the book is very similar to other 9/11 fiction in that it centers on Changez’s tumultuous inner life, conflicting identities and the failed love story between him and Erica. It is, in this indirect way, a story about mourning and loss, not about the 9/11 catastrophe, but about the loss arising from unrequited love. Romance and “emotional entanglements,” no doubt, dominate this very personal narrative. But while the book reflects the common patterns of 9/11 novels, it also simultaneously resists the domestication. The novel deviates from other 9/11 fiction by situating the post-9/11 events in a global framework. As Changez documents the effects of the disaster on his own personal life, in particular the breakdown of his American life and success, he also transgresses the bounds of that domestic-personal space to consider the impact of 9/11 as experienced elsewhere in the globe. The novel confronts both the private drama of Changez’s life and the historic public events of 9/11, the subsequent US-led military campaign in Afghanistan, and US foreign policy in general. Changez’s criticisms of America not only go against the grain of fiction that avoids any implication of 9/11 in international relations, they form a counter-narrative in which resistance is expressed as a direct negation of the dominant discourse and its assertions. To put it more simply, the novel is simultaneously private and public, local and global.

The title of the book also goes against a certain post-9/11 presumption of what the word and concept of “fundamentalism” signifies; this presumption often links the word to Islam and the ideologies of al-Qaeda and the Taliban. Hamid offers a more ambivalent application, challenging the ubiquitous post-9/11 public discussions that identify religion as the source of extremism and threat by confronting readers’ expectations of the word fundamentalist and its negative connotations. For a novel with the word “fundamentalist” in the title, and given that the jacket cover for one popular edition shows a star and crescent, the symbols of Islam, (and when placed against the green background of the cover is suggestive of the flag of Pakistan) one might

suspect that the word “fundamentalist” in the title is related to Islam.<sup>49</sup> But the word Islam does not even appear in the book and while the word “Muslim” is mentioned, it appears only a few times and mostly in a cultural context rather than a political one. Religious fundamentalism in Pakistan is noted only once. Despite being a national of a predominately Muslim country and having sported a post-9/11 beard, Changez’s religious convictions are unclear.

The fundamentalism in the title actually has more relevance for Changez’s belief in and practice of a set of financial principles espoused by the elite New York-based financial services firm for which he worked prior to 9/11. It is a rival American capitalistic fundamentalism that mandates a single-minded attention to maximum productivity, ever-increasing profit and progress. While this capitalist fundamentalism will also be contested during the novel, a point which I will discuss in the last section, Hamid has attempted to reconfigure a word that has not only become a key term in contemporary political and popular discourse on terrorism, but also a pejorative word with a labeling function to qualify and position certain political groups as enemies of the West.

That the novel carries a contrastive force to dominant narratives is also consciously proclaimed by its publisher, Harcourt Books, as exemplified by one of the discussion questions listed at the end of the novel which reads: “Since 9/11, there has been a growing trend in contemporary fiction to write about the tragedy of that day and its aftermath. Compare *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* with some of the other ‘9/11 novels’ you have read. What sets it apart or makes it unique?” (191).<sup>50</sup> Writing a book review for *The Washington Post*, Laila Halaby also claims: “... for those who want a different voice, a different view of the aftermath of 9/11, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is well worth reading.”<sup>51</sup>

Scholars, too, have positioned the novel as a challenge to the familiar post-9/11 novel that generally anchors itself in personal trauma and loss. Anna Hartnell notes the book’s deviation from other 9/11 novels, claiming that it “subjects the insular tendencies of the American 9/11 novel to a postcolonial gaze, and in so doing makes manifest the repressed political content of the genre” (336). Her own analysis assesses the novel through two lines of inquiry: first, within the broader context of ongoing debates on multiculturalism in America, as she positions Changez’s experience in relation to other minority groups; and second, through the relationship

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<sup>49</sup> I am referring to the cover of the 2007 Harcourt paperback edition of the novel.

<sup>50</sup> These discussion questions are available in my 2007 Harcourt paperback edition.

<sup>51</sup> Her review, dated April 22, 2007, can be accessed at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/04/19/AR2007041903000.html>

between America and Europe, as marked by the former's current status as imperial power and the latter's colonial legacies. Focusing more on the formal qualities of the novel, Peter Morey raises the issue of readers' experience, arguing that Hamid's usage of hyperbole, allegory and unreliable narration, calls one's attention to the act of fiction-making and defamiliarizes the reading experience and the traditional process of character identification. This opens up the possibility of creating a deterritorialized reader (138). Matthew Hart and Jim Hansen mention the novel in their introduction to the special issue of *Contemporary Literature*, entitled "Contemporary Literature and the State." While the broader theme of the issue focuses on the relations between the collective state and individuated subjectivity and (literary) writers' engagement with or autonomy from politics, the writers also consider the state's value as an analytical paradigm for literary studies in this era of globalization. Hamid's novel, with its explorations of transnational identity and critique of exceptional (violent) power of the state, among other issues, seems an apt example to help anchor such a discussion on the state and the globe. The editors have characterized Changez's story as one that concerns "the resurgence of inter-national politics from within the carapace of globalization and the post-political" (Hart and Hansen 511).

My own analysis now proceeds to engage with this small body of literature in several ways: I deviate from Hartnell's discussion on American multiculturalism by focusing on Changez's "foreignness" both before and after 9/11 and by showing how that foreignness is mobilized politically for economic and national security interests. I also place a heavier accent on Changez's identity formation as an interiorized struggle, rent and forged by both national and global forces. Such a vacillating process undermines post-9/11 claims of totalizing categories and polarized identities, whether they are national, cultural or political. I, too, adopt Morey's emphasis on the novel's form and focus on the monologue, but rather than relating it to readerly expectations, I explore it in the final two sections as a site of multiple resistance in which a foreigner like Changez, as the speaking "I" of the monologue, can be seen as an excluded (but privileged) speaking subject within Rancière's theorization of political participation. This "I" is also related to a broader post-9/11 context in which narrative domination – the ascendancy of certain voices and the inaudibility of others – is contested.

### **A Shifting Identity**

As mentioned previously, Hamid's novel features a story within a story, with the present plotline

in Lahore interlinking a recollection of the past that is devastated by 9/11. My analysis begins with this remembrance of the past by looking at Changez's articulation of an ambivalent tale of both belonging and exclusion. The story that Changez tells the American auditor/tea companion in Lahore is the four and a half years he spent in America. This account is most notably in the form of a *Bildungsroman*, a novel of education or a novel of formation. The story traces the development of Changez's mind and character from youth to early adulthood, with 9/11 serving as a moment of identity disorientation. The *Bildungsroman* model has, no doubt, undergone many transformations, renegotiations, and contestations in different national literary contexts, but it is worthwhile to explore briefly its original German roots, as they yield helpful insights into Changez's experience of disillusionment and his formation as a resistant model.

Often featuring a linear plot of its protagonist's growth from youth to adulthood, the genre emerged within the framework of the 19<sup>th</sup> century European nation-state, with the archetype being Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*. As Jed Esty explains, the classic model developed within the context of German nationalism, and is one based on "an ideal of organic culture whose temporality and harmony could be reflected in the developing personality at the core of the *Bildungsroman*" (5). Entangling the process of nation-building and self-making, the genre depicts the development from youth to maturity within and against the backdrop of the nation-state. Not only do the protagonists reach maturity by the end of the novel, but this maturity is also marked by some form of integration into the national community. At the same time, the self-formation parallels national development, in what Esty has described as the "soul-nation allegory" (4). He notes the important symbolic function of nationhood, which gives a completed form to modern societies similar to how adulthood rounds off the modern subject, stabilizing the unpredictable aging process of the protagonist by bringing him/her to the stable state of adulthood (4). "Adulthood and nationhood were the twin symbolic termini for the endless and originless processes of self-formation and social transformation," argues Esty (26).

In Changez's case, however, the circumscription of the self within the nation and the synchronization between adulthood and nationhood are impacted by both the enabling and disruptive forces of globalization, as I will soon demonstrate. His resettlement in America forces his identity formation to undergo a far more complex process drawn within the national contexts of both America and Pakistan; moreover, the process also has the newly emerging reference point of empire. The story that Changez tells the American listener is his own self-making in the shadow of US imperial power; a self that ultimately comes of age amid, in Retort's phrase, a

“new round of conquest and colonization” (Retort 11). With such a dual national/empire-situated identity, Changez also possesses a diasporic sensibility in which his whole orientation about national belonging, cultural affiliations, home desiring and homeland are always problematized and ever evolving. This is exactly contrary to the spirit of that post-9/11 moment when notions of identity, nation, homeland, and “ways of life” were articulated as being stable and coherent, whether it is through official discourses such as Bush’s unproblematic political distinction between friend and enemy, or through popular media narratives that had welcomed Huntington’s paradigm of civilizational animosities (the West versus Islam) and cultural distinctness and fault lines (Huntington 25).

Changez’s trajectory to becoming a national subject is characterized by convoluted relations with the nation-state; he departs from one, embraces another, then renounces the latter in order to return to the former. When the story begins, Changez is the 18-year-old youth embarking on a journey of expatriation, escaping from the national confines of Pakistan to pursue an elite education at Princeton and, subsequently, a career in finance when he secures a prestigious job as a successful financial analyst at the New York firm of Underwood Samson. At this point, his national affinity is reoriented towards his new adopted country, thus continuing in his development as a national subject, albeit not as a Pakistani but as an American. As the model emigrant, both highly skilled and eager, he comes to embody America’s beloved ideal of securing upward mobility through hard work and dedication. Through his new job, Changez becomes part of the Wall Street elite that helps America sustain its global economic domination. As the capitalist overachiever who is basking in the American Dream, he is more American than native-born Americans themselves; his mastery of English, too, surpasses that of native speakers. When Bush’s post-9/11 speeches always describe the enemy and the terrorist as absolutely external and other, Changez is a potential enemy (a designation he will receive following 9/11) who is actually more “us” than ourselves.

Empowered by an impressive American salary, exemplifying American economic values, and enamored with an American woman, Erica,<sup>52</sup> Changez’s enfolding of the self in the frame of

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<sup>52</sup> Esty’s “soul-nation” allegory can also be adopted for Changez’s love interest Erica, whose name is echoic of “America.” In the novel, Erica’s interest in Changez and her emotional life often parallel those of America’s own attitudes towards Changez. She embraces him at first as a friend much like America embracing Changez as the hard-working foreigner. When America falls into a deep state of post-9/11 mourning and nostalgia, and becomes suspicious of foreigners, so does Erica. She, too, retreats into the past, pines for her dead boyfriend Chris and starts to lose interest in Changez. Equally, Changez’s frustrated relationship with her serves as a parallel to his troubled relationship with the country. After all, both Erica and America are objects of his desire and unrequited love. During his courtship of Erica, Changez had to pretend to be Chris in order to win her love and secure their first and only

the nation seems to progress unhindered. But the nation-state as a stable reference point is already in doubt, for what he identifies with is not solely America as a nation in itself, but also the American empire. His job has, after all, placed him at the heart of the empire. Changez becomes so captivated by his new employer Underwood Samson that, at one point, he proclaims himself not as a Pakistani national but an Underwood Samson trainee and derives tremendous pride from his firm's offices (34).<sup>53</sup> One sees that for Changez, who has passionately identified himself with a company – one with global operations that intertwine it with American international economic power – America's imperial outreach has become a key and commanding reference point for his own self growth. But this smooth assimilation, aided by an embrace of empire, undergoes dramatic disorientation following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, which abruptly return him back into the fold of the nation-state.

Although before 9/11 Changez had already experienced a certain disquietude, sensing that he had been “play-acting” as an American (67), 9/11 precipitates a definite break. Despite being a New Yorker, Changez – being away on a business trip to Manila – encounters 9/11 through the television. While some of the most common emotions arising from witnessing 9/11, at least as expressed by Americans, had been shock, terror, outrage, sorrow, and grief, Changez experiences, or at least articulates, none of these. As he confesses, his initial reaction of seeing the collapse of the twin towers is one of pleasure and fascination with the image of the catastrophe:

I stared as one—and then the other—of the twin towers of New York's World Center collapsed. And then I *smiled*. Yes, despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased ... my thoughts were not with the *victims* of the attack ... no, I was caught up in the symbolism of it all, the fact that someone had so visibly brought America to her knees. (72 and 73, italics in original)

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sexual encounter. Changez eventually relates this pretense to the false identity he had to construct in order to become an American. On a separate note, this association of the female body and the adopted land is actually quite common in ethnic literature. The conquest/possession of the native white (often blonde) woman is seen as a gauge of a male immigrant's successful assimilation into the country.

<sup>53</sup> Both Morey and Hartnell have already pointed out that the initials of Underwood Samson are U.S. I would add that the name Underwood Samson is also echoic of Uncle Sam, the figure personifying the American government in old army recruitment posters. Later in the novel, Changez would increasingly view himself as a “soldier” in the American financial empire.

Knowing such a reaction would be unacceptable to his American colleagues, he forces himself to *feign* the same shock and anger that others are experiencing (74). Such a counter-intuitive delight in the terrorist attacks and in America's misfortune contradicts the global outpouring of sympathy for, and solidarity with, not just the victims and their families, but also with America itself. Here, Changez expresses resistance to three popular and intertwined post-9/11 sentiments: a broadly accepted and embraced identification with America, grief, and patriotism.

Encountering a post-9/11 climate of suspicion and hostilities, within which there exists a pervasive discourse that mobilizes the category of foreignness to signify negatively what/who "we" clearly are not, Changez's foreignness now signifies a possible threat to homeland security, rather than the embodiment of ideals. Even Erica begins to lose interest in him. With 9/11 as the catalyst, Changez's usual sense of self-possession is exchanged for self-examination. The attacks mark the beginning of what he calls an "inflective journey," which not only involves the eventual rejection of America and a journey home, but also a new political consciousness. He begins to formulate an overt critique of America by highlighting the global effects of its war on terror, in particular its disruption in Pakistan-India relations. While the US secures its own borders and solidifies national identity, Changez, too, has home and nation on his mind, being concerned for his family in Pakistan now facing a possible war with India. His national identity and orientations begin to shift again from the global and the imperial to the local.

This disorientation has wider implications if one considers the classic *Bildungsroman* model that reflects reciprocal allegories of self-making and nation-building. While Changez's own developmental process destabilizes and undergoes tremendous confusion, so does America's own maturity as a superpower, with its own shaky entry into the new century marred by a domestic catastrophe and two foreign wars. The terrorist attacks have disrupted the developmental trajectories for both soul and nation. While the post-9/11 official nationalistic doctrine disseminates imagery and narratives of American ideals and benevolence that claim to bring democracy and prosperity to troubled places like Afghanistan and Iraq, Changez narrates a counter-national history of the new woes of American imperial power. This narrative act of resistance presents a glimpse of America as seen from the (potential) victims of US military power, directly exposing the fissure between former president Bush's triumphant post-9/11 rhetoric of freedom and democracy and the material consequences of his administration's military activities in far-flung places. Reversing his previous endorsement of the globalization of American economic power, Changez now condemns America's military power. Through

Changez's eyes, one sees that it is America's global war on terror that is increasingly becoming the new disaster that eclipses the 9/11 attacks itself. Expressing an abhorrence for America's dealings abroad, Changez gives the American listener a quick alternative history lesson by reviewing the country's interventionist record: Vietnam, Korea, the straits of Taiwan, the Middle East and most recently Afghanistan (156).

So opposed to his once beloved American host country, Changez tells how he provocatively grows a beard, which he calls "a symbol of his identity" (130). Although one might see the beard as a sign of radicalization, Changez does not experience a conversion to Islam. This change in appearance remains an uncertain gesture, as he said it is perhaps partly out of protest or as a way to identify with Pakistan. It is, however, a determined distancing from his American colleagues. Increasingly viewing himself as "a soldier and servant" of America's financial system, and thus its global financial empire, Changez dissociates himself further from what he sees as America's "project of domination" (156). Changez's counter-history, thus, also includes a revision of his own quintessential American story. Rather than viewing it through that American gaze of financial success and cultural assimilation, he reassesses it through the lenses of the Janissaries – Christians serving in a Muslim army back in the 14<sup>th</sup> century – and considers himself a reversed Janissary, a Muslim serving in a Christian (American financial) empire. He tells the American listener:

I spent that night considering what I had become. There really could be no doubt: I was a modern-day janissary, a servant of the American empire at a time when it was invading a country [Afghanistan] with a kinship to mine and was perhaps even colluding to ensure that my own country [Pakistan] faced the treat of war ... I had thrown my lot with the men of Underwood Samson, with the officers of the empire, when all along I was predisposed to feel compassion for those ... whose lives the empire thought nothing of overturning for its own gain. (152)

One sees here how Changez begins to link America's war activities to the capitalist state. Given that finance, as Changez believes, is a primary means by which the American empire exerts its influence and power, he quits his job and refuses to participate any longer in American global domination and imperialism. Having solidified his political and ethical convictions, Changez exchanges his once globally-oriented future with infinite international career possibilities and travels, for a limited national one as he returns back to Pakistan. In a dilatory way, Changez seems to be completing his own developmental process as an adult and reassimilates into the

confines of the national community, albeit Pakistan's and not America's, by restoring kinship, language, and identity. His own uncertain arrival at adulthood is related to Pakistan's own lack of national maturity, as he calls on Pakistan to exercise greater independence in its domestic and international affairs and to resist American interference. But if both soul and nation are destabilized by 9/11, adulthood and nationhood can no longer serve as the terminal points, thus propelling Changez's process of self-evolution and social transformation rather than allowing both to reach any final resolutions.

In the post-9/11 world of "them/us" and "with/against us" paradigms as prescribed by Bush, this shift in Changez might be seen as a crossover from the category of "us" – as testified by his former American education, job, and success – to the category of "them," namely those who refuse to be with America and have become, by default, the enemy. But, ultimately, his loyalties remain unclear. The fact that he can cross various divides and then re-cross them underscores the instability of these lines and puts them in jeopardy. As Changez's formation testifies, affinities, identities, and identification – be they national, economic or cultural – shift constantly. His name, after all, summons the word "change" itself, which aptly characterizes his evolving life. He is able to position and reposition himself strategically – if not somewhat thoughtlessly – as he puts on a business suit and grows a beard. The burden of a diasporic identity is having to remain agile in negotiating different positionalities. He is able (and has) to shuttle between the borders, exploring American spaces and customs from his foreigner vantage point, but also recalibrating his own native Pakistani culture (negatively at first) through American lenses.

What is even more difficult to determine is Changez's identity within Bush's binary of enemy or friend. Is he an enemy or a friend of the US and of his accidental American companion? Although clearly anti-American in his rhetoric, Changez nevertheless also describes himself as a "lover of America." After returning to Pakistan, he becomes a university lecturer, and as such, has been publically denouncing America's military activities and its war on terror. He has also persuaded his students to participate in anti-American protests. Furthermore, one of his students has been arrested for allegedly planning to assassinate a development aid official. Against the backdrop of America's global hunt for terrorists and Pakistan's ill reputation as a safe haven for al-Qaeda leaders and Taliban fighters, Changez's political activities have gained potency. As a result, he has become a target of possible American retribution. While Changez once exemplified "our way of life," he can just as easily mutate into a threat to that life. The

novel's title takes on another possibility as the word "fundamentalist" might be joined once again with Islam. As Hartnell has pointed out, Changez does still show stereotypical traits of an Islamist terrorist: a well-educated young man from the Muslim world, and one who is disaffected by a sense of rejection from the West (345). There are plenty of hints that the American listener might be an undercover secret agent sent to intimidate, or even worse, to assassinate Changez for his anti-American activities, and yet, this American accepts Changez's invitation for tea and listens to his tale.

The American listener, too, has an indeterminate status. Their relationship becomes one of an accidental friendship, as the sharing of their afternoon tea is extended when Changez treats the American to the evening meal. As Changez tells the American: "It is a mark of friendship when someone treats you to a meal—ushering you thereby into a relationship of mutual generosity ..." (40). Their casual friendship actually surpasses normal bounds as Changez divulges more and more intimate details of his love relationship with Erica. In the tone of a confession, Changez details his somewhat manipulated sexual encounter with Erica and acknowledges a sense of shame to the American auditor who takes on the role of a surrogate priest. As Changez explains, with the sharing of such private thoughts, he and the American man are, by the end of their encounter, "bound by a certain shared intimacy" (184). This emotional entanglement complicates any simple friend/enemy designations and underscores the complexity of political relations, which are always difficult to disentangle.

Even when the novel reaches its final scene, this enigmatic relationship remains unresolved. Changez extends his hand for a handshake in a gesture of goodwill, as a group of Pakistani men are closing in on them, perhaps to do the American harm. Meanwhile, the American's own response is also indeterminate as he reaches into his jacket, either for a pistol or the metal holder of his business cards. It remains unclear whether the two men are to do each other good or harm. Indeed, both characters elude the readers' grasp. Their fictional world of instability, ambiguity, and duality both reflects a similar real-world mistrust between Pakistan and the US, and also unsettles the post-9/11 political climate that privileges rhetorical certainty and disallows ambiguity. Contra Bush's "us and them" and "friend and enemy" distinctions, the encounter between Changez and the American, which oscillates precariously between amity and enmity, challenges this very possibility and certainty of distinguishing, knowing and identifying one's enemy and friend.

Avtar Brah once argued that: "processes of diasporic identity formation are exemplars

*par excellence* of the claim that identity is always plural, and in process” (197, italics in original). Not only is Changez’s passage to adulthood complicated by migration, it is also beset by forces of altering post-9/11 national attitudes, politics, as well as empire-building. Recall that this turbulent identity formation is divulged as a recollection of a past now being related to the present and told to the American auditor. Even as Changez speaks in the autobiographical mode of the “I,” which infers a certain stable identity from which one can narrate one’s life, his own is conspicuously marked by an absence of a fixed identity. Instead, one sees an identity unfolding, drifting, and maneuvering, allowing it to serve as a counter and resistant model that fractures supposedly distinct and delineated positions and identities. The next section examines how this memory of the past and its peculiar “I” narration might open other ways of resistance against post-9/11 boundaries.

### **Excluded Body as Speaking Subject**

Changez’s relationship with a post-catastrophe New York is one of estrangement, detachment and, finally, disavowal. While he had enjoyed a sense of inclusion before 9/11 as an insider to the city, he is quickly banished to the outside by the post-9/11 climate of suspicion. Upon returning to the city for the first time following the attacks, he is separated from his American-citizen colleagues and asked to join the queue for foreigners at immigration, which subjected him to questioning and inspections. Once, he is mistaken as an Arab and verbally assaulted as a result. When the whole city retreats in mourning, he himself confronts this public ritual of communal mourning only as a spectator and not as a participant. This can be seen in the scene when he encounters the impromptu shrines to the 9/11 victims that had sprung up in the city. These walls or public spaces with posters and flyers with the names and pictures of the missing and the dead had emerged not only as one of the most iconic and gut-wrenching images of post-disaster suffering and despondency, but had become for so many New Yorkers informal sites for collective mourning and affirmation of communal belonging/solidarity. No such possibilities, however, existed for Changez. As he explains:

I would often glance at them [shrines] as I walked by: photos, bouquets, words of condolence – nestled into street corners and between shops and along the railings of public squares. They reminded me of my own uncharitable – indeed, inhumane – response to the tragedy, and I felt from them a constant murmur of reproach.

(79)

While locating himself at scenes of grief, Changez distances himself from its effects. Changez's sense of alienation from the scene might also work on a meta-level to defamiliarize readers from what has become a significant image in the collective American national memory. Along with photographs of the blazing and collapsing twin towers, ash-smearing firefighters, and fleeing citizens, images of these homemade posters of the missing and the dead have appeared in newspapers, special 9/11 commemorative editions of magazines, books and art exhibitions; they have become part of the standard visual illustrations of the catastrophe. When descriptions of these posters and impromptu shrines appear in 9/11 novels, such as in *The Good Life* and *The Writing on the Wall*, they receive longer treatment and are usually invested with great pathos. Hamid's alternative, and by comparison very brief, treatment of this emblematic scene of collective mourning defamiliarizes a very familiar and poignant moment in contemporary American history that usually awakens a tremendous sense of sorrow and sympathy. His interpretation becomes a counterpoint to the pervasive national mood of mourning.

As he walks through the city, Changez confronts the ubiquity of the American flag and senses a nationalization of the terrorist attacks and the emergence of national unity and vengeance (79). A nostalgia, says Changez, grips the country, but one that is unsure of what or which past it must return to. And if such a going-back was possible, he wonders whether this return "contained a part written for someone like me" (115). What role or form of participation, indeed, is possible for a foreigner like Changez after 9/11? If mourning, patriotism, and anti-terrorism discourses, as I argued earlier in the introduction, are the primary qualifications for belonging and togetherness and function as the main coordinates that have structured the field of visibility and audibility, what is his part? What forms of speech does he utter and what does he make possible to be heard?

As an excluded body from this post-9/11 scene of belonging and mourning, Changez claims a part for himself by assertively speaking up and telling his own counter memories of the catastrophe and its aftermath. One sees from page one of the novel how Changez approaches the American visitor in Lahore some years after the disaster, initiates contact, and proceeds intriguingly to tell his own revisionist version of 9/11. Equally important of the resistant content of the stories he tells is the formal structure of the dramatic monologue through which Hamid allows Changez to communicate, foregrounding this character as the single speaking subject, as exemplified in these opening lines: "Excuse me, sir, but may I be of assistance? Ah, I see I have alarmed you. Do not be frightened by my beard: I am a lover of America ... Come, tell me, what

were you looking for?” (1). It is this connection between Changez’s excluded body and his status as a *speaking* “I,” that opens up immense potential for resistance both on the level of content (his story as a counter narrative) and the act of speaking itself (as a disruptive speech act). Thus, even when Changez has no (emotional and affective) qualifications to speak, being outside the sphere of appearance, he speaks nevertheless and claims a part.

To solidify further this relationship between excluded bodies and their potential status as speaking beings, I now return briefly to Rancière’s thoughts on the emancipatory possibilities of speech acts. Recall Rancière’s well-known and paradoxical designation of “the part of those who have no part,” or those who have no part in the community’s sensible order. Rancière’s politics centers on this polemical emergence of the non-part, a process known as dissensus (see my previous chapter), in which those who are not fully included in a system of rights – those who do not count or those who have no presumed qualifications to part-take – challenge their exclusion through speech acts by demonstrating their linguistic capacity. In discussing this issue of speech and legitimacy, Rancière returns to the deduction Aristotle made in Book I of *Politics*: what marks the political nature of humans is their possession of the *logos*, that capacity to express what is useful, harmful, just and unjust. In contrast, an animal is only in possession of *phôné* and capable of only signaling pleasure and pain (*DS* 37). But what this distinction overlooks is a third category, for in political life there are those endowed with *logos* but are still excluded from political participation (Sonderegger 63-64). As Rancière has argued, the rejection of certain categories of people as political participants often begins by a refusal to see them as bearers of politicalness and to hear and acknowledge their words as valid speech and discourse (*DS* 38). As he claims:

Politics exists because the *logos* is never simply speech, because it is always indissolubly the *account* that is made of this speech: the account by which a sonorous emission is understood as speech, capable of enunciating what is just, whereas some other emission is merely perceived as a noise signaling pleasure or pain, consent or revolt. (*D* 22-23, italics in original)

Politics for Rancière, however, occurs when the uncounted, those who have no speech to be heard, speak up, seize their yet-to-exist rights rather than wait to be granted those rights, and intervene in the sayable as speaking subjects demonstrating their possession of *logos*. By doing so, they also reconfigure the distribution of the sensible in that, as those who have no speech to be had within the existing framework, they nevertheless do just that: they speak when they are

not to speak and partake in what they have no part in, therefore disrupting the established distribution of the sensible and what can be heard. What arises is a new visibility or audibility of something (or someone) that is previously non-visible or non-audible. This is why politics is aesthetic for Rancière: it, like the arts, produces a new way of seeing and hearing something and something new being seen and heard (May, “South Carolina” 115).

With Rancière’s theoretical assistance, one can conceptualize Changez as an excluded-but-still-speaking subject by seeing him as a non-part that makes claims to equality and inclusion, and therefore reconfigures the established sensory order. But as I stipulated previously, post-9/11 exclusions have a different dimension than the forms of political exclusions and inequalities that interest Rancière. Within his arguments, the non-parts (the *demos*) refer to a collective and not an individual like Changez. What I see, however, is a similar association in terms of the capacity for enunciation for those who are not previously identifiable within an established field of appearance and how their disruptive appearance can then reconfigure the field itself. In the case of Changez, his post-9/11 exclusion is not one from political participation per se, but an exclusion from national pathos, the collective experience of catastrophe, narratives, memories, social spaces, and his recognition as a legitimate and valid participant of the post-trauma American society. He stands outside the spaces of mourning and patriotism, which are precisely spaces that are politicized following 9/11 and are now contested. His resistance through the act of speaking up, in this sense, is not aimed at emancipation by demonstrating the equality of all speaking beings; he is not staging and seizing non-existent political rights. He does, however, disrupt the sphere of audibility, in which the lines of separation are drawn to accord specific bodies the possibility to speak specific narratives, while silencing others. Such a disruption reconfigures the existing sensory limits of what can be heard after 9/11. Here lies the book’s politics; in that it recasts given perceptual limits by allowing Changez to speak and forcing the American to be inaudible.

When the sphere of appearance is one peopled by mourners, patriotic natives, and catastrophe victims, and as a result, makes audible their narratives of hope and heroism, Changez serves as the previously missing voice. Thus, amid post-9/11 flag-waving patriots and grieving bodies, he as a different figure emerges and speaks. He tells a defamiliarizing counter-narrative of exclusion, rejection and repatriation, re-narrating 9/11 to impart his own experiences and insights in an account that is un-American and unsympathetic to the disaster itself. This articulation from a marginal and illegitimate figure is a resistant act as it inserts the previously

overlooked memory of a life, experience, and pathos that contrasts with the prevailing national normalizing one. While Changez, as an excluded body, tells an alternative story that creates possibilities of modifying post-9/11 audibility, his act of speaking up actually goes even further by staging a double act of miming and subverting. Indeed, Rancière foregrounds the role of excluded speaking subjects and their disruptive presence, but Changez actually introduces a second layer of intervention by destabilizing his own position as a speaking subject.

### **The Speaking Subject in Doubt**

Changez might be the outsider poised to transform the established sensory sphere but while he speaks, he does so with a covert aim; the nature of Changez as a speaking “I” is both problematic and precarious. As mentioned previously, the novel’s two storylines are narrated through Changez’s first-person point of view, but the main storyline in Lahore has the extra dimension of being a dramatic monologue spoken by Changez. It is helpful to examine the form of the monologue and highlight some of its generic conventions before I argue how they affect Changez’s positioning as a speaking subject.

A poetic form, the dramatic monologue is most often linked to the works of Victorian poets such as Alfred Tennyson and Robert Browning, with Browning’s “My Last Duchess” seen by many as the best-known model (Byron 3). While scholars often disagree on the form’s properties, it does exhibit some essential qualities: a first-person speaker who alone speaks in response to a silent auditor, in a specific setting, on a particular occasion (Sinfield 3-4; Byron 8-29).<sup>54</sup> Vital to the form is the feature of dramatic irony where the sole speaker reveals his own character and temperament unwittingly (Sinfield 7), creating a disjunction between the speaker’s own self-disclosure and self-understanding and the keener awareness and judgment of the poet and the reader. Here lies an invitation for the reader to scrutinize the speaker’s authenticity and integrity.

Equally important to my analysis is this unstable position of the speaking subject, which is undermined in two specific ways by the form. Scholars exploring the Victorian origins of the dramatic monologue have suggested that the form emerged in reaction to the Romantic lyric, which centers on the poet’s own personal subjective experience and inner emotions. Instead,

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<sup>54</sup> While the dramatic monologue’s form is significant to my argument, I do not wish to engage in the complex debate that aims to solidify or deconstruct the form itself. For a comprehensive discussion of the form’s history, definitions and functions, see Glennis Byron’s *Dramatic Monologue* (London: Routledge, 2003).

practitioners of the dramatic monologue explore a more objectively perceived world and experiences external to the poet's own (Byron 35). While the lyric associates the speaking "I" in the poem to the poet, the speaker of the dramatic monologue has been distinguished from the poet (Byron 11). But more important than the speaking "I" being severed from the poet's own voice, is its nature in relation to the representation of the self. Whilst the lyric voice presents itself as "autonomous, self-conscious, atemporal, and male" (Slinn 309), the speaking "I" of the dramatic monologue, in contrast, constructs "a self that is not autonomous, unified or stable, but rather the unfixed, fragmented product of various social and historical forces," according to Glennis Byron (42-43). As she comments on the form's strategy: "... dramatic monologue can be said to begin as a poem of contestation, a ruthless taking apart and exposure of the illusion of both the supposedly autonomous, authoritative and unified Romantic subject and the possibility of transcendence, of attaining a universal position untouched by context" (42). Relatedly, looking at the contemporary use of dramatic monologues, Byron has also associated the form to social critique (6, 129-145). On the whole, the form's strategic function seems to question and disrupt rather than confirm and consolidate authority.

Whilst not a poem, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* does for the most part adhere to the main formal features of the dramatic monologue. The scenes in Lahore are a dramatization of Changez's singular voice and point of view, focusing on his primacy as the sole dominating and all-knowing speaking subject. As the authoritative speaker, he is the one in possession of knowledge. In every chapter, he launches knowingly into his tales; he is fully and completely in control. Even though the presence of the American auditor suggests the possibility of a perspective deviating from Changez's point of view, that perspective is unfavorably mediated. While the American does speak, and many interactions occur between him and Changez, he remains unheard by the reader and his interventions and responses are only implied from Changez's words: "What has so startled you? Was it that sound in the distance? I assure you, it was not the report of a pistol ... but rather the misfiring exhaust of a passing rickshaw ... It is most disturbing, I agree. What? Is somebody following us?" (176). This monologue technique has effectively rendered the American inaudible. His objections, interjections, and characteristics – jittery, suspicious, and disrespectful – can only be gathered and inferred through Changez's speech. The reader accesses this American only through Changez who controls the domain of audibility, or what can be heard. The constructed inaudibility of the American's voice and the totality of Changez's point of view make distinct the power relationship at stake; the novel

makes no pretense of Changez's own account of 9/11 as a domination of speech over the American's inaudibility and perspectives.

Changez's narrative domination is actually a reversal of the power relations that have influenced how the catastrophe has been explained, understood, and remembered. When commenting on 9/11 in *Precarious Life*, Butler identifies the narrative dimension of an explanatory framework that seeks to understand the catastrophe: "In the United States, we begin the story by invoking a first-person narrative point of view, and telling what happened on September 11. It is that date and the unexpected and fully terrible experience of violence that propels the narrative" (5). This narrative structure does not encourage an understanding of the prehistory to the attacks and serves to preclude accounts that might de-center America's narrative "I" within the international political sphere. Seeking an alternative, Butler says: "The ability to narrate ourselves not from the first person alone, but from, say, the position of the third, or to receive an account delivered in the second, can actually work to expand our understanding of the forms that global power has taken" (8).

Mimicking America's narrative "I" and the linguistic authority and autonomy that come with the first-person point of view, Changez protrusively and bluntly speaks to the unidentified American auditor through the second-person pronoun "you," thus delivering his story exactly through the second-person address to the American listener who is forced to receive such a de-centering narrative. This direct address of "you" also places an extra responsibility on readers, who are partitioned vicariously to the same receiving addressee position as the American stranger. Much like *Le Monde's* post-9/11 proclamation that "We are all Americans," the novel, via the monologue, also offers readers this same possibility to adopt the subject position of the American character. They can, of course, choose not to do so but they, nevertheless, must assess their own positioning.

But while Changez reverses America's post-9/11 rhetorical domination and the narrative "I" and mimics it for his own purpose of disrupting the sphere of audibility, the monologue form simultaneously asks one to be distrustful of Changez and to question and scrutinize his narratorial authenticity and credibility, and by extension, America's own post-9/11 narrative domination and self-preoccupation. At stake is not so much the unwitting revelation of Changez's hidden character and temperament, as in the case of classic dramatic monologue models, but his ominous domination and the narrative precarity of the American auditor in the novel. The monologue invites a closer epistemological investigation into how Changez's self-

knowledge is produced, since the form has already suggested a speaker who is not necessarily stable and authoritative. Changez's own narrative supremacy and the absence of competing perspectives as a result of the American's inaudibility are signals to examine and judge, reversely, America's own narrative authority for reliability and the post-9/11 sphere of appearance which is overpowered by themes of trauma, mourning, and patriotism at the expense of other deviating narratives.

In this sense, Changez is articulating a double resistance: as an excluded foreigner, he constitutes himself as a valid speaking being and mimes the rhetorical and narrative power of America itself, demonstrating his own legitimate possession of *logos* and resisting by disrupting the existing sensible (audible) fabric. Concurrently, his monologue invites a critique and investigation into that exact power of speech domination, opening another channel of resistance. Multiple aims are embedded within Changez's utterances. In sum, his story-telling functions to mimic speech domination, to intrude and disrupt established audible orders and, finally, to undermine speech and auditory mastery.

## **Conclusion**

In the post-9/11 world of religious and political boundaries, Changez demonstrates an uprooted and fluctuating identity, as well as multiple affinities and allegiances that are difficult to disjoin. Although "different" and "deviating" are the two qualities that commonly characterize Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, my analysis has examined its non-conforming elements and has suggested how they have generated possibilities of resistance in relation to the post-9/11 sensible/audible experience, memory, and identity. Changez's own personal formation is shown as a site of resistance, with his *Bildung* – bearing national, global and diasporic inscriptions – as an oppositional model; just like his uncertain political status as both enemy and foe. His role as the sole speaker of the novel is linked to his status as an excluded body outside a mourning and patriotic American community.

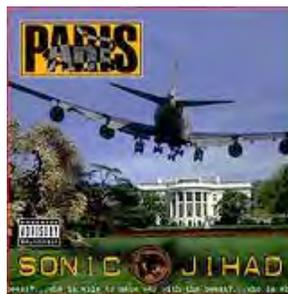
While previously he had no part in this community's memory-formation process, he now does have a part to play by inserting his own alternative memory of alienation and estrangement. As an outsider, he polemically makes claims to inclusion through a virtuoso act of story-telling that can transform the established audible boundaries. But by reigning over this audibility, his domination is also subjected to scrutiny via the formal structure of the monologue, with his speech mastery and totalizing point of view undercut by doubt. This possibility of being heard, a

sign of agency and transformation under Rancière's theorization, is now also contested. Nonetheless, the post-9/11 audible order is beginning to be reconfigured with Changez, and even more possibilities of alteration lie ahead for auditory resistance when considering my next case study in which a sonic assault will articulate no such ambivalence over its own auditory ferocity and domination.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Restaging the War on Terror and Nationhood: Political Rap's Sonic Resistance

The cover art for *Sonic Jihad*, the post-9/11 album by the American rapper Paris, shows a low-flying airplane heading for the White House (see figure 3.1). Should the viewer fail to grasp the incendiary message, a casual sampling of a few tracks from the album (Guerrilla Funk, 2003 and 2009) would reinforce the counter-hegemonic intention: the album contains neither tributes to heroic 9/11 rescue workers nor elegies for the dead, as many post-9/11 cultural objects often do. Rather, it is a war declaration. Written and performed by Paris, the album appropriates the lexicon of military insurgency and resistance movements and provides what the artist claims is “revolutionary music.” Targeting the American corporate elite, the mainstream media, the former Bush administration, nationalism, and the war on terror, Paris’s biting lyrics and menacing soundscape have returned political rap – intentionally and nostalgically – to its historical roots as a form of oppositional culture. As such, the album dovetails both the subjects of protest music and post-9/11 aesthetics of politics. It articulates, to appropriate Rancière’s phrasing, a politics of aesthetics that utilizes music fully for the project of resistance and denunciation, and moreover, this political-artistic project directly targets the aesthetics of post-9/11 politics.



**Figure 3.1.** Cover art of album *Sonic Jihad* by Paris, produced by Guerrilla Funk Recordings, 2003 and 2009. Image and reprint permission courtesy of Guerrilla Funk.

Continuing my exploration of the previous chapter, post-catastrophe politics is envisaged through Rancière’s aesthetic lens as a struggle over perceptible and sensible materials, particularly as applied to the realm of audibility, or what can be heard. I examine aesthetic borders that separate the audible from the inaudible, arguing that the ordering of a sensible world – in particular the audible and the visible (the latter will be addressed in chapters four and five) – is part of the manifestation of political domination and power. As Rancière stresses in an

interview: “The police define the configuration of the visible, the thinkable, and the possible through a systematic production of the given, not through spectacular strategies of control and repression” (Carnevale and Kelsey 6). Resistance, as expressed by *Sonic Jihad*, is allied with a struggle for the sphere of appearance by contesting the given dominant boundaries of the audible and the perceptible, which in the post-9/11 context are drawn and policed to enclose discourses of mourning, American exceptionalism and nationalism, while excluding other contestatory narratives. One illustration of these post-9/11 auditory borders is the odd incident involving the Texas-based media group, Clear Channel Communications, which had circulated an eclectic list of 150 songs that it had asked its radio stations, about 1,170 of them, to avoid playing following the attacks.<sup>55</sup>

It is also indicative that no official music videos were made for any of the tracks on *Sonic Jihad*, in all probability due to its controversial content, which, if translated into music videos, would not likely have been picked up by music television channels.<sup>56</sup> As an excluded object, the album attacks the dominant regime of audibility, as I will soon demonstrate, by introducing different modes of sense perception and forms of meanings to 9/11 and the war on terror. This chapter traces that sonic resistance by first looking at the relations between rap music and 9/11, and the fiercely militant and self-referential Paris himself, an artist whose tracks are dedicated to depicting the reality of racial oppression but also his own efforts to proclaim freedom, provocation, and “upliftin.” My analysis continues with a closer look at the album’s liner notes to identify Paris’s political views and orientations. The next section focuses solely on the album’s musical elements and other sound effects and explores specifically how Paris creates a different sense perception of the war on terror by relocating the war elsewhere and by re-inscribing new meanings to the sounds of terror. This tactic of re-signification is extended in the ensuing segment which demonstrates how Paris redefines post-9/11 key terms such as freedom, jihad, police, and the figure of the soldier. I then consider how Paris, in view of the post-9/11 effusion of patriotism, reframes the concept of nationhood and restages national belonging

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<sup>55</sup> For details on the incident, see *The New York Times* report at [www.nytimes.com/2001/09/19/arts/the-pop-life-after-the-horror-radio-stations-pull-some-songs.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2001/09/19/arts/the-pop-life-after-the-horror-radio-stations-pull-some-songs.html), accessed November 21, 2012. Some of those songs include The Gap Band’s “You Dropped a Bomb on Me,” Soundgarden’s “Blow Up the Outside World,” and “Ticket to Ride” by The Beatles.

<sup>56</sup> That would not be the first time that the rapper was shunned by a music station; the video for the title track of his debut album *The Devil Made Me Do It* (Tommy Boy Records, 1990) was banned by MTV, according to a biography of Paris on the music channel’s website at [http://www.mtv.com/music/artist/paris\\_rap\\_/artist.jhtml](http://www.mtv.com/music/artist/paris_rap_/artist.jhtml), accessed on November 28, 2012. As several years have now passed since 9/11, MTV is playing the video for “Don’t Stop the Movement” from Paris’s more recent album *Acid Reflex* (Guerrilla Funk, 2008).

through a return to the history of black struggles and the Black Diaspora. My analysis here also considers the virtual community of amateur YouTube video makers who are utilizing Paris's music for their own political projects. While this informal YouTube approach goes beyond the album's composition and recorded performance to examine the music's interactions with its listeners, this is not meant to be a comprehensive exploration of audience reception. It aims to assess how Paris's music impacts its audience socially and politically as they form a virtual hip hop community. Finally, my examination ends with a discussion of some of the blind spots of Paris's politicized music which he has conceptualized through pedagogy and enlightenment. I do so by returning to Rancière's writings on several interlinked subjects: intellectual equality, aesthetic dissensus and art's efficacy, all of which find new resonance in Paris's music.

The methodology for *Sonic Jihad* is slightly different from my approach to other objects in the dissertation, as I place extra emphasis on the artist himself. Given that many rappers whose fame, inflated personality, and ability to generate controversy rival those of major movie celebrities, the extra emphasis I place on Paris is inspired by Richard Dyer's concept of the "star image." In his book *Stars*, Dyer argues that a star image is created through the interaction of multiple media texts, such as promotion, films, critical reception, and other commentaries, leading to wide-ranging meanings (60-62). For some stars these various elements of signification reinforce one another, and yet for others, they are in contradiction (63-64). With this in mind, I also explore official promotional material, fragments of interviews and reviews to understand Paris's image and iconography as a polemical and belligerent rap artist. This extra dimension helps to move my examination beyond mere textual analysis on the protest lyrics' social commentaries, whose meanings are often context-bound and multiple (Balliger 426). While lyrics still serve as an important site of meanings, their consideration can be deepened with multiple lines of inquiry into the album's oppositional practices through sounds, guest stars, and style, as well as its impact on social relations (Balliger 424 and 429). This would underscore rap music as a more complex cultural object whose meanings, politics, and resistance are produced through multiple interactions and contexts.

### **Rhymed Anger with a Beat: Political Rap and Paris**

That hip hop would again function as cultural resistance against the dominant order is unsurprising, given that during its history it has often served as a declared form of opposition

against what bell hooks has called a “white supremacist capitalist” America.<sup>57</sup> This association of hip hop with dissidence is well established, as all of its prominent features have been theorized and deemed as resistance.<sup>58</sup> In terms of musical elements, its initial functional disruption/transformation of a turntable from a playback unit into an instrument of production succinctly illustrates Michel de Certeau’s idea of oppositional practices (Forman 389; de Certeau 3-4). At the same time, its earlier practice of sampling unabashedly challenged the music industry’s copyright laws (Forman 390). Through hip hop lyrics, be they political or not, resistance is mounted through the genre’s own unique linguistics (Alim 69-108), while the practice of self-ethnography gives a voice to the black underclass through their own depictions of ghetto oppression and exploitation (Light 143-144). Its resistance can also be attributed to the way live music performances create a temporary autonomous zone, or TAZ (Balliger 429). As my exploration of Paris will soon demonstrate, political rap often claims to disseminate counter-narratives to dominant or official accounts of public events by serving as an alternative media source. Despite its current commercialization and globalization, hip hop, in particular the category of political rap to which Paris belongs, still does retain some of this original oppositional spirit.

This antagonism is clearly seen in political hip hop’s controversial reactions and relations to the 9/11 catastrophe. One prominent incident revolves around comments by rapper KRS-One in 2004 when he responded to media questions on why the hip hop community was not engaged with 9/11 by saying: “9/11 happened to them ... 9/11 affected them down the block; the rich, the powerful those that are oppressing us as a culture.” But what angered many more was his comment that “we cheered when 9/11 happened in New York and say that proudly here.” He qualified his statement by explaining that in the pre-9/11 days, blacks were summarily prevented from entering the World Trade Center and hustled down to the train station because of their appearance and deportment. Precisely because of such past encounters, when the planes struck, it

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<sup>57</sup> Bell hooks uses this description frequently, see for example, *Outlaw Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>58</sup> Hip hop as a form of resistance has been well documented. For some overviews, see Theresa A. Martinez’s “Popular Culture as Oppositional Culture: Rap as Resistance,” *Sociological Perspectives* 40.2 (1997): 265-86; Brian Cross’s *It’s Not About a Salary: Rap, Race and Resistance in Los Angeles* (London: Verso, 1993); Part 5 of *That’s the Joint!: The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*, ed. Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal (New York: Routledge, 2004); chapter four of Tricia Rose’s *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), and Charise Cheney’s “In Search of The ‘Revolutionary Generation’: (En)gendering the Golden Age of Rap Nationalism,” *Journal of African American History* 90.3 (2005): 278-298. For rap as a form of linguistic resistance, see chapters one, two, and four of Samy H. Alim’s *Roc the Mic Right: The Language of Hip Hop Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

felt like the actualization of justice.<sup>59</sup> The 2004 single “Bin Laden” by Immortal Technique, which features Jadakiss rapping the line “Bush knocked down the towers,” is also reflective of a community that would rather denounce the US government than partake in popular displays of patriotism and national unity, and one that would rather condemn police brutality than venerate the NYPD as 9/11 heroes. For these African-American artists, their attachment to the nation-state is marred or non-existent due to a long history of civic terrorism and racism they themselves have experienced, or are identifying with their black communities.<sup>60</sup>

Paris, too, does not pledge any form of post-9/11 loyalty to America. If anything, judging from the album’s cover art, he sides with the enemy. Much like Changez in the last chapter, he hampers Bush’s facile attempts to distinguish between friends and foes, citizens and foreigners, patriots and terrorists. The post-9/11 process to solidify an “us” is as much in disarray as the process of enemification to engender a “them.” Paris first gained national exposure in America two decades ago with his hit single and first album *The Devil Made Me Do It* (Tommy Boy Records, 1990). This entrance into the hip hop scene put him in the company of other artists like the seminal and iconic political group Public Enemy, KRS-One, and X-Clan, who all incorporated black nationalist rhetoric into their music during a period described as the “Golden Age of Rap Nationalism” (Cheney 278). Every bit as belligerent and militant as Public Enemy, which went on to gain great popularity and renown, Paris has neither achieved as high a profile nor garnered the same academic curiosity, despite his virtuosity as an artist who flows at a furious speed in his signature baritone. He holds an economics degree from the University of California at Davis and has worked as a stockbroker. His real name is Oscar Jackson, Jr., but he chose the name Paris as a way to transform a Euro-centric word into something that is Afro-centric, he once explained in an interview with Germany’s BACKSPIN TV.<sup>61</sup> Shorn of his hardcore militant persona, Paris is a 45-year-old man with a family living in a wealthy suburb of

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<sup>59</sup> KRS-One’s full statement can be accessed at [www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/KRS-One](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/KRS-One), accessed November 28, 2012.

<sup>60</sup> Another famous incident that reveals the complex realities of African-Americans’ relations to the country centers around writer Amiri Baraka’s controversial poem “Somebody Blew Up America,” which focuses on how black Americans have suffered from domestic terrorism since the era of slavery. Another prominent theme of the poem is the history and evils of imperialism. For Baraka’s defense of his poem, see his article in *CounterPunch*, “The ADL Smear Campaign Against Me. I Will Not Resign, I Will Not Apologize,” at <http://www.counterpunch.org/2002/10/07/the-adl-smear-campaign-against-me/>, accessed November 28, 2012. For a detailed examination of the controversy, see Mathilde Roza’s “‘America under Attack’: Unity and Division after 9/11” in *Multiculturalism after 9/11: Transatlantic Perspectives*, ed. Derek Rubin and Jaap Verheul (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009).

<sup>61</sup> To access that interview, go to <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PVm5tTH2F0E>, accessed December 1, 2012.

Oakland and San Francisco, according to a news report.<sup>62</sup> In view of this, his strong commitment to and identification with the black underclass in his lyrics are noteworthy given that his own background suggests neither powerlessness nor oppression.



**Figure 3.2.** American rapper Paris. Credits unavailable. Reprint permission granted by the artist.

His fifth album *Sonic Jihad* serves as an interesting case study not only because it marked the bold return of the artist after a hiatus, but the album was also the launching pad for his new independent label Guerrilla Funk Recordings, which he created as an antidote to what he views as the post-9/11 “intolerant climate” of suppression of free speech and artistic expression. This independent production is also a form of resistance against what he sees as the “corporate homogenization” of hip hop and R&B. First released in 2003, just two years following the 9/11 catastrophe, the album was relaunched in 2009 in a deluxe edition with one extra remix. Depicting himself as “Hard Truth Soldier,” Paris’s overall performance is marshaled to serve his oppositional politics. If the loaded word “jihad” in the album’s title<sup>63</sup> and its aforementioned cover art of a plane targeting the White House are inadequate harbingers of the political lyrics to be heard on the CD, other graphic elements and images on the album jacket and in the liner notes clearly characterize Paris’s revolutionary commitments. Disregarding post-9/11 national rhetoric and sentiments of patriotism and mourning, Paris calls for the overthrow of the then president George W. Bush and charges that 9/11 was an inside job. He also tackles other familiar themes covered in his previous albums, such as police brutality and racial oppression.

Hailing from the San Francisco Bay Area, Paris exhibits certain West Coast rap sensibilities, including the G-funk style which is characterized by the use of live instrumentation – often heavy on bass and keyboards – with minimal or no sampling (Krimms 74). In *Sonic Jihad*, Paris deploys the repeated backdrop musical loops of menacing-sounding keyboard and bass lines, as well as percussion, such as hand-clapping accents, to reinforce his rhymes. The most

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<sup>62</sup> For an interesting look at the man behind the rapper, see the article by Peter Byrne in *SF Weekly* on December 3, 2003, at <http://www.sfweekly.com/2003-12-03/news/capital-rap/>, accessed on November 28, 2012.

<sup>63</sup> The significance of the word jihad will be discussed later in the chapter.

common feature of his rhyming style is the consistent and disciplined usage of the couplet; when two successive lines are linked by simple and catchy end rhymes – for example, pain/rain, game/fame, itch/bitch – which are always stressed with a beat. Alliteration is also used. There are no breaks between the tracks, as one simply flows into the next. This is very evocative of the structure favored by Public Enemy. In an old interview, Chuck D, the lead rapper, comments that the group's records are formatted like radio shows in which there is "something happening every second, from beginning to end." This continuity is meant to limit any dead air that might prematurely prompt listeners to turn off the music, an act he views as a rejection of the music (Dery 413). It is quite fitting that Public Enemy made a guest appearance on *Sonic Jihad*.

A salient feature of the album is also Paris's self-referentiality and his own sense of exceptionalism as a political rap artist, as the album's title, his nickname P-Dog, and his record label's website Guerrillafunk.com are all often cited in the lyrics. No doubt, the album is about police brutality and black oppression, but it is equally about how Paris and his "Hard Truth" soldiers are battling for emancipation and expressing violent and masculinist black power. In other words, besides the required themes of racial terror and oppression, *Sonic Jihad* is also a self-glorifying portrait of and fierce performance by Paris as an old-school, authentic, "raw," ultra-committed, and militant rapper, in contradistinction to other mainstream hip hop artists who lack radical political pedigree.

Paris's main political and ideological affinity remains affixed to the Black Power movement of the late 1960s and specifically the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, which was founded in Oakland. His logo is actually that of a black panther superimposed onto the word Paris. The politics and ideologies of those black radical activities are simply too complex and varied to be detailed here; while Marxism was a major influence, black radicalism had its own vitality and inspirations also in the context of racial oppression. When asked about the influence of the Black Panther Party on his music, Paris pointed to the party's emphasis on self-sufficiency and the care for one's local community. Its former force as a revolutionary vanguard is somewhat obscured when Paris describes it generically as being "all about a fight for liberation, a fight for social justice, a fight for the betterment of everybody."<sup>64</sup> The lyrics of *Sonic Jihad* and Paris's other albums, however, reflect more fully the impact of the party's militancy, rhetoric, and revolutionary agenda on his music. Paris's politics is further informed by the Nation of

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<sup>64</sup> For this interview of Paris with Germany's BACKSPIN TV, go to <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PVm5tTH2F0E>, accessed November 30, 2012.

Islam, being a former member of the group which has enjoyed tremendous influence in African-American communities, as well as hip hop culture.<sup>65</sup> In general, the targets of Paris's resistance are mostly Althusser's repressive state apparatus (government, police, and the prison system) and ideological state apparatus (religion, schools, and the media) (Althusser 207-208). Moreover, Paris seems to view various social, political, and economic events through a conspiratorial interpretive framework. Given that these ideological elements are reflected in the liner notes and they reinforce the main themes of the tracks, a closer analysis of the album's insert is warranted.

### Contesting 9/11: A Prelude

The outside jacket of the CD shows the twin towers of the World Trade Center engulfed in flames; looming over them is the head and upper body of former president Bush, with the numbers 666 – the Biblical and popular reference to the devil – triangulated and placed adjacent to his face.<sup>66</sup> His head is also encircled by the presidential seal, half of which is on fire (see figure 3.3). This association of Bush with the devil is, no doubt, inspired by Paris's Nation of Islam roots and the movement's iconic leader Malcolm X, whose famous phrase, "the devil white man," is a perennial reference in political hip hop.



**Figure 3.3.** An image of Bush as appearing in the CD insert and jacket of Paris's *Sonic Jihad*, produced by Guerrilla Funk Recordings, 2003 and 2009. Reprint permission granted by Guerrilla Funk.

Rising over both Bush and the twin towers is Paris's face, with only his watchful eyes being illuminated to create the stock veiled face and head of a guerrilla fighter. This portrayal of Bush-as-the devil and the destruction of the twin towers underscore one of Paris's major claims

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<sup>65</sup> For Nation of Islam references in Paris's song "The Devil Made Me Do It," see Rose's *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1994): 102-103. For a detailed study of hip hop's engagement with Islam, see chapter two of Alim's *Roc the Mic Right: The Language of Hip Hop Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>66</sup> The jacket and liner notes I am examining here are from the 2009 deluxe edition of *Sonic Jihad*.

in the album: 9/11 was an inside job. That Paris is hovering in the background with his familiar scowl and gazing directly at the viewer emphasizes a tripartite engagement between artist, audience, and political events. In this sense he implicates the listeners, calling on them to contemplate and act, in particular on the catastrophe itself, as well as its wide-reaching political consequences. This can be seen more clearly in the insert where a statement, presumably penned by Paris, informs readers that the war on terror amounts to “violence visited on people of color.” Indeed, the country is at war, but not against the enemies commonly identified by the government. “Who are the bigger terrorists,” Paris asks. “Bush, Cheney, Powell, Blair, Rice, Ashcroft and Ridge etc. – those who murder and sanction vicious violence against innocents for control and profit in the name of protecting Americans against a non-existent menace, or Bin Laden and Saddam & Co?”. Paris continues and exhorts the reader to “think” and “don’t be a sheep.” As this condemnation nears an end, he offers this final warning: “Don’t be fooled. We are at war. Know your real enemy.”

Not only does Paris inveigh against the former US administration, he also directs his venom at the conservative media and various entertainment consortia which have, according to him, colluded to exclude voices of resistance from mainstream culture in the wake of 9/11. Paris’s various claims about 9/11 can be seen as a form of counter-hegemonic initiative to compete, if not overturn, rival authority explanations about the disaster offered by the government and disseminated by the media. He seems to believe that “official” and dominant texts – government accounts and news reports – always serve other hidden power interests; they serve the purpose of “mass deception” to benefit the rich elite. In response, he presents “facts” and “hard truths” in a struggle for the sonic realm. By denouncing ideology and articulating counter-hegemonic claims, Paris relies on a self-proclaimed legitimacy, which presupposes that his own inversion of official 9/11 accounts is somehow non-ideological. And yet by designating his ideas and beliefs as “truth,” this reflects the very form and logic of ideology.

He repeatedly parodies and denounces the media to alert listeners to its power to control their perceptions of the world. Much like Public Enemy, Paris sees his music as a kind of alternative media source. His condemnation of the mainstream media can be seen on the adjacent page which shows a headshot of a riled-up Paris, with his mouth duct-taped, towering over a freeze frame of a television newscast with two anchors whose heads have been replaced by cartoon faces. Once again the triangulated 666 design appears, but this time it is used as a station identification logo, along with the headline “AMERIKKKA’S WAR ON TERROR,” and a ticker



conspiracy bent can also be seen in his lyrics which contain several references to secret societies, such as the Illuminati and Freemasonry. As virulent as they are, both the album's jacket and the insert are but a prelude to the assault by the music itself. These political views will be translated into rhyming verses and ferocious sounds in an aural resistance that confronts the war on terror and post-9/11 politics of nationalism.

### **Reframing Sounds of Terror and War**

Approaching the politics of 9/11 through the sensible, particularly in this chapter on audibility, means listening closely to the literal sounds of catastrophe, terror, and war. These sounds – vocal, natural or manipulated, as in *Sonic Jihad* – shape one's perceptual experience of 9/11, elucidate their corresponding visual images, and ultimately help to condition the legibility and meaning of the event itself. The 9/11 soundscape includes not only the poignant human voices heard in farewell telephone calls from victims trapped inside the twin towers and the hijacked planes, but also the overwhelming roars of jetliners, collapsing towers, screams, cries, voices of panic, and piercing sounds of police cars and fire truck sirens. The war on terror, too, generates its terrifying sounds of violence through detonations of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and the roars and thunders of US military jet engines, whether they are heard on the nightly newscasts as natural sounds, or as artificial sounds created by special effects in terrorism movies. Confused shouted orders on the battlefields, bursts of automatic weapons, booming of rocket propellers, and revving of engines from Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected vehicles (MRAPs) and Strykers are just some of the auditory coordinates of American "shock and awe" military campaigns. Even sounds of the whirling blades of low-flying helicopters had gained startling signifying power. At a 2004 press briefing, an Iraqi journalist told US army Brigadier General Mark Kimmitt that the sound of American helicopters, which were flying low to the ground, was terrifying young children, especially at night. He asked, "Why do you insist on flying so low and scaring the Iraqi people?" Kimmitt, who was both the deputy director for operations and the chief military spokesman for coalition forces in Iraq, responded: "What we would tell the children of Iraq is that the noise they hear is the sound of freedom" (qtd. in Creekmur 83). How might these sounds, which make up the post-9/11 auditory fabric, be disrupted to create new conceptualizations of war and terror and enlarge the fields of the thinkable and the possible for the discussion of 9/11?

Similar sounds of violence, terror, and war permeate Paris's *Sonic Jihad*. But the war on

terror undergoes a drastic reconfiguration and re-signification as the war zones, terror, perpetrators of violence, and victims are all relocated to somewhere else and substituted with other actors, inventing an alternative sensory experience in which established meanings are modified. For Paris, the battlefield is the streets of the inner city ghetto, and terror is the domestic and racial terror endured historically by African-Americans. The perpetrators of such terrors are neither al-Qaeda nor other Islamist extremists, but the police and the US government. The victims are the black poor, who lead lives that are oppressed and often destroyed by criminality. The resistance battle that Paris declares on the US's war on terror is that of sonic warfare. Consistent with the hip hop aesthetics of cutting and remixing samples, Paris's resistance tactic consists of appropriating existing sound elements and recombining them in a new context as a way to reframe and reconfigure existing definitions, meanings, and sensory experiences. Consequently, this redefinition also displays both the contingency and fragility of the original context and elements.

This resistant aural reconfiguration and re-signification begins with the album's opening track "Ave Bushani," which swiftly establishes 9/11 and war on terror references and context. The number is a parodic imitation of the theme song "Ave Satani" of the classic film *The Omen*. Bush, unsurprisingly, is alluded to once more as the Beast through a reference of the number 666. The song introduces a riotous post-9/11 soundscape made up of a fast-paced collage of existing news broadcast fragments communicating post-catastrophe rising tensions: Americans' freedom from fear, the public's calls for military response and the rise of the terrorism threat advisory to color orange (high risk). These sounds are then layered with voices of panicking and frightened women, and chants from anti-war demonstrations. Also hovering in the background are sung voices in the choral style of the original song.

These actual sounds and references to 9/11, fear, and panic, however, take on a dramatic twist in the next number "Field Nigga Boogie" and for the rest of the album, which relocates the catastrophe and the war on terror to Paris's parallel violent reality of the American inner city. That soundscape of violence and warfare, associated with America's war on terror military campaigns abroad, finds a near mimesis in the album as aural special effects are achieved with a pandemonic collage of sputtering Uzis, gun bursts, suggestive sounds of guns reloading, the sharp pings of bullet casings dropping on the ground, wailing police sirens, bomb explosions, shattered glass, and low-flying helicopter noises that are far from the sound of freedom. Screams of women, confused shouting, sounds of car tires screeching against the pavement, and

fragments of police radio dispatches all coalesce to suggest troubled and perilous lives in the ghetto. These special sound effects are the standard aural markers of the political rap genre, but when placed within an album that specifically targets the war on terror, they redefine the concepts of terror and terrorism.

Not only are artificial sounds used to achieve a reconfiguration, Bush's own voice is also exploited to shift the meaning and scope of 9/11 terror to domestic terror. The song "What Would You Do?" begins with a fragment of a public address spoken in what is clearly Bush's voice, but his words are digitally remixed to announce a "war against the American people." In the tradition of *détournement*, this faux Bush speech continues to outline the government's sustained campaign to locate and apprehend, presumably terrorist suspects in Bush's original speech, but now the target of the post-9/11 manhunt has been altered to "every American." Thus, while Bush still speaks in his own voice, his sentences have been twisted and recombined to create a new meaning. This way, Paris sets Bush up to announce and confirm violations of civil liberties, and in the process, makes Bush expose his own culpability through his own (albeit digitally manipulated by Paris) utterances. In "Agents of Repression," Paris appropriates the rousing promotional style of 24-hour cable news channels and uses the familiar intonation of a broadcaster to announce: "All day on the nation's only all-terror network, all terror, all the time, Fox, MSNBC and CNN." Through this parody, he articulates a triple critique: first, the fear-inducing discourse of post-9/11 terrorism; second, the media's capitalization of that discourse; and finally, the propensity of these media to hype the news.

What the listener hears are often the same sonic and sensorial elements: sounds of violence, combat, and war; sounds of Bush's familiar southern-accented voice and the familiar and authoritative intonation of network television identification announcements, but these elements are adapted and re-contextualized, generating new and multiple reference points. What this yields is also the possibility of parallel discourses in the same soundscape, as the original now signifies something different or it is ruptured and remixed to mingle with the new. Sounds of American violence abroad are also sounds of inner city violence; Bush's speech to apprehend terrorists, and thus to protect Americans, is now also a promise to harm them. By re-inscribing different meanings to these sounds, Paris is able to reconfigure the war on terror, which can now be signified and perceived differently. Hearing the war on terror means simultaneously hearing American urban and racial violence, and reversely, hearing ghetto violence is also to acknowledge American military aggression abroad. Not only is the discourse of the war on terror

reframed by that of racial violence but also vice versa; anti-racism is fused with anti-imperialism.

In this sense, Paris is trying to bring America's foreign wars closer to home, but the raging sounds of war and violence are not contrasted with scenes of complacent and peaceful American lives but an equally violent and precarious existence of African-Americans. Rather than the contradiction of war abroad and peace at home, there is instead a co-presence of realities and meanings that serves a critical function.<sup>67</sup> The US administration's war on terror and racial terror are not separate realities but are linked by what Paris sees as an axis of white power, capital, and violence. Rather than treating the events of 9/11 as a rupture in American history, Paris chooses to identify the connections between these two terrors. After all, the myriad of woes against which Paris had directed his critique before 9/11 in his previous albums – racist violence, discrimination, police brutality, exploitation – all have found similar expressions after 9/11. Police brutality and racial profiling, topics that rappers have been thundering against unremittingly for decades, are now being targeted at Muslims; the post-9/11 curtailing of civil liberties and the intensification of surveillance were already familiar aspects of ghetto life. Thus, the post-catastrophe sense of physical vulnerability felt by traumatized Americans is but a lesser and temporary ordeal compared to the historical and daily experience of racial terrorism encountered by African-Americans.

A system of domination, oppression, and exploitation is suggested in the track "Evil" in which Paris imagines and traces a lengthy history of evil that includes slavery, economic exploitation, social and psychological oppression and degradation of blacks, imperialism, the corrupted financial market, 9/11 conspiracy, censorship, and post-9/11 restricted civil liberties. As Paris's lyrics contend, racial hierarchies, oppression, physical terror, and economic exploitation, which started with slavery, still find their present-day legacies in social, political, and economic institutions, like prisons, schools, and the job market. American blacks are still confronting oppressive conditions, enslaved by poverty and encountering physical violence through police brutality. And much like the global anti-war protests at the time, Paris calls attention to the ulterior motives – economic interests – behind the post-9/11 military interventions. Seen through these prisms of evil and capital, America's "new round of capital

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<sup>67</sup> Readers familiar with Rancière's discussion of the four forms of contemporary art might immediately think of this co-presence through either the category of play or mystery. While there are similarities, there are also differences. In Paris's reconfiguration there is no element of undecidedness. Paris is, however, emphasizing the connection between heterogeneous elements that are testifying to a world in common. But this is not used to address the loss of a social bond. For Rancière's discussion on those four forms see "Problems and Transformations of Critical Art" in *AD*, pages 53-59.

accumulation,” to appropriate Retort’s words (7), is but a continuation of the long-established economic exploitation of and physical assault on colored people domestically and globally, as Paris argues.

In attacking the post-9/11 auditory realm, Paris creates an alternative sonic experience. Appropriated sounds relocated or remixed engender a permutation of meanings. If mourning, remembrance and patriotism became some of the dominant ways of both sensing and making sense of 9/11, Paris turns to racial terror to make sense of the catastrophe and the war on terror – oppositionally. What is conceivable about 9/11 is expanded and might even lead to other possibilities of re-conceptualization.

### **Redefining 9/11 Key Terms**

Besides the re-signification of artificial sounds and voices, numerous post-9/11 key concepts and words, such as freedom, jihad, and police, plus the crucial figure of the soldier, are all redefined through Paris’s lyrics. The album actually contains a track called “Freedom”, an important term which appeared frequently in post-9/11 rhetoric. The word had served as the motivation behind the terrorist attacks, which were interpreted as an assault on quintessential American values like economic progress and prosperity, freedom, religious pluralism, and universal suffrage: “They [terrorists] hate our freedoms – our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other,” so said Bush in his famous address to Congress on September 20, 2001.<sup>68</sup> Alternatively, the word had been enlisted in the rhetoric of American exceptionalism that extols the country’s goal to assist Afghanistan and Iraq by bringing freedom. Freedom for Paris, however, means an ardent militant fight against government lies, America’s “capital wars” abroad, black poverty, police brutality, and other woes, which are all opposed through the ideals of black nationalism (which I will address in the next section) and fueled with the refrain of “power to the people.” The sounds of freedom are not low-flying US military helicopters in Iraq, but sounds of Paris’s own voice and his lyrics on black emancipation. Paris raps in “Freedom”:

Freedom, Freedom, Freedom, Freedom  
This is how we ride and roll – Soldiers for life fo’ sho  
We come back to the days of – grenades up

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<sup>68</sup> For the complete speech, see the archived White House website of the Bush presidency at <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html>, accessed December 3, 2012.

Black fist raised up – we stay tough

...

Still put a fist in – the system

Still kill a killa cop, we still win

Still be the one to expose the beast [when it's]

Still un-American to be for peace [yeah] (3-6, 13-16)

Along with the word freedom, the term police, too, takes on a different meaning and imagery for Paris. In a 9/11 context, two specific associations to this word are possible: one refers to officers of the New York Police Department (NYPD), who along with the city's firefighters have been hailed as the heroes of 9/11, and the other, less positive, is the development of post-9/11 international politics in which the US has adopted the "world police" posture in its war on terror. In Paris's political rap imaginary, the word police is synonymous with police brutality, as his lyrics never fail to remind listeners of officers who are "servin' us with sticks and shots." He raps in "Tear Shit Up": "But who protects us from these murderous cops / Whose heroes, you could keep your flags I'm out, I'll / Wrap a chain around the precinct and burn shit down" (5-8). As mentioned earlier, this loathing of the police is always expressed through the police-pig equation. Besides the photo of the pig in the insert and the word itself in the lyrics, the album is also filled with squeaking and oinking sounds of pigs.

The figure of the soldier, which has proliferated in popular-culture representations as a result of intense post-9/11 militarization, is appropriated for Paris's own army of "Hard Truth Soldiers."<sup>69</sup> The violent nature of the soldier's life is not contested here but magnified, for Paris demonstrates a parallel, if not more intense, militant and masculinist aggression that has characterized his resistance and revolutionary fervor. Often, it is the glorification of his masculinist and militant style of defiance – gun prowess and expletives – that dominates the lyrics. In his anti-war song "AWOL" (absent without leave), Paris adopts the persona of "a true soldier for America" who is deployed to the Middle East for a peacekeeping mission. This young soldier, however, is stripped of any form of heroism, military competence, and courage when confronted with a violent, gory, and confused battle scene. Moreover, the lyrics describe what Paris sees as a deceitful military recruitment campaign.

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<sup>69</sup> For a detailed discussion on the image of the soldier and Rancière's thoughts on aesthetics, see Sudeep Dasgupta's "The Spare Image in an Unsparing World: Framing the Soldier in an Indeterminate War" in *Transformations* 19 (2011): 1-18.

Paris, though, is a self-proclaimed soldier who does not claim to bring democracy to foreign countries but to fight against black servility and degradation. His oppositional black and soldier identity is further bolstered by media interviews and reviews of *Sonic Jihad*. The adjective “militant” is a common description of Paris by journalists, as his star image is constructed exactly as a rebel and as an antithesis to mainstream hip hop stars who have mostly abandoned political issues.<sup>70</sup> In “You Know My Name,” Paris stresses his identity by repeating the final line four times: “It’s plain to see, you can’t change me, cause I’m a soldier for life” (63). Contra the image of the American soldier, Paris is a different kind of soldier fighting, as I have suggested, a different kind of war; a sonic jihad against the war on terror. Although Paris is no longer a member of the Nation of Islam, he has nevertheless used the word jihad in his album title. Much like the word fundamentalist, the word jihad has also gained tremendous potency in post-9/11 public discourses. Resembling author Hamid’s attempt to reframe the word fundamentalist in his novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, which I addressed in previous chapter, Paris is also reappropriating the term jihad.

A key concept in Islam, the word jihad has often been reductively interpreted when it actually possesses a long history and multiple meanings (Cook 1). As David Cook explains, the word’s literal meaning in Arabic is “striving” or “exerting oneself,” with the implication, and based on its usage in the Quran, towards one’s religion (1). Wary of the word’s negative connotations, such as violence and conquest, some Muslims maintain that the word’s significance is solely spiritual (2). But Cook has also called attention to the word’s primary meaning, which points to “warfare with spiritual significance” (2). In view of the histories of black American Muslim movements and their impact on hip hop culture, H. Samy Alim has related the term jihad specifically to hip hop music, describing “a jihad of the tongue, or *jihad bil lisaan*, which also includes *jihad bil qalam*, or jihad of the pen” (35). Turning to Hadith, the record of the sayings of Prophet Mohammad, Alim discusses one specific hadith, which suggests that jihad can operate on many levels: “The Prophet is reported to have said: ‘He amongst you who sees something evil should change it with his hand; and if he is unable he should change it with his tongue, and if he is unable to do that he should at least hate it in his heart, and that is the

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<sup>70</sup> These media texts include Bradley Miller’s review for urbent.com at [www.urbnet.com/review.asp?CDID=1205](http://www.urbnet.com/review.asp?CDID=1205), in which Miller describes Paris as “the Black Panther of rap”; Ken Capobianco’s review for *The Boston Globe*, dated January 16, 2004, accessible at [www.boston.com/ae/music/cd\\_reviews/articles/2004/01/16/paris\\_sonic\\_jihad/](http://www.boston.com/ae/music/cd_reviews/articles/2004/01/16/paris_sonic_jihad/); or Seandra Sim’s interview with Paris for AllHipHop.com on October 14, 2003 at [www.guerrillafunk.com/press/doc2901a.html](http://www.guerrillafunk.com/press/doc2901a.html), accessed December 3, 2012.

weakest form of faith” (Alim 35).<sup>71</sup> Alim has called hip hop artists, in particular those who are active in what he defines as the transglobal hip hop umma, as “verbal mujahidin” (21). Although Paris did not specify his usage of jihad in the liner notes, the sonic battle that he is mounting can also be seen in this context. Warring against what he sees and defines as evil is exactly his struggle. He is launching a “jihad of words,” already modeled by Malcolm X decades earlier, in a discursive and auditory war. Instead of being armed with a Molotov cocktail, he is hurling a “Malcolm X cocktail, ready to burn the street up” (“Freedom,” 27). Musical arrangements, words and phrases, and sounds – found and appropriated, instrumental and artificial – are his weapons of destruction. Paris raps in “How We Do”:

Who could match when we spit bricks  
See em scatter when I call blitz  
Nigga scratch em out the mix  
No matter what you been through  
We still comin’ with that  
Bomb bomb biddy in the city when we bring truth

...

See I’mma blast the Devil, the rhythm is the rebel. (22-27, 31)

As the pronoun “we” in the lyrics testifies, this sonic war is fought collectively by a network of like-minded rap artists and fans who establish their own community of “revolutionaries.” Alim has also described hip hop culture, which is globally circulated, through the term “Global Hip Hop Nation,” a form of nationhood instituted along the lines of “cultural, ideological, and imaginary means” (21). *Sonic Jihad*, too, deliberates on this theme of nationhood and its related components of nationalism and national belonging. It does so, however, once again in opposition to the post-9/11 rise of American patriotism and the protection of the homeland. Through lyrics, formal elements, guest rappers, and even the music’s reception, the album redefines and re-enacts the concept of an alternative nationhood through the competing historical discourse of Black nationalism.

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<sup>71</sup> Alim is quoting Sahih Muslim Book 01, Hadith No. 79. For a detailed study of the meanings of jihad and its relation to hip hop, see chapter two of his *Roc the Mic Right: The Language of Hip Hop Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

## Post-9/11 United Streets of America

One of the immediate consequences of the terrorist attacks was the emergence of a collective national identity and the ubiquity of American flags in public spaces. Americans were urged by Bush, as well as public officials, television commentators, reporters, and survivors alike, to remember and rekindle their national ideals – freedom of religion, speech, and democracy itself, as mentioned earlier – in the face of such a tragedy. A revived sense of nationalism, expressed in devotion and loyalty to America and its virtues and values, therefore, became the balm that could heal the terror-stricken nation. As Bush claimed in a speech on October 12, 2001: “As Americans, we’ve mourned together ... it seems like we’re putting first things first. In my inaugural address, I said that some Americans feel like they share a continent, but not a country. Today, that feeling is gone. We know we are a single nation, each a part of one another.”<sup>72</sup>

Rudolph Giuliani, the New York mayor at the time of the attacks, said it succinctly: “All that matters is that you embrace America and understand its ideals and what it’s all about. Abraham Lincoln used to say that the test of your Americanism was how much you believed in America. Because we’re like a religion really. A secular religion” (qtd. in Croucher 181). Americans in the post-9/11 years were not asked to be global citizens, instead they were urged to turn inward (Croucher 186). Official discourse aside, more informal nationalistic impulses were also visible and widespread in the placement of “United We Stand” bumper stickers on vehicles, patriotic tattoos, and the unabashed display of patriotism and unity at national sporting events and in public spaces.<sup>73</sup>

Interrogating this intensification of nationalism and patriotism, Paris articulates his resistance through the ideals of Black nationalism by re-conceptualizing national devotion and homeland. The Nation of Islam’s well-known shout “Do you know what time it is? It’s nation time!” thus becomes an appropriate rallying cry again, validating not the post-9/11 American nationalism but sustaining Paris’s resistance against it through the history of black struggles. *Sonic Jihad’s* many themes, icons, and images can be traced back to the Black Power and nationalist movement prominent in the late 1960s and 1970s. The album can also be seen in the

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<sup>72</sup> That speech was given during the March of Dimes Volunteer Leadership Conference on October 12, 2001. During the speech Bush also asked American children to help Afghan children. See the archived White House website of the Bush presidency at <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/10/>, accessed December 3, 2012.

<sup>73</sup> See chapter three of Jaap Kooijman’s *Fabricating the Absolute Fake* for examples of the public display of American military power and patriotism at Super Bowl events (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008).

context of the rise of political rap in the late 1980s and early 1990s, which fused the ideology of Black Power with hip hop music.

The phrase “Black Power” encapsulated many of the aspiring and contradictory aspects of the movement itself. Some interpreted it as a call for violence, others envisioned the economic empowerment of blacks, and still many urged African-Americans to affirm and celebrate their own culture (Glaude 4). But what circulated, galvanized by the phrase Black Power, was a collective mood that “a new black man and woman had been born and that their subordination would be, if necessary, violently resisted,” explains Eddie Glaude Jr (4). The various political organizations that emerged at this time, including the Black Panther Party which had influenced Paris, envisaged diverse ambitions: from the complete separation from the US and the formation of an independent nation-state, to black-owned and black-operated businesses, to cultural retrieval and preservation of an African identity (Glaude 4). As Glaude argues: “‘Blackness’ became a determining category in how African Americans understood themselves as agents, *and* the articulation of ‘blackness’ as a positive value became a means to defiantly challenge the state” (6, italics in original).<sup>74</sup> But what distinguished the movement was also an expression of rage, what Jeffrey Stout describes as its “rhetoric of excess and the fantasy of vengeance” (qtd. in Glaude 8). This would later be appropriated by “raptivists,” including Paris, during the late 1980s and early 1990s, as they revived that same rhetorical and political styling of the Black Panther Party and the Black Power movement (Cheney 278). As Charise Cheney explains:

Black nationalist theory is founded upon the conviction that black people in the Diaspora – by virtue of African ancestry, a common historical experience of slavery, as well as a legacy of racial oppression in the forms of political disfranchisement, economic exploitation, social discrimination, and cultural degradation – share a cultural identity and therefore constitute a nationality, or nation, separate and distinct from other (read: white) Americans. (281, parenthesis in original)

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<sup>74</sup> In this specific context concerning black identity and resistance, it is also helpful to turn briefly to African-American writer bell hooks, who has explicitly linked the act of resistance to one’s racial identity by propagating the act of “loving blackness as political resistance.” In *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, hooks, writing in the early 1990s, argues that the hegemonic mode of seeing and thinking is perpetuated through negative media images and representations of blackness that not only support and maintain the oppression, exploitation, and domination of blacks, but also create internalized racism and self-hatred among blacks themselves. Therefore, loving one’s own blackness becomes an act of resistance (9-20).

It is this conceptualization of nationality that Paris seems to champion. His lyrics stress black people's shared history of slavery, present dangers of self-destruction through criminality and black-on-black violence, and the ever elusive hope of collective betterment. In this sense, his nationalism is very much "a cultural nation," as succinctly articulated by Maulana Karenga, the founder of the cultural nationalist US Organization, back in 1967. "The cultural nation is a people with a common past, a common present and, hopefully, a common future," he said (qtd. in Cheney 281).

Where acts of mourning, patriotism, and public commemoration all helped to create a sense of post-catastrophe national belonging and participation, Paris introduces other scenes of being together and ways of communal participation and partaking. Rejecting the restrictive bonds of national identification, he raps mockingly in "What Would You Do": "Now even niggas wavin' flags like they lost they mind" (27). Elsewhere in the album, rapper stic.man of dead prez promotes, instead, the red-black-green colors of the Pan-African flag. Amidst the post-9/11 clamor of being an American, what Paris and his guest rappers take pride in is being black. "Being" black here does not imply an essentialist approach to blackness, as the album does reveal how blackness itself is rent by gender, class, generations, and political consciousness.<sup>75</sup>

Relatedly, what distinguishes Paris's sonic and cultural nation from the various narrowly conceived post-9/11 expressions of nationalism are explicitly its global and outer-national referents of blackness. As Paul Gilroy and other scholars have already pointed out, hip hop music itself is not a purely American creation, having been influenced by Caribbean characteristics and having undergone cross-border and cross-cultural processes in its development (*Black* 85). One prominent indication of this transnational and transcultural connectedness can be seen in the appearance of various black guest rappers in the album with their different timbres and voices: from Capleton, a Jamaican reggae and dancehall artist, to the

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<sup>75</sup> This internal antagonism can be seen in the title of the first song "Field Nigga Boogie," in which Paris announces his own return to rap and states his intentions: to bring listeners back to the days when rap served the purposes of black empowerment. He is a "field" nigga, no doubt, a real nigga. The distinction between a "field" Negro and a "house" Negro is one that was often invoked by Malcolm X to distinguish two types of blacks during the slavery era: a slave who worked and lived in the field and abhorred his white master and one who lived in the house, close to the master, and who obeyed him. In Malcolm's time, this field-slave/house-slave dichotomy found its correlatives in the distinction between the black middle class and the masses, highlighting class and intra-racial politics among blacks, see Robin D.G. Kelley's "House Negroes on the Loose: Malcolm X and the Black Bourgeoisie," *Callaloo* 21.2 (1998): 419-435. In Paris's case, "Field Nigga Boogie" speaks of Paris's own fearless and violent opposition against the police instead of any form of acquiescence. Elsewhere in the album, this black internal division is also evident in Paris's critique of contemporary hip hop's betrayal of the original spirit and aims of political rap of an earlier generation. Paris has reserved some of his fiercest condemnation for black rappers who have "made the game corrupt."

LA rapper Kam; from New York's Public Enemy and the duo dead prez to the Afro-Peruvian rapper Felipe Andres Coronel, better-known as Immortal Technique. The album has even been hailed as "historic" and "monumental" by a reviewer from the *San Francisco Bay View* given that so many black revolutionary rappers are being heard on the same album.<sup>76</sup> These voices, drastically divergent in terms of tempo, rhyming pattern, and vocal range, create a boisterous soundscape as each joins the communal "capha" in a running dialogue with Paris, rapping lines of their own, substantiating the main themes by performing the chorus, or firing off the response to Paris's call. The antiphony (call-and-response) generates more than a just a polyphonic atmosphere but also what Gilroy has termed a "democratic, communitarian moment" which underscores and anticipates, but does not guarantee, equal social relationships. "Lines between self and others are blurred and special forms of pleasure are created as a result of the meetings and conversations that are established between one fractured, incomplete, and unfinished racial self and others," says Gilroy (*Black* 79). Commonality, group experience, individual and collective outlook are all emphasized here as the guests' presence is needed to complete the song. Although Paris's formulation of collective belonging deviates from Bush's post-9/11 America, it does still share many of the same sentiments that cement solidarity: hatred, outrage, and revenge. Moreover, gender equality is not validated as female vocal voices do appear in the album but are relegated to the chorus and to the background.<sup>77</sup>

The album's communal atmosphere is also achieved through assemblages of recycled sounds: television news/radio broadcasts, as mentioned earlier, segments from galvanizing public speeches by black leaders, a voice fragment from a female black anti-war demonstrator, rallying cries from anti-war protests, and a brief narrative about growing up in a ghetto by a young boy. These fragments from diverse sources are linked in a sonic reunification to contest Bush's singular voice and to contrast the post-9/11 narratives of grief and of national unity, pride and values, which permeated the public sphere. In this sonic and cultural nation, Paris not only addresses the bleak lives in American inner cities, he also alludes to the lives of those outside US borders, signaling a shift from the nation-state to a global frame of reference. As discussed earlier, domestic anti-racism is associated with anti-imperialism, with the album's liner notes, its lyrics, and sound fragments identifying exploitation and suffering at geographic locations such as

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<sup>76</sup> For a reprint of the review, go to <http://www.guerrillafunk.com/press/doc3179a.html>, accessed November 12, 2012.

<sup>77</sup> For an in-depth look at the gender politics of the Black Power and hip hop movements, see Charise Cheney's "In Search of the 'Revolutionary Generation': (En)gendering the Golden Age of Rap Nationalism," *Journal of African American History* 90.3 (2005): 278-298.

the Middle East and Africa. The so-called conflict diamonds of Sierra Leone, too, appear in the lyrics. Dead prez also denounce the Bush administration's treatment of Haitian refugees in Miami. In terms of revolutionary zeal, a transnational identification is also expressed through lyrical references to Che Guevara.

Additionally, Paris's oppositional nationhood also takes on a virtual dimension as the camaraderie made audible in the album itself is extended to the reception and usage of that music. As mentioned earlier, no official music videos were made for *Sonic Jihad* but one does find a small collection of amateur videos on YouTube that are inspired by tracks from the album. In terms of YouTube genres, these are a hybrid of music and activism/outreach videos.<sup>78</sup> Applying a similar assemblage technique as used by Paris, these video remixes edit and weave together existing visual material from multiple media sources. These collages consist of still images that include press and amateur photographs, clip art images, graphics, newspaper clippings, and also simply slides of written texts by the video maker clarifying the political message of the lyrics. Some of the videos also have moving images, which include newscast footage, archive television footage, and fragments of official music videos or movies.

In all these videos there is no editing or manipulation of the music, which means Paris's tracks are always played in their original state. They all follow the same formula and show images, whether still or moving, paced to the rhythm of the song and sequenced to match the lyrics. Overall, these audio-visual compositions crystallize Paris's original political message and thus, bolster his various political claims. For example, consider the 37-year-old American identified as Bee, who uploaded a video for the song "Evil." His comment that "The liberation of Black People around the world is what I want to see and fighting for it" could have just as easily been uttered by Paris himself.<sup>79</sup> This rap-artist/video maker camaraderie is further extended with the addition of video viewers. Like most videos on YouTube, these *Sonic Jihad* videos also attract a mix of stock reactions from viewers. Many of the responses praise Paris for his rapping artistry and express their appreciation for his "real talk." Some reactions piggyback on Paris's

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<sup>78</sup> While these video makers are usually not identified, the channel pages of users who uploaded and likely made the videos offer at least some demographic details. No doubt, the profiles on these channel pages cannot be verified, but these users disclosed their sex as male and are aged between 22 and 58; they reside in the US and Canada. At the time of writing, the number of subscribers to their channels ranged from 23 to 2,537 and the number of viewers is estimated at between 1,700 and 116,000 per video, but mostly in the tens of thousands. According to YouTube statistics, these *Sonic Jihad* videos are popular among males between 25 and 44 years old and are mostly watched by viewers registered in the US. Statistics are not available for every video, but this set of numbers applies to the video "Evil" at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E4JLI0XiMGQ>, accessed on December 31, 2010.

<sup>79</sup> This video can be accessed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E4JLI0XiMGQ&feature=related>; the link to Bee's channel is <http://www.youtube.com/user/niggaoffdaclair>, accessed May 6, 2013.

political message and call for resistance against the New World Order, the government and the media. Much like Paris himself, these fans resort to that familiar masculinist and militant protest posture: “This Song Gets Me Pumped Up I Could Kill A Whole Block With This Song,” writes one viewer.<sup>80</sup>

What *Sonic Jihad*'s presence on YouTube indicates is that Paris's music generally attracts like-minded political hip hop fans, conspiracy theorists from the 9/11 Truth and anti-New World Order movements, raptivists and self-proclaimed revolutionaries, who are all addressing and resisting similar social and political issues. While the spirit of YouTube is that of a “video-sharing community,” these fans share more than just videos but also political convictions. These videos reflect a mutual affirmation and assistance: YouTube users visually recreate and disseminate Paris's political message while Paris energizes their individual political protest, as they utilize his music for their personal political interests. His music enables moments of identification and solidarity, connects diverse groups of fellow protesters, and forges them into an aural and visual hip hop cultural nation without traditional nation-state borders and distinctions, which deviates considerably from the post-9/11 imaginary of nationhood through its intense preoccupation with borders, boundaries, and national security.

In this sense, *Sonic Jihad* is very much a project of national reconstruction of sorts, in that it re-conceptualizes the idea of the post-9/11 nation through black struggles for emancipation. This nation is not perfect by any means as internal antagonisms are also evident, but nevertheless, nationalistic values, affection, and affiliation are all reconsidered as Paris offers his own version of America. It is an auditory protest that relocates American nationhood to the ‘hood’ and renames the United States of America to what rap fans often claim as their United Streets of America.

### **Truth and Knowledge: Paris's Politics and Rancière's Critique**

My analysis of *Sonic Jihad* has up to now examined several of Paris's tactics of resistance and how they relate to the struggle for contesting the auditory borders that delimit what can or cannot be heard following 9/11. He does so by forcing listeners to hear sounds of the war on terror domestically and to translate some key terms and concepts differently. His oppositional practices also operate through an enactment of “national” affinities and the creation of (virtual) social

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<sup>80</sup> These comments can be viewed at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=iaCPUIfr8PY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iaCPUIfr8PY), [www.youtube.com/watch?v=03emv95Lf\\_o](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=03emv95Lf_o), and [www.youtube.com/watch?v=r2f7VW9\\_YOM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r2f7VW9_YOM), accessed November 28, 2012.

relations. This final section investigates his revolutionary politics by looking at the wider relationship between art and politics. Paris's mingling of music and politics raises several fundamental issues about politicized creative expressions, which are the broader concerns of this dissertation as 9/11 is being explored through my four creative cultural objects. While Rancière's conceptualization of politics through aesthetic borders has already become evident in this chapter with 9/11 politics being discussed through the sonic realm, his writings become even more pertinent here as they can help pinpoint some blind spots in Paris's sonic resistance project. Rancière's thoughts on several related subjects, such as intellectual equality, art's function and operations, the spectator's responsibility, and art's efficacy, all find resonances in Paris's music.

What rages through *Sonic Jihad* is Paris's unwavering political commitment; his music is uncompromisingly engaged with a broader context of political action and revolutionary passion. In fact, he is so adamant about the purpose of rap for the political project of "uplift," that he cannot tolerate any other forms of hip hop. As Paris himself laments in "Ain't No Love": "'Fore blingin' we was singin' what it mean to be black / Now these bitchy bitchy boy bands causin' a fuss" (45-46). Whether it is articulated through his star image, liner notes, sounds, lyrics, or website, his music functions to expose, enlighten, activate, and mobilize. His music often addresses the social inequality encountered by blacks in America, but his primary intent to expose the lies of government and mainstream media and to provide knowledge and truth implicitly raises the issue of intellectual equality and suggests a hierarchy between the rap artist and his listeners.

The equality of intelligence actually has great implications for Rancière's general analysis on politics and art, and in particular, for the artist-spectator relationship. This theme surfaced initially in Rancière's much earlier book, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, in which he recounts the unorthodox teaching methods of the nineteenth-century pedagogical theorist, Joseph Jacotot. Jacotot's pedagogical paradigm, which Rancière never seems tired of telling, advances the claim that teaching is not primarily the transfer of knowledge by knowing teachers to their ignorant students, as in traditional explicatory pedagogical practices. This would presume an inequality of intelligence. "To explain something to someone is first of all to show him he cannot understand it by himself," says Rancière (*TIS* 6). Jacotot's students, on the other hand, were able to learn without the aid of explication, for the teacher himself was unable to explain anything to them: they did not speak his French and he did not speak their Flemish. But their learning experience underscores the possibility that one can learn not by receiving and adopting the

teacher's knowledge but by exerting one's own intelligence through exploration and contemplation on the material. Rather than a relationship of inequality, one in which informed teachers would guide students from ignorance to knowledge, Jacotot's radical thoughts are anchored in a presupposition of intellectual equality, the position whence one must begin. Using Jacotot as an illustrative case and supporting his view, Rancière argues, "Equality was not an end to attain, but a point of departure, a *supposition* to maintain in every circumstance" (*TIS* 138, italics in original).

This notion of intellectual equality and equality in general as a point of departure rather than a destination or the end result of processes (such as reforms, protests and education) can also travel beyond pedagogy and into the aesthetic by thinking about the artist-spectator relationship through Jacotot's teacher-student equality. Artistic expressions, most often critical and politically-engaged projects, that aim and claim to transmit knowledge, truths, and awareness already start with a gesture of hierarchy and a certain assumption of the audience's ignorance by fixing them as receptive figures and forcing them to the receiving end. Rancière warns in an interview:

... emancipation can't be expected from forms of art that presuppose the imbecility of the viewer while anticipating their precise effect on that viewer ...  
An art is emancipated and emancipating when it renounces the authority of the imposed message, the target audience, and the univocal mode of explicating the world, when, in other words, it stops wanting to emancipate us. (Carnevale and Kelsey 2)

That such an imposed message could be transmitted unproblematically to the audience and generate consequences for their behavior – thus assuming a direct link between artistic presentation, spectators' interpretation and their (assumed) ignited and ensuing desire to act politically – is a cause-effect logic Rancière has already rejected. As my earlier discussion of Rancière's argument for the aesthetic regime of art has already stated, what sets the aesthetic regime apart from others (the ethical and the representative) is an aesthetic dissensus that consists of a rupture between the art object and its specific social function (*DS* 138). The object no longer serves a specific purpose, whether that is religious, civic, moralistic or something else, thus disrupting its signification. This dissensus is a conflict between sense and sense, namely that disjunction between a sensory experience (of the art) and ways of making sense of it (by the spectator) (*DS* 139). What this means is that the underlying assumption of the efficacy of

subversive artistic practices – one which joins revelation (by art objects) to awareness and mobilization (in the audience) – must be reconsidered, given artistic forms are uncoupled from their purpose and effects.

Rather than dissensus, Paris insists on a cause-effect logic. A key component of his revolutionary politics is the weight he places on knowledge and truth. Attacking what he sees as the government's and the media's manipulation of public discourse in a project of mass deception, Paris claims his music provides "knowledge and truth" to his listeners, therefore fashioning himself as a purveyor of truth. His sonic war is fought in part to combat ignorance and ignite knowledge and political awareness. Consequently, this motivation grants his music the added dimension of education rather than entertainment, although Paris himself has insisted that he does not want to play the role of a schoolteacher.<sup>81</sup> Nevertheless, his commentaries on contemporary issues have a didactic edge in the sense that they alert listeners who presumably are unaware of "hard truths" or are passively trusting the mainstream media sources.

The website for his independent label Guerrilla Funk Recordings reflects this educative purpose, as it works in tandem with his records to inform and educate. The website offers an eclectic must-read booklist, with suggestions ranging from autobiographies of black heroes, such as Malcolm X and Nelson Mandela, to self-empowerment books such as *The Millionaire Next Door*. Interestingly, the website also contains a page on financial empowerment called the Guerrilla Funk Wealth Builder, which is a primer on various subjects including investing, debt management, retirement and college planning – all aimed at helping fans to achieve wealth. Putting his economics degree and investment savvy to use, Paris writes: "It's important that you understand and adapt to the (financial) system if we want to bring about change. Use it for your benefit to enact change. Remember, change and revolution are one and the same – economic depression is *oppression*" (italics in original).<sup>82</sup>

Throughout the album, Paris repeatedly emphasizes his responsibility and commitment to his listeners: "I rush truth to the youth – and shine the light / Take the red pill, open ya eyes to life" ("Field Nigga Boogie" 9-10). Lyrics from the track "Evil" also suggest this theme of exposure: "Some close they eyes but mine can see, all the evil surroundin' me / So what I'm 'posed ta do, when I can see right through? / Expose the lies and snatch the sheets, fight the evil

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<sup>81</sup> See Paris's interview with the alternative weekly *San Francisco Bay Guardian* which has been posted on his website at <http://www.guerrillafunk.com/press/doc3060a.html>, accessed on November 5, 2012.

<sup>82</sup> This article, entitled "Money Matters," is available at <http://www.guerrillafunk.com/thoughts/doc4023a.html>, accessed on December 13, 2010.

surroundin' me" (46-48). In this way, resistance for Paris often becomes an aggressive unmasking of these lies and ills of the dominant order, as well as the mechanism of ideological power itself. The premise, though, is that the public is ignorant of such falsehood, that people are willing dupes and passive consumers of news fodder. In short, they are docile citizens, while Paris is the informed and enlightened artist.

In an interview with the *San Francisco Bay View*, which is reprinted and made available on Paris's website, Paris comments on what he sees as his own community's lack of knowledge and awareness.

We're all in this together. It's just that most of us aren't up on the way things really are. We're not up on why conditions exist the way they do in our communities – we just deal with it ... We have to stop treating knowledge like it's a disease. Somewhere along the line, it became cool to be dumb – especially among the youth.<sup>83</sup>

The earnestness with which Paris stresses this improvement of the mind and the quest for knowledge surely has its roots, once again, in the Black Power movement and in Malcolm X. As stated earlier, many new Black organizations were established during that era, calling for various political interventions. But what united these different efforts is what Glaude has called a "politics of transvaluation." What he is referring to is a "fundamental psychological and cultural conversion from their socialization as a subordinate people to a self-determining nation" (Glaude 4). This conversion requires a "revolution of the mind," which was seen as a prerequisite for the success of the material revolution. This emphasis on thinking differently, as well as the pressing call for independent thought, were also central to the message of Malcolm X. As he once urged: "One of the first things I think young people, especially nowadays, should learn is how to see for yourself and listen for yourself and think for yourself ... The most important thing that we can learn to do today is think for ourselves" (qtd. in Glaude 1). Given that Malcolm X is the undisputed hero and idol of politically conscious hip hop stars, this theme of independent thought and its link to revolution has survived through the years and serves as an anchor for Paris.

Moreover, as the refrain from "What Would You Do" best exemplifies, knowledge and political awareness are linked to the possibilities of future action. This refrain, rather than rapped by Paris, is sung and repeated three times by imploring female voices:

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<sup>83</sup> For the interview, go to [www.guerrillafunk.com/press/doc3179a.html](http://www.guerrillafunk.com/press/doc3179a.html), accessed November 21, 2012

What would you do if you  
Knew all the things we know  
Would you stand up for truth  
Or would you turn away too?  
And then what if you saw  
All the things that's wrong  
Would you stand tall and strong?  
Or would you turn and walk away. (17-24)

Paris is searching for contemplative listeners who will respond and act. It is knowledge and the practice of thinking, initiated by Paris's music, that would pave the way for action. He first assumes an intellectual inequality, that of between the ignorance of the listener and the knowledge of the artist, and second, the power of his music to lead them out of that ignorance, which would further engender political action. I think Rancière would dismiss outright Paris's political import of artistic practice, for he has argued adamantly, via his discussion of the aesthetic regime, for the "aesthetic cut" that separates (artistic) intentions and (spectator) consequences (*TES* 82).

Furthermore, when artists like Paris frame their works in terms of revolution and mobilization, they also bring to the fore the issue of spectatorship, and in particular artist-audience relationality and responsibility. But as the title of Rancière's book *The Emancipated Spectator* suggests, the spectator is not under any obligation; s/he is capable of resisting the operations of the artist and is not compelled by the latter's ethical program or the political consequences that are intended.<sup>84</sup> This Rancièrian skepticism collides directly with Paris's assumptions of musical power and political efficacy; however, in Paris's case, both propositions are defensible. YouTube videos of *Sonic Jihad* and viewers' reactions have validated both potentialities of the album's operations. Paris and the video makers are allied through a virtual political rap community, as already pointed out, but the content of the videos also demonstrates another form of relationality. What the literal illustration of Paris's songs in those YouTube videos suggests is the video makers' eagerness to adopt his views and conform to the narrative framework he has given them. What these listeners experience is similar to what Paris intended for them to experience, given they faithfully translate his denunciatory politics into concurring images. When they hear the songs, they are ushered into the corresponding semantic and visual

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<sup>84</sup> Says Rancière during a lecture on September 22, 2010 at the University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

spaces that Paris has delineated for them: ghetto decay, government mind-control, and violent imperialism. Put more directly, these listeners “accurately” interpret the political lyrics, and are affected – enlightened perhaps – or even enraged by them that they are stirred to action by making videos that reaffirm and proliferate the original political message, thus protesting in their own ways through a different medium and at a different site.

The relationship between the sensory presentation of the music and the way of making sense of it by the listener is one of consensus and not dissensus. To a certain extent, political art’s assumption of a connection between art objects, and their effects on spectators and their subsequent behavior seems at work, despite Rancière’s doubts. Of course, protest songs that have spawned a handful of YouTube videos that are now being watched by a minority calling for resistance, cannot be so quickly and unproblematically viewed as political mobilization, much less a “revolution.” But the point is that these videos demonstrate a direct link between artist performance and the listeners’ sensory reception, their awareness, and their subsequent behavior and mobilization.

At the same time, how Paris’s songs can veer from their original purpose and escape his will can be seen in one YouTube video which features a blindfolded man named Baxter who gyrates and hula hoops to the hypnotizing rhythm of Paris’s song “Split Milk.”<sup>85</sup> The lyrics actually showcase Paris, unabashedly self-referential, rapping about himself as an authentic and militant rapper who is fiercely committed to providing “raw shit” for the struggle of racial “upliftin.” What captivates Baxter, however, seems to be the mesmerizing rhythm that propels his spinning upper body and his shuffling feet to keep his hula hoop in motion. Despite Paris’s claims of his music’s edifying operations, surely their function as the backdrop sound of a sweaty hula hoop session is beyond his vision. Baxter is not in need of Paris’s emancipation, he is already one of Rancière’s emancipated spectators, or listener in this case.

## **Conclusion**

Encountering the sound world of *Sonic Jihad* is to enter into an alternative sphere where 9/11 is redefined. The cause of the catastrophe, as well as its political, military, social, and sensorial legacies all find new meanings in Paris’s vocal and musical fury. The war on terror, American freedom, courageous police officers, al-Qaeda’s jihad, peace-keeping soldiers, and US

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<sup>85</sup> Baxter’s video can be viewed at [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Odw\\_H90C-6c](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Odw_H90C-6c), accessed on November 26, 2012.

nationalism take on modified and counter-hegemonic envisioning to contest their established legitimacy. Paris attacks this sonic realm through an appropriation of auditory materials and established key terms that are then re-introduced in a changed context or recombined to fashion new definitions. In doing so, Paris gives a different aural account of America as a country and as a global power after 9/11 through parallel discourses of its history on slavery, domestic terror, and Black nationalism, and via his own visions and sounds of belonging and national togetherness.

In this sense, Paris's music is very much achieving what might be seen as the interventional value of creative practices in relation to 9/11, deploying artistic endeavors for politics in terms of their critical, dissenting, contemplative, and enlightening potential. It is Rancière, however, who has warned against any facile and calculable passage from art to politics, specifically the purported straight path from the critical art object to political awareness, and finally to political action. Rancière is not against political art per se, but his emphasis on the aesthetic regime does mean the dismissal of any determinate relationship between artworks and its audience, or between its sensible presence and a natural effect.

Paris undoubtedly continues to view his music through the political virtue of resistance and revolution, presuming its capacity to expose corrupted power and domination, enlighten (and enrage) listeners, and initiate change, as shown by his 2008 album *Acid Reflex* (Guerrilla Funk). Embittered and infuriated by the history, past and present, of racism, social injustice, economic inequalities, the war on terror, and somewhat incongruously, mainstream hip hop betrayal, he intentionally and resolutely uses music for the service of direct political opposition. No political efficacy should be assumed here, as a great deal of Rancièrian skepticism is warranted. Additionally, for Paris, the rigorous political message always takes precedence over formal creativity, complexity, and nuance. His politics also implicitly constructs and perpetuates a form of intellectual inequality. Nevertheless, there exists a force in Paris's impassioned music that must be acknowledged. His uncompromising social commentary and his attempt to restage the war on terror and US nationalism – assisted by expletives and violent language – enrages and provokes. And even when that oppositional message fails to transmit as in Baxter's case, there is still a source of musical energy that propels Baxter corporeally. Politically effective or not, misguided or not, formally significant or not, Paris's music still offers an emotive and sensorial engagement that must be recognized for its potency.

Representing different media and pursuing varied themes, both *The Reluctant*

*Fundamentalist* and *Sonic Jihad* rearticulate post-9/11 politics through the sensible by considering the issue of audibility, or what can be heard. This emphasis on audibility underscores 9/11 as a catastrophe whose impact is not just limited to the visual imagery of the colliding towers, but also in bequeathing an aural legacy of overwhelming sounds of chaos and destruction at Ground Zero. While these sounds amplify the overall 9/11 event that has been annexed for nationalistic and patriotic purposes – to sustain public mourning and to bolster the rationale for the war on terror – they also give rise to artistic interventions. From the sound of Changez’s asserted monologic voice to Paris’s fiery soundscape, sensorial and perceptual disruptions remediate 9/11 so that catastrophe-induced sensations, sentiments, and affects can be reformulated and experienced anew. The politics of 9/11 is raised at this level of aesthetic delimitation, with the aim to disturb it by inserting disparate conceptualizations of the catastrophe and its aftermath. As a result, the perceptual field is starting to broaden. Heightening this attention on the sensible, the following two case studies will transition into the realm of the visual, which in the 9/11 context has come to define one’s encounter with the disaster by conditioning what can be seen and the ways of seeing.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **Oppositional Banality: Watching Ordinary Muslims in *Little Mosque on the Prairie***

In the premiering episode of the Canadian situation comedy series *Little Mosque on the Prairie* (2007-2012), the character Joe, a white prairie farmer, wanders into the local Anglican parish hall to witness a group of Muslims praying and prostrating in unison. Alarmed and frightened, he stumbles out of the building to call the national terrorist-attack hotline. Later on, he recounts – with agitation – his encounter with these Muslims to his reverend: “I saw them [Muslims] bowing and moaning just like on CNN.” Although the comical scene is meant to parody the post-9/11 anti-Muslim paranoia that had spread in the US, Canada and elsewhere, it nevertheless crystallizes several lingering cultural and visual effects of the September 11, 2001 attacks: first, there remains a tenuous but stubborn visual association linking Muslims and the practice of Islam with terrorism; second and as a consequence of the first, encounters with Muslims for non-Muslims like Joe become moments of alarm, fear, and panic; and third, perceptions of Muslims and Islam are guided and shaped by the media, in this case the news media. These issues of post-9/11 visibility (ways of seeing and their affects) and audibility (who is visible and in what imposed way) lie at the heart of this dissertation, which tackles 9/11 politics through its aesthetic dimensions of audibility and visibility, and with cultural resistance defined as struggles and interventions that seek to disrupt these fields.

Moving past the realm of audibility explored in the previous two case studies, this chapter and the next shift to visibility and visuality, with this chapter centering on the various visual structures governing the key figures of Muslims and the practice of Islam in Western media. It does so through *Little Mosque* (henceforth thus shortened), given that the presence of Muslims and Islam in the media, and the (mis)representation of both are the driving forces of the show in terms of its content, motivations, and oppositional spirit. Having premiered on Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) in 2007 and ending in 2012 after six seasons, the show features a mosque located in a church intentionally. It parodies many 9/11 topics or situations which have by now become familiar: Muslims, or dark-skinned foreigners, being interrogated at the airport as terrorist suspects, Muslims being placed on airlines’ no-fly lists, mosques under police surveillance or being raided by the security intelligence services. Acting as a comic relief to succor anti-Muslim fears and hostility, the show directly opposes common stereotypes and hostile perceptions towards Muslims by exaggerating these attitudes or exposing their

instrumentalization by the media. Although originated in Canada, the show circulates globally, being syndicated in 80 countries.<sup>86</sup> Inconspicuous is the fact that it has not yet been aired in the United States, highlighting a visual boundary that delimits what can and cannot be seen.<sup>87</sup> Some episodes, though, have been downloaded onto YouTube, thus allowing sporadic online viewing. This exclusion from a sphere of appearance raises the question of what are the determinants of visibility and visual inclusion when it comes to Muslims and Islam? And relatedly, what are the resistant possibilities? My analysis seeks to show how *Little Mosque* contests the sphere of visibility by introducing a different mode of seeing and a contrastive presence that hitherto deviate from other forms of televisual presence possessed by Muslims and Islam in the West.

The chapter first details the key issues in the post-9/11 debate over the visual representation of Muslims and Islam in the West, as well as how *Little Mosque* engages with those discussions. Besides outlining the intentions, ambitions, and major features of the program, I also address the academic responses it has attracted. The next section looks at the issue of visibility in depth by enclosing the politics of representing Muslims and Islam within a regime of visibility that invites certain ways of watching and forecloses others. This requires a brief return to Rancière's thoughts on the distribution of the sensible which I relate to a distribution of genres that conditions the television appearances of Muslims and Islam. Section three sets forth the multiple ways in which the situation comedy genre transforms Muslim bodies and the practice of Islam visually and impacts affects. Rather than focusing solely on the Muslim characters of *Little Mosque*, I then consider in section four how the on-screen interactions between Muslim and non-Muslim characters might also facilitate a distinct, although overtly idealized, visuality. These on-screen relations and the emerging visuality are discussed through Paul Gilroy's concept of convivial culture. The final section pinpoints some of the show's thematic limits which circumscribe its oppositional potential.

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<sup>86</sup> The show was produced by WestWind Pictures, an independent television production and distribution company.

<sup>87</sup> According to television trade reports, the American broadcasting company Fox acquired the rights back in 2008 to adapt the show into an American setting, but that version never materialized. In 2012, however, the American television distribution company PPI Releasing joined forces with the production company of the CBC series to sell the show to American broadcasters. See press release from PPI Releasing at [http://www.ppi.tv/news\\_mar282012.shtml](http://www.ppi.tv/news_mar282012.shtml), accessed February 18, 2013.

### ***Little Mosque's Big Ambitions***

Central to the debate over visual representations of Muslims and Islam in Western media is the common practice of linking Muslims at large and Islam to terrorism, as well as the persistence of canonical anti-Muslim and Orientalist stereotypes.<sup>88</sup> These discussions predate 9/11 but have been intensified since, as representations of Muslim bodies and the religion became entwined with the concurrent launch of the former Bush administration's war on terror and the circulation of civilizationalism discourse, which interprets the 9/11 attacks as part of a wider conflict between contending civilizations of the East and West. This approach to global politics through culture and civilizational animosities reiterates Huntington's earlier and disputed hypothesis of "the clash of civilizations." As Ervand Abrahamian has argued, a backward glance at the American media coverage of 9/11 in the attacks' aftermath confirms Huntington's "triumph," as the American media reported the catastrophe through the prism of a cultural conflict between Islam and the West, as well as the West being threatened by the Other (Abrahamian 531).<sup>89</sup>

With the help of comedy and laughter, *Little Mosque* seeks to change all this. Although produced and set in Canada, the show is assertively responding to and continuously engaging with the events of 9/11 through its own content, motivation, and intentions. Discussions of the show, both in the Canadian and American media, also situate it within 9/11's history. The show's title is an allusion to the classic American book and television drama series, *Little House on the Prairie*, which has prompted scholars to suggest a parallel settler-narrative.<sup>90</sup> There is, however, no specific intertextuality between it and the earlier American program in terms of the plotlines. The title of the situation comedy has more to do with the life experience of its Muslim-Canadian creator Zarqa Nawaz, who moved from Toronto to a Canadian prairie town after she was married, according to the commentary offered in the DVD of the series. The show offers a

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<sup>88</sup> "Media" in this chapter is always referring to mainstream media and does not cover any New Media forms.

<sup>89</sup> Besides a general discussion of the media coverage of the attacks, Ervand Abrahamian also examines the coverage of the *New York Times*, including the paper's new section "A Nation Challenged," which contained articles with headlines such as "Yes, this is about Islam," "The core of Muslim rage," "The age of Muslim wars." See Abrahamian's "The US Media, Huntington and September 11," *Third World Quarterly* 24.3 (June, 2003): 529-44.

<sup>90</sup> Scholars have interpreted differently the allusion to the original American show. Michele Byers claims that *Little Mosque* "calls attention to the white supremacy of the original narrative and suggests itself as a corrective, a re-insertion of difference into both the Canadian prairie landscape and into narratives of small town life." See her "Speaking About the Nation: Critiques from the Canadian Margins," *Critical Studies in Television* 6.2 (2011): 145. Peter Morey and Amina Yaquín claim that *Little Mosque* forgoes the moralizing that characterizes the older American series and directly tackles community relations and stereotyping. "If Charles Ingalls and his family were nineteenth-century pioneers forging a new life in the untamed Midwest, in *Little Mosque* the extended Muslim 'family' of Mercy, Saskatchewan, blazes its own trail by establishing a place of worship in the local church hall, facing fearsome rednecks and hostile 'natives' along the way" (202). See their *Framing Muslims: Stereotyping and Representation after 9/11* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

homey and comical depiction of everyday life in a Muslim community as its members interact with other non-Muslims in their fictional Canadian prairie town of Mercy. The show's first episode attracted 2.1 million viewers which, according to a television critic, was a feat in a country where an audience of one million is already a hit.<sup>91</sup> Ratings, however, fell as the show progressed.



**Figure 4.1.** A promotional photograph for *Little Mosque* featuring characters, from left to right, Barber (Manoj Sood), Rayyan (Sitara Hewitt), Amaar (Zaib Shaikh), Reverend Thorne (Brandon Firla), Yasir (Carlo Rota) and Sarah (Sheila McCarthy). Reprint permission courtesy of WestWind Pictures.

According to *Little Mosque*'s producer Mary Darling, the storylines of the weekly show contain, first, a strong Muslim perspective that highlights the religious practices of Islam, and second, various popular universal themes such as family and marriage life, generational gap, love and friendship.<sup>92</sup> In other words, the show simultaneously highlights the particularities of Islam and overlaps them with what the show sees as universal ideals. *Little Mosque* also has pedagogical ambitions: it hopes to meet the public's need for understanding and knowledge following a catastrophe that has, in some ways, defied human comprehension. "I think everybody was looking for understanding. Here I was with my *Idiot's Guide to Islam* trying to learn about a culture that really a lot of us don't know much about," says Susan Flanders-Alexander, a member of the show's writing team. She believes that one of the strengths of the series is that "it [is] a great exploration of a culture ... it is teaching, it is educative."<sup>93</sup> That farmer Joe, featured in the first episode, would react to a group of Muslims praying with such fear, is because of misrepresentation on the one hand, and his own cultural and religious ignorance, on the other.

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<sup>91</sup> Christopher Mason, "Muslim Sitcom off to a Big Start in Canada," January 15, 2007, *International Herald Tribune*. Electronic version.

<sup>92</sup> DVD commentary from *Little Mosque on the Prairie: Season One*.

<sup>93</sup> DVD commentary from *Little Mosque on the Prairie: Season One*.

Regardless of whether the spectator is indeed ignorant or not (Rancière would no doubt dismiss this assumption of the public's religious illiteracy), the show nevertheless familiarizes non-Muslim spectators with some very basic beliefs, institutions and experiences of the religion, including the Five Pillars of Islam, the five daily prayers and halal food. These topics are seamlessly woven into the weekly storylines. Various episodes also feature Islamic festivals such as Ramadan and Eid-al-Adha. In the second episode of the first season, for example, the fictional mosque hosts an open house to combat suspicion and educate the white, non-Muslim townsfolk the basics of their religion. Several scenes show the Muslim characters explaining Islam and educating their uninformed but eager-to-learn neighbors, and by extension, the television viewing audience.

The spirit of the *Bildungsroman* is one that *Little Mosque* shares with Hamid's novel. The situation comedy can also be seen as a kind of multi-voiced and communitarian *Bildungsroman* that chronicles the development or maturation of a Muslim community. From episode to episode, viewers see the transformation of this community from several loosely linked families that have to hold their meetings in each other's basements to a more coherent group possessing a proper mosque and imam.

For the show's creator Nawaz, the show aims to alter the public's misperceptions and misrepresentations of Muslims and Islam. She explains:

It [the show] is a snapshot of a normal Muslim community in Canada, because a lot of people don't see Muslims in the media, they only see the male terrorist or the oppressed Muslim women. They get a skewed perception of the Muslim community. This is a show that examines the ordinary lives of ordinary Muslims. Muslims are parents ... they are holding down jobs; they are paying off their homes; they are paying off their bills, and no one ever gets to see that side of the Muslim world.<sup>94</sup>

Nawaz's wish seems not to be limited to replacing the post-9/11 negative representations with positive ones, but to see more complex portrayals of Muslims' lives. Although she uses neither the word "resistance" nor "opposition" in various interviews about *Little Mosque*, her rejection of the caricatural, anti-Muslim stereotypes echoes the sentiment of many Muslim and American-Muslim artists who believe stereotypes and misrepresentations serve as the primary site for

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<sup>94</sup> DVD commentary from *Little Mosque on the Prairie: Season One*.

cultural contention and resistance.<sup>95</sup> Cultural resistance, in this specific Canadian and Western context, is synonymous with self-representation and self-articulation through the introduction of counter-images, narratives, and history to subvert dominant and reductive generalizations.<sup>96</sup> Confronted by negative representations, these projects take the expected “critique-of-stereotype” approach, which aims to address the inadequacy or distortion of representations. These discussions of anti-Muslim/Arab media representations often have as their fulcrum assessments of whether the images are “positive” or “negative,” “sympathetic/honest/humane” or “unsympathetic” towards Muslims at large. This form of critique, however, neglects the broader issues in the politics of representation, in particular questions of power and instrumentalization. Moreover, certain positive images can function as ethnic stereotypes (Rosello 40), and are therefore equally debilitating.<sup>97</sup>

Using the situation comedy genre to contest media misrepresentations has a precedent. The most familiar case might be *The Cosby Show* (1984-1992), which offered a different and positive characterization of a successful and upper-middle-class African-American family, deviating a great deal from the negative and distorted television representations of blacks from the previous decades (Mastro and Greenberg 691-692; Cummings 75 and 82). According to Steve Neale and Frank Krutnik’s analysis of the situation comedy: “... racial difference is made acceptable within the parameters of traditional family unity – the Huxtables are an idealized family who ‘just happen’ to be black” (243-244). Some have drawn the parallel and call the Canadian show the “Muslim Cosby Show.” In *Little Mosque* the Muslim difference is also negotiated and made familiar through universal values and the Canadian (Western) context, as testified by CBC’s promotional phrase: “Small Town Canada. With a Little Muslim Twist.” In general, its characters reflect the diversity among the followers of Islam, as well as its varying ideologies, in opposition to the common perception of the religion as being homogenous and monolithic. Their various designations include reformist, traditionalist, moderate/feminist, conservative, and also nominal. Their countries of origin consist of Nigeria, Pakistan, and Lebanon, along with second-generation Canadian-Muslims and a white Canadian Muslim.

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<sup>95</sup> These stereotypes are not just the concerns of entertainers but also politicians and other public figures, such as Queen Rania of Jordan who launched her own channel on YouTube in March 2007 to tackle stereotypes about Arabs, Muslims, and the Middle East.

<sup>96</sup> This same resistance strategy can be detected among other American-Muslim writers. Female Muslim writers have produced several anthologies to challenge stereotypes, see *Voices of Resistance: Muslim Women on War, Faith & Sexuality*, ed. Sarah Husain (Emeryville, CA: Seal Press, 2006).

<sup>97</sup> Take for example the prevailing positive stereotypes of Asian-Americans who are often considered to be the “model minority” of America.

When it comes to specific academic responses to *Little Mosque*, the politics of representation is one of the frameworks through which Sandra Cañas assesses the show. Concurring with the general claim of the post-9/11 reinforcement of Orientalist portrayals of Islam and Muslims, Cañas suggests that the situation comedy provides a counter-hegemonic narrative that questions stereotypes and prejudices against Muslims and Islam (207). Analyzing the show through specific themes, such as contested public spaces and gender relations, she also points to the show's political limitations, calling attention to its selective emphasis on specific forms of diversity and its practice of creating national unity through conflict resolutions. Cañas cites the show's comedy form as an obstacle to more complex engagements with Islam and with multiculturalism. "[It] can only use satire, parody, and mimicry in comedic ways that, while challenging the Orientalist discourse of the Muslim Other, produces its own silences," she argues (209).

Another analysis has placed the show within the specific context of publically-funded Canadian television and within the country's own geographical-ideological politics. Because the show is set in the fictional prairie town of Mercy, Saskatchewan, a locale considered regional and outside the national centre, this leads Michele Byers to examine the show in terms of the complex relations of nationalism and regionalism. According to Byers, regional spaces are seen as sites from which to critique the center and to provide counter narratives and histories of Canada. Paradoxically, the idea of regionalism itself is part of the mythology of Canada, and regional counter-narratives can also be complicit in "covering over" less than positive aspects of the country's national history (143). Byers has argued that *Little Mosque* "covers over more problematic issues about the literal landscape" where the show is situated. "The discourse of state-sanctioned multiculturalism – through which immigrants are imagined to be inducted into the nation – covers over the story of colonialism and white supremacy upon which the nation is founded, and the bodies of aboriginal people who haunt the borders of the text," she contends (147). Byers, however, focuses only on the opening credit sequence and the pilot episode and does not examine how the show develops through multiple seasons.

While Mercy's marginal status and the associated geographical-ideological implications of that location are interesting aspects, seeing the show solely through this narrow location-specific framework misses some of the other equally vital qualities of the series. The characters often poke fun at Toronto and accentuate the city-versus-prairie opposition but ultimately it is the Muslim identity that remains the most prominent aspect of the show. My own analysis is

specifically and extensively geared toward the broader debate of post-9/11 media representation of Muslims and Islam. More importantly, this examination of the politics of representation is hinged on visibility and visuality, concentrating on the boundaries that delineate a sphere of appearance. Extending Cañas's focus on negative representations, my exploration pushes the debate beyond the positive and negative representations to consider how the show introduces a more congenial and convivial mode of watching Muslims. This different way of looking impacts the show's potential as cultural resistance.

### **Islam Within a Regime of Visibility**

Rancière once explained that an image does not stand alone and exists solitarily, but rather, "it belongs to a system of visibility that governs the status of the bodies represented and the kind of attention they merit. The issue is knowing the kind of attention prompted by some particular system" (*TES* 99). Although Rancière is speaking here specifically about photographic images, this attention to a broader system of visibility is helpful for the discussion at hand. To consider the existence of a wider post-9/11 system of visibility or visual regime governing Muslim bodies and Islam is to look beyond specific negative or positive images, and instead, to investigate the dominant interpretive grid or televisual distribution of the visible that renders Muslims and Islam visible and perceptible. In this way, the discussion over the media representation of Muslims and Islam would consider other factors that affect visibility and not dwell unproductively and stereotypically on the negative images themselves. What becomes more prominent in my analysis is the act of looking at Muslim bodies and to question how that act itself is framed;<sup>98</sup> it is to inquire into the construction of the Muslim body as an element in a visual regime that structures what is possible to see, or more bluntly, what kinds of Muslim bodies are possible to see in the wake of 9/11, and what are the possible ways of seeing.

To theorize this regime, it is helpful to think through Rancière's foundational idea of the distribution of the sensible which, although he considers in relation to the ways a political community is structurally divided, can be posited more broadly in terms of the distribution of genres within the televisual landscape. For Rancière, the process of partition is also related to the deterministic apportionment of competences (who is qualified to speak and act), visibility (who

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<sup>98</sup> This approach is no doubt also inspired by Mieke Bal's writings on visual analysis. When discussing the issue of visibility, she suggests giving "attention to the various *framings* that affect visibility, not only of the object framed but also of the act of looking at it and the ways in which that act is framed" (170, italics in original). See her chapter "Visual Analysis" in *The Sage Handbook of Cultural Analysis*, ed. Tony Bennett and John Frow (Los Angeles: Sage, 2008): 163-84.

becomes visible or not in a common space), and capacities and capabilities (what a body can do consequently). It is a form of distribution that ultimately establishes delimitations. How might this logic of distribution and its subsequent delimitations relate to visualizing Muslims and Islam?

In terms of televisuality, apportionment and delimitation are two ways of discussing Muslims' and Islam's entrances into this media sphere of appearance. American and Western media's encounters with Muslims and Islam both before and after 9/11 have often been through the narrow confines of dramatic news events, such as plane hijackings, bomb atrocities, and hostages takings.<sup>99</sup> In particular, the 9/11 catastrophe, the subsequent wars, and the host of related issues of global terrorism, national security, public safety, and Islamic radicalization are exactly subjects that are necessarily represented by news-related genres, such as the daily news broadcasts, current affairs programs, and documentaries, which in turn, thrive on and are dictated by contemporary events. What this suggests is that Muslims and Islam tend to be confined to representation within these particular news genres. Critics and scholars often fail to consider beyond the negative and narrow media images themselves and address how those images are the consequences of being represented through the limited factual genres.<sup>100</sup>

One would be hard pressed to find Muslim characters, visibly marked as so, in a major American soap opera or Muslim contestants on popular game shows. Television genres impact thematic content, dictate expressive range and emotive scope, and establish formulaic constraints; they are a way of framing a specific mode of visibility and visibility.<sup>101</sup> News genres tend to emphasize and accentuate society's most dramatic conflicts, tensions and problems. Their realism mode and tone of address to their audiences as a source of information, in the best scenario, is that of the factual, authoritative, trustworthy, inquisitorial, investigative, and polemical.<sup>102</sup> While not all news-related programs reflect high journalistic standards, a certain gravitas is nevertheless required by these genres to document and chronicle contemporary

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<sup>99</sup> Some of those infamous events involving Islamist groups that come to mind include the 1983 suicide bombings of the American Marines barracks and of the American embassy, both in Beirut; the hostage crisis in Lebanon during the 1980s involving American victims; the 1988 bombing of a Pan Am flight over Lockerbie; and the 1993 car bombing of the World Trade Center.

<sup>100</sup> Post-9/11 Muslim and Islam-related current affairs programs, documentaries, and news items are simply too copious to be listed here. For some examples of how Muslims are represented in these and other genres, see Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin's *Framing Muslims: Stereotyping and Representation after 9/11* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

<sup>101</sup> For a detailed discussion of television's various genres, see *The Television Genre Book*, ed. Glen Creeber (London: British Film Institute, 2001).

<sup>102</sup> With the advent of reality shows, the category of factual genres itself is destabilized. My point here is that there is a specific mode of looking enabled by a situation comedy that is different from the one encouraged by newscasts.

political, social and economic events.

This common and dominant practice of pairing up Muslims and Islam with a specific factual and news mode of presentation shares a similar guiding principle as Rancière's representative regime, in which there exists an adequation between expression and subject matter. As I outlined in chapter one, this regime is guided by a principle of appropriateness that requires action and modes of expression to be matched to the subject in question and the genre used (*DS* 15; Rockhill and Watts 9).

A normativity exists that defines the representation appropriate for specific subjects (Tanke 80-81). This distribution of genre is vital, for genres determine capacities and possibilities for those bodies represented within, how these subjects will be portrayed and understood, how viewers will generally experience these encounters, and what forms of knowledge, entertainment, and excitement are to be gained. As Rancière comments in a different context: "... the distribution of genres – for example, the division between the freedom of fiction and the reality of news – is always already a distribution of possibilities and capacities ..." for those represented (Carnevale and Kelsey 5). Muslims and Islam have found themselves in a distribution of the sensible that determines how they will appear on television and to which specific genres they should be assigned, which in turn dictate how they are to be portrayed and with what kinds of capacities. They are, no doubt, the subjects of fiction in numerous films and television dramas. But when they do appear in those non-factual formats, they are still scripted within the contemporary and news events of global terrorism, homeland security, and fundamentalism, and are given identities and aptitudes related to that specific sensible world.<sup>103</sup>

Appearing in this news-oriented visual system means Muslims merit tremendous media attention if not as emblems of global terrorism (as terrorists, suspects, or terrorists-to-be), then as pressing problems of multi-cultural societies that must be tackled and resolved. The potential affective consequences of looking at Muslim bodies through these genres and through the prism of contemporary global conflicts might be a heightened sense of alertness, consciousness, and consternation, for non-Muslims viewers at least. The practice of Islam itself is also viewed as a suspicious activity, as exemplified by farmer Joe's exaggerated reaction to group prayer in *Little Mosque*.

There are only a few exceptions to this visual regime. Two programs have represented Muslims through genres other than the news category on American television: the little-known

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<sup>103</sup> See Jack Shaheen's *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 2001).

situation comedy *Aliens in America*, (2007-2008) which was cancelled after one season with 18 episodes on The CW Network, and the reality show *All-American Muslim* (2011-2012) on cable channel TLC which was also cancelled after just one season with eight episodes. As the titles from both shows already intimate, the Muslim identity is forcefully embedded within an American location, national identity and lifestyle. *All-American Muslim* narrates the daily experiences of five American Muslim families through the artificial reality show format of a regular cast and interviews. As a situation comedy, *Aliens in America* features a young Muslim teenager from Pakistan who lives with an American family as part of an international foreign student exchange program. Although it might share some of the general premises of *Little Mosque* by revealing some insights about Islam, by parodying Islamophobia, and by stressing the friendship between the Muslim character and his American teenage counterpart, in the long run the show is actually more about the quirky American white family and the daily tribulations of surviving the quintessential American experience: high school.

*Little Mosque* goes further than both of these programs in terms of its sustained and extensive representation of Muslims and Islam. It offers a dramatic and resistant shift that transforms Muslims from news-making bodies to comedy-making bodies, as I argue in the following section. Rather than representing Muslims in their expected “proper” or “appropriate” genre, the show disconnects them from their distribution within the given regime of visual presentation, as well as the generic roles, possibilities, and capabilities that are inscribed. In opposition to news genres, the situation comedy genre has the potential to extract Muslims and Islam from being only recognizable and perceivable through realism or contemporary events of terrorism, offering a different mode of seeing both Muslims and Islam.

### **Seeing Muslim Bodies Differently**

While comedy exists in numerous forms on television, none is so familiar and so popular as the situation comedy, one of the staples of television (Creeber 65). Its basic and general features of fixed and likable characters, settings (most often in a studio with several sets), narrative style (conflict to resolution and happy ending), warm moments, humorous situations, one-liners, and physical comedy (Creeber 65-70), create drastically more congenial viewing intentions than the news genres. *Little Mosque* adheres faithfully to the standard conventions, norms and features of the situation comedy, and as such, positions Muslims and Islam in a very different and (de)politicized context via different aesthetics, tone, and plot. The show might be considered a

traditional family situation comedy, with the family being both the various individual Muslim families showcased, and the Muslim community in Mercy which acts as a wider family with its familiar and familial daily squabbles. With this family emphasis, its various studio sets also follow typical family situation comedy iconography: the warm and cozy kitchen, and the dining and living rooms of the Hamoudi family, the principal Muslim family in the community; the character Fatima's welcoming and retro diner-style café, which serves as the community's main spot for socialization. These two regular sets already accentuate the ordinary and daily life around which the show evolves. One other key visual reference is that of the Mercy mosque, which is located within the Anglican church, since Muslim worshippers are unable to find any other building in the area that is willing to house it.

*Little Mosque*'s portrayal of Islam's spaces and soundscape contrasts sharply with other American media representations that have taken on violent connotations.<sup>104</sup> In his study of the sounds of the war on terror, Corey Creekmur explores the various functions of the *adhan* (the call to prayer) and Muslim prayer in popular films and television dramas. Rather than serving as a geographical or cultural cue along with the mosque, the *adhan* and the mass prayer it solicits are "employed as a sound of dread, establishing narrative tension through an emphatic aural announcement of the narrative threat unfolding before us," he claims (87). As Creekmur argues:

Muslim prayer in "War on Terror" media signals unthinking, indoctrinated repetition rather than the spiritual power of sacred ritual and is thus often heard in the voice of an undifferentiated crowd. In short, in popular American media, Muslim prayer has become the sound of Islamic fundamentalism rather than a common cultural practice; it anticipates political violence while masquerading as religious ritual, narratively functioning as the sonic prelude to the danger that soon follows. (87)

In contrast, the fictional mosque and the daily practice of Islamic prayers as represented in *Little Mosque* are both visualized within a strictly religious context. They are further neutralized when embedded within a situation comedy framework. In the show, the so-called mosque is only designated as such by a small sign posted on top of the entrance to the parish hall and a metal structure upholding the symbolic crescent affixed to the church's roof. The mosque itself consists

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<sup>104</sup> Even before 9/11, Jack Shaheen had argued that Hollywood films associate Islam with "male supremacy, holy war, and acts of terror ... When mosques are displayed on-screen, the camera inevitably cuts to Arabs praying, and then gunning down civilians." See page 9 of Shaheen's *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 2001).

of a simple and plain prayer hall, which appears to be the former auditorium of the church, and the imam's office. The prayer hall is decorated with individual prayer rugs, wall decorations and a plain pulpit, or minbar, which the ignorant Joe character disrespectfully referred to as a "minibar." There are no other props that signify drastic differences, religiously or culturally. Absent, too, are the conventionalized and overtly connotative visual and audible cues of minarets and the *adhan*. Visually, it is an inconspicuous and unremarkable place. Serving as one of the permanent sets of the show, this hall is where many comical scenes occur, in particular those relating to the internal squabbles within the Muslim community. The fictional mosque's diminutive size, as suggested by the word "little" in its title, is also cozy, if not reassuring, given that large and real-life urban mosques are sometimes seen as potential sites for radicalization.

In the final season, when the Muslim community finally builds its own mosque, the new mosque possesses more distinct and elaborate features that include multiple minarets and stained glass windows. Although the construction of the mosque is incorporated into the plotlines of the last few episodes, the actual space is featured only briefly during the mosque's grand opening in the series finale. A wide-angle shot from the mosque's balcony is used to reveal its minimalist aesthetics. This is clearly seen in the promotional photograph for this mosque-opening episode which CBC has placed on the show's website (see figure 4.2). This space of simple grandeur is dramatically lit with the character Sarah kneeling for her morning prayer. The undertone is one of romantic fascination, returning the space of the mosque from the political to the sacred.



**Figure 4.2.** A promotional photograph for *Little Mosque's* finale with the character Sarah (Sheila McCarthy) in the new mosque, and Amaar (Zaib Shaikh) in the background. Reprint permission courtesy of WestWind Pictures.

For the rest of the episode, the site of the mosque is visually downplayed as the mosque's grand opening coincides with another storyline that culminates in the marriage of one of the non-

Muslim characters who wishes to have her wedding at the mosque. The prayer hall is thus adorned with abundant floral arrangements and experienced as the setting for a Christian wedding ceremony, with the bride walking down the aisle to the familiar Pachelbel's *Canon in D*. Moreover, the imam also announces that the new mosque will shelter the former Mercy Anglican church, which has been destroyed by a fire, thus reversing the mosque-in-church premise on which the series began. This mosque space is idealized as a space for a loving and loveable Muslim community, for traditions, and for prayers. More importantly, it continues to reflect the interdependence between the Muslim and the Anglican communities.

Indeed, group prayers and individual prayers by the show's characters are uttered and performed but stripped of any negative connotations or fearful emotive values. In fact, prayer scenes appear to have a more didactic purpose rather than a politicized framing. One up-close scene occurs in the fourth episode of the first season involving the character Rayyan (other aspects of this character will be addressed shortly). The scene appears towards the end of the show with Rayyan sitting on the steps leading to the mosque talking to the imam Amaar. During the conversation, Amaar scolds Rayyan for harboring ill will towards her own mother and urges her to go pray. Heeding to Amaar's advice, Rayyan stands up and enters the mosque. At this point, it is clear and logical from the preceding dialogue that Rayyan intends to go pray in the prayer hall and there is nothing in the storyline that requires an actual praying scene. Whether Rayyan actually prays and confesses her insensitivity also has no further consequences on the storyline.

What occurs next, however, are four shots that follow Rayyan into the prayer hall documenting her every physical movement as she performs the act of prayer. The first shot, a close-up, focuses on her legs in trousers and her feet as she removes her shoes before entering the prayer hall. The second, a full shot, shows her walking into the prayer hall. Third, a medium shot, features her upper body and shows her raising her hands next to her ears as she utters an invocation. The shot continues as the camera rests on Rayyan while she pauses briefly and readies her mind for confession. The final shot is another close-up that focuses on her folded hands resting on her midriff while she continues to pray and confess. The choice of the medium shot and the close-up is interesting, for it is through these closer looks that Rayyan's movements are demystified and accentuated for the non-Muslim spectators, given that practicing Muslims, or even nominal Muslims, would likely be familiar with this common habit. Once again, the scene dislocates Islam from the politicized and public discussions that have linked it to global terrorism

and posits it in the private realm as a deeply personal and everyday religious experience. It also has the potential to serve as a pedagogical moment to educate viewers on the practice of prayer.

Although the scene is framed to emphasize the spiritual, embedded within it are still some mis-en-scène elements – the emptiness of the prayer room, the muted lighting of the room, and the mood-setting non-diegetic Middle Eastern music – that intensifies the act of gazing at a lone veiled woman. Such a scene cannot help but raise the spectre of Orientalist obsessions with veiled women and the voyeuristic gaze towards them, most apparent in relation to sexual curiosities about female harems.<sup>105</sup> No other character's prayer life is rendered in a similar fashion. Whatever gaze this praying scene is able to inspire, however, would be fleeting since the scene ends abruptly after about 17 seconds.

The character of Rayyan, a 20-something Muslim woman, is undoubtedly a challenge to represent visually with the veil, not just because of the visual heritage of Orientalism just mentioned, but also because of the contemporary discussions over the practice of veiling itself. The subject of Muslim women's dress, be it the headscarf or the face veil, has provoked heated public debates in relation to issues of multiculturalism pre-9/11 as a target of state governance in European countries such as France and the Netherlands. Criticized as the sign and instrument of Islam's oppression, veiling has also been made to carry a symbolic potency, seen to reflect an "undesirable" form of Islam, "backward, radical, segregating or simply public" (Moors 1). More pertinent to 9/11, the politics of veiling and unveiling is linked to military interventions in Afghanistan, with images of burka-clad women in US media symbolizing women's oppression under Taliban rule, which bolstered justifications for military intervention, and the lifting of the burkas by Muslim women following the Taliban's downfall as a symbol of American military triumph.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> The various connotations of the veiled female body and the problematic visual legacy of representing Muslim women have been detailed and critiqued by many scholars. See for example Malek Alloula's *The Colonial Harem* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), and Ella Shohat and Robert Stam's *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London: Routledge, 1994). According to Shohat and Stam, in Hollywood's ethnographies, the orient is "sexualized through the recurrent figure of the veiled women whose mysterious inaccessibility, mirroring that of the orient itself, requires Western unveiling to be understood." This process of exposing the Oriental female, furthermore, "comes to allegorize the availability of Eastern land for Western penetrating knowledge and possession" (148 and 149).

<sup>106</sup> Scholars have written about this politics of unveiling and the war on Afghanistan, including Judith Butler, whose thoughts I covered in my introduction. For other arguments on how American news media portrayed this unveiling, see Carol A. Stabile and Deepa Kumar's "Unveiling Imperialism: Media, Gender and the War on Afghanistan," *Media, Culture & Society* 27.5 (2005): 765-782; and Smeeta Mishra's "'Saving' Muslim Women and Fighting Muslim Men: Analysis of Representation in *The New York Times*," *Global Media Journal* (American Edition) 6.11 (2007): 1-20.

Into this visual minefield enters Rayyan. Just like the mosque and the practice of praying, veiling is significantly re-contextualized in *Little Mosque's* situation comedy world; it is made utilitarian as a costume, and its defense is articulated through traditions of democracy such as freedom and autonomous choice. Among the female Muslim characters, only Fatima and Rayyan wear the hijab. Rayyan's character (played by Sitara Hewitt) is a successful doctor and obviously serves as the counter and "positive" image of a Muslim woman, being the very antithesis of the stereotyped Muslim woman supposedly victimized by the Islamic patriarchy and in need of rescue by the West. Rayyan is featured as a role model for Muslim women: intelligent, strong, assertive, highly articulate, and independent.

Describing herself as an Islamic feminist, she advocates women's rights and gender equality; she passionately defends the practice of wearing the hijab as a religious practice – a sign of modesty – and not as the commonly perceived manifestation of Islam's oppression. Furthermore, Rayyan defends the hijab through the idiom of liberal democracy, stressing her decision as a matter of personal choice, individualism, religious freedom and pride and not as a result of patriarchal coercion or pressure from the Muslim community. On the issue of Muslim women wearing a burka, Rayyan *indirectly* supports face veiling when she protests a ban on the burka as being "an unjust law" that wrongly regulates what people can or cannot wear. In other words, what she champions are the freedoms of choice and personal expression. As she tells another character in episode 14 of season three, "It is not about the part of me that it [the hijab] covers; it's about the part of me that it shows."

In every episode, Rayyan dons vibrantly colored and fashionable headscarves that have become the talk of the show. Judging from the informal post-show comments from viewers watching the situation comedy on YouTube, she has become a fashion role model for female Muslim viewers.<sup>107</sup> Rayyan sports outfits that are considered religiously appropriate yet modern and professional, says the show's stylist Resa McConaghy, who was interviewed in a segment included in the DVD set of the first season. Detailing her strategy for dressing Rayyan, an ebullient McConaghy shows off her rack of stylish scarves for the character and explains: "You can never get enough scarves to make the outfit look good." During the same interview, Hewitt, the actress who plays Rayyan, strokes the colorful headscarves and exclaims, "It's head candy,

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<sup>107</sup> Rayyan's outfits and headscarves have even inspired a blog that details her on-screen wardrobe. The blogger also suggests alternative pieces to recreate Rayyan's looks, see <http://hijabchique.blogspot.co.uk/2007/12/rayyans-tenth-outfit-shirt.html>, accessed February 20, 2013.

baby.”<sup>108</sup> Ironically, no longer just a sign of modesty and even less so a symbol of Islamic oppression, the headscarf becomes a glamorous fashion accessory to accentuate Rayyan’s beauty and reflect her modern identity.



**Figure 4.3.** The character Rayyan from *Little Mosque* wearing one of her many colorful headscarves. Photograph reprint permission courtesy of WestWind Pictures.

Indeed, Rayyan is able to wear her veil triumphantly, reversing the negative connotations and turning the practice into an expression of freedom. McConaghy, meanwhile, is able to transform the controversial act of veiling into showcase moments for trendy headscarves. But this shift in signification and function is not necessarily oppositional. Perhaps what is more subversive are the moments when Rayyan is not actually wearing the hijab. Each week as the plot dictates, Rayyan is veiled while in public but when she is within the private realm of her one-screen home, she is without the veil. Viewers see her, shorn of this visible sign of religious difference, engaging in the banal activities of daily life: cooking, arguing with her parents, and watching television. Her body takes up a very generic aesthetics: casual outfits, both Western and ethnic pieces, and dark free-flowing hair. Her presence is ordinary, commonplace, and undistinguished, except for the fact that she is both likeable and attractive. The show thus highlights the *full* life of a Muslim woman, both with and without the veil, and both in public and in private. The figure of the Muslim woman, rather than the symbolic battle ground for Islam’s assumed conservatism or West’s progressivism, or the visual illustration of the strangeness of the Muslim other, is instead normalized. Her presence is no longer made noteworthy, at best, or controversial, at worst, only when she is envisaged with the veil. Her life and identity are no longer singularly defined by this one item of clothing, as significant as it is in her life. Moreover,

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<sup>108</sup> DVD commentary from *Little Mosque on the Prairie: Season One*.

this unveiling, situated in a different context, lacks the American military triumphalism associated with the unveiling of Afghan women under Taliban rule; neither does it carry with it Orientalist sexual and voyeuristic overtones. Unveiling is subversive here not because she is “liberated” from her veil but because her quotidian presence invites a visual shift from the conscious and heightened way of looking to the ordinary.

With its studio settings – the family kitchen, the friendly café, the neutralized mosque – and ordinary Muslim figures, the show locates Muslims and Islam within domestic and private spaces and out of the confines of global terrorism. Rather than being collectively under the scrutinizing gaze of news cameras, perennially vilified as a group and religion responsible for extreme violence, and existing as the headline-grabbing leading actors in global news events or the “unassimilables” in Western multicultural societies, *Little Mosque*’s Muslims are made banal and ordinary, subjected to the emotional entanglements of everyday life, personalized with their own individual histories. While references to terrorism and 9/11 abound in the show, which is thus still haunted by that outside world of political violence and conflicts, *Little Mosque*’s Muslims and Islam nevertheless become timeless, or perhaps more accurately, untimely, in the sense that their presence is a timely response to post-9/11 misrepresentations, and yet, their portrayals are no longer conventionally and conveniently anchored in historic times and cataclysmic events – catastrophes, hijackings, and bombings, to name but a few. Instead, they now dwell in domestic times of uneventfulness. No longer the people framed by and seen through global public events, they are now literally and metaphorically domesticated in the fictional sets of a television studio.

While warm, cozy and inviting television studio sets create a visual backdrop that recalibrates the often hostile mode through which to see Muslim bodies and Islam, the situation comedy’s most prominent attribute of humor also generates oppositional possibilities to neutralize an antagonistic gaze.<sup>109</sup> Against the backdrop of post-9/11 media stereotypes of Muslims and Islam, laughter and comedy have become an important strategy for contesting representations. As the Egyptian-American stand-up comedian Ahmed Ahmed says, “We can’t define who are on a serious note because nobody will listen. The only way to do it is to be funny

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<sup>109</sup> Humor as a form of resistance has been well discussed in humor studies. Mikhail Bakhtin’s description of the carnival is foundational, see his *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984). For more general overviews and specific case studies, see *Humour in Society. Resistance and Control*, ed. Chris Powell and George E.C. Paton (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988); and *A Cultural History of Humour from Antiquity to the Present Day*, ed. Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg (Cambridge: Polity, 1997).

about it.”<sup>110</sup> The fact that a group of American Muslim comedians have named their comedy project as *Allah Made Me Funny: The Official Muslim Comedy Tour* to emphasize the obvious idea that indeed, Muslims, too, have a sense of humor, points to the deep-rooted and unfavorable stereotypes of Islam as being oppressive, draconian, and strict, and its followers as being somber and ascetic.<sup>111</sup>

In the case of *Little Mosque*, humor and laughter are important elements, but on their own the comical contents themselves are not resistant per se. After all, jokes might fail to generate laughter, as many of the one-liners and situations in *Little Mosque* are so cliché and are not necessarily funny at all. Poking fun at post-9/11 effects such as airport security, the no-fly list, racial profiling, and mosque surveillance is also a precarious act. Parody does indeed point out some of the absurdities and paranoia of homeland security measures, but the show often defuses these issues with slight twists in the storyline, thus exempting it from articulating any direct critique and blunting humor’s subversive edge. In those cases, humor’s critical effect is minimalized as it acts merely as a safety valve.

What is resistant, however, are the possibilities and capabilities that are now made available for Muslim bodies as the site of comedic performance. Beyond the numerous 9/11 references, much of the laughter of the show comes from the Muslim characters’ sincere and desperate attempts to live by Islam’s rules that sometimes conflict with the more liberal mores of Western societies. The show also offers an affectionate mockery of Muslims by addressing their intra-religious differences and conflicts which are just as fierce and comical as any clashes between Muslims and non-Muslims. These comical scenes between Muslims themselves and between Muslims and non-Muslim characters drastically transform Muslim bodies from their highly politicized pre- and post-9/11 designations into bodies that generate laughter through various forms of humor techniques: caricature, exaggeration, wordplay, repartee, misunderstanding, and parody. In *Little Mosque*, Muslims are comical bodies, not menacing or victimized bodies. What is resistant about this show is how comedy and laughter, as part of the broader sensible framework of the situation comedy genre, can modify one’s gaze towards Muslims and Islam by injecting a more personal, empathetic, and familiar way of looking.

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<sup>110</sup> See Ahmed’s comic routine and interview in the documentary, *Stand Up: Muslim American Comics Come of Age*, produced by PBS, [www.pbs.org/weta/crossroads/about/show\\_standup.html](http://www.pbs.org/weta/crossroads/about/show_standup.html), accessed February 21, 2013.

<sup>111</sup> Another similar post-9/11 comedy tour is *The Axis of Evil Comedy Tour*, which features four Arab-American comedians.

This empathy and familiarity are also enabled by the situation comedy's series format. As Neale and Krutnik explain: "As with all series or serials, we can switch on at the same time each week and update ourselves on the lives and situations of what often become very familiar characters" (178 and 179). Episode after episode, audiences have the possibility to accrue a viewing relationship with its regular cast of characters through five substantial seasons. This series form is no doubt more pertinent to CBC viewers who saw the show every week during its regular Monday night slot. Those who are watching the show on DVDs or on YouTube might have a less organized and sequential viewing pattern. Nevertheless, this five-season run, with a total of 91 episodes, has the potential to pull viewers into the emotional entanglements between the characters.

Romantic tensions between Rayyan and the handsome imam Amaar, for example, notable already in earlier episodes, are prolonged for most of the series. Just like Rayyan, Amaar serves as a "positive" representation of a Muslim man. Young, progressive and congenial, Amaar becomes the antithesis of the many post-9/11 real-life examples of hard-line Muslim clerics who are often blamed for preaching hatred and inciting violence. Rayyan and Amaar's love quest finally culminates in their profession of love to each other in season four's finale, followed by Amaar's proposal and the couple's wedding in season five. In later seasons, their experiences of marriage and home life are incorporated into the plotlines, and in the series' finale, the revelation of Rayyan's pregnancy completes their story. This is one narrative arc that has the potential to pique viewers' interest, drawing them back every week, and thus deepening not only visual familiarity but also creating relationality in the process. This sustained and emotionally-invested visual bond is not usually possible when seeing Muslims through the factual news genres which often involve brief one-off encounters with limiting sound bites.

With the aid of various expected situation comedy features – family-related settings, themes, humor, and series format – *Little Mosque* offers congenial visions of Muslims, as well as a familiar and familial mode through which to see them. The show becomes resistant not because it offers "positive" images of Muslims against a litany of "negative" representations, but because it calls upon viewers to exercise interpretive abilities, affective capacities, and emotional commitments that deviate from those incited by news media representations. Rather than a gaze intensified by the realist and somber tone of terrorism-related news, watching *Little Mosque* would require a gaze informed by the situation comedy aesthetics of everyday life.

## Watching Convivial Relationships

Ensnared within the homey and cheerful situation comedy world, Muslims in *Little Mosque* no longer command a heightened presence. The externals that have often marked them adversely in the West as Muslim and foreign are depoliticized and made ordinary. While the Muslim body itself is a site for the politics of representation, it is also that body's relationship with non-Muslims that has provoked public debates, most often through the leitmotif of a cultural clash and conflicts. Against this sense of post-9/11 antagonism, *Little Mosque* posits instead multicultural friendships and community. This, too, contributes to the show's overall resistant potential with a counter viewing that subverts both Islamophobia and civilizationalism. The "us versus them" divide, made distinct and antagonistic by the war on terror and Huntington's conflicting-civilizations hypothesis, becomes obscured in the fictional world of *Little Mosque*.

The series portrays a very specific vision of a Muslim/non-Muslim relationship that can be best understood and visualized through Gilroy's concept of convivial culture, a vision of cross-cultural relationship that opposes the thesis of civilizationalism.<sup>112</sup> As part of his discussion of multiculturalism in Britain, Gilroy introduces in *Postcolonial Melancholia* the concept of convivial culture, or conviviality, defining it as "the processes of cohabitation and interaction that have made multiculturalism an ordinary feature of social life in Britain's urban areas and in postcolonial cities elsewhere" (xv).<sup>113</sup> He has used the same set of adjectives repeatedly to capture the dynamic of this ordinary multiculturalism: it is spontaneous, organic, chaotic, unkempt, unruly, unplanned, everyday, routine, demotic, and perhaps even banal. What convivial culture privileges is an informed affiliation based on shared common interests and social desires.

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<sup>112</sup> I would like to thank Mireille Rosello of the University of Amsterdam for introducing me to Gilroy's idea of conviviality and suggesting its possible relevance to *Little Mosque*.

<sup>113</sup> In *Postcolonial Melancholia*, Gilroy introduces the term convivial culture in opposition to what he sees as the gloomy and destructive condition of Britain's "postcolonial melancholia," the country's inability to mourn the loss of its empire. Moreover, he has placed convivial culture in the metropolitan space because it serves as "a fragmented and stratified location in which cultures, histories, and structures of feeling previously separated by enormous distances could be found in the same place, the same time: school, bus, café, cell, waiting room, or traffic jam" (70). While *Little Mosque* takes place in very different political, historical and geographical contexts, the term is still helpful due to the similar and broader issues of identity, identification, differences, and of course, multiculturalism. This concept is also appropriate despite the show's setting in a Canadian prairie town because the "prairie" location is actually quite ambivalent. On the one hand, the show's jokes sometimes highlight Mercy's own regional location by making fun of Toronto, as I pointed out earlier. On the other hand, the prairie geography is seen only in the opening credits and occasionally when characters wander outside of the mosque or their homes and into the open spaces of Mercy. Moreover, its storylines usually do not concern the prairie location, with the exception of two episodes "Wheat Week" and "Mercy Beet" which are specifically connected to the prairie economy and local traditions. As testified by its successful global syndication, what distinguishes the series is its universal appeal that has transcended geography. Noteworthy is also the fact that the show's title had been shortened to *Little Mosque*, with the prairie reference dropped, when it was being promoted for distribution in America.

More importantly, it is a way of viewing alterity relationally and dialogically. In *Little Mosque*, the relations between Muslims and non-Muslims are distinguished by this exact spirit of conviviality; each week the storylines unfold with this everyday, routine, and mundane exposure to difference. The show's various expressions of conviviality between two communities, which since 9/11 have been perceived as being mutually suspicious and hostile, reflect that, as Gilroy has seen in the British context, cohabitation and encounter with difference need not be a source of fear, anxiety or violence.

Especially in the first few seasons, the two opposing poles of Islam and the West, actually serve as the ideological framework and the "situation" in many episodes. The Islam/West dichotomy is often identified at the beginning of the episode but it is always resolved by the end of the show with the two communities reconciling through moments of conviviality. If bin Laden and Bush became the metonymy for the post-9/11 Manichean battle, the two characters of Barber and Fred serve as the same metonymy for the two conflicting communities in *Little Mosque*. Fred, the shock DJ at the local radio station, is based on the real-life American conservative radio talk show host Rush Limbaugh. Constantly demonizing and vilifying Islam, Fred uses Muslims and their religious differences as fodder for his radio show. Always sowing suspicion and paranoia as a way to drive up ratings, he rants ridiculously and inanely, calling his Muslim neighbors "terrorists," "jihadists," and "suicide bombers." Barber, on the other end, is one of the patriarchs of the Muslim community and its most conservative member. Calling his white Canadian neighbors "infidels," "heathens," "barbarians" and "crusaders," he constantly condemns Western culture as the corruptor of sexual morality and scolds non-Muslims for their lack of piety.

With Fred and Barber becoming visually identified with the ills of post-9/11 antagonisms and civilizationalism, it is the stable friendship between imam Amaar and the Anglican Reverend Duncan Magee – the metonymies of Islam and Christianity – that serves as strategic counter images. Since the mosque is housed within the Anglican church, the spatially-determined way of thinking about cultural and religious differences through distinct territories of East and West with clear boundaries is undermined. Instead, what viewers see each week are the constant encounters and interdependence that characterize the two communities. Having the mosque within the church means Amaar's and Reverend Magee's offices are near each other, prompting various idyllic and convivial moments between the two spiritual leaders in almost every episode. They are often shown sharing cups of tea or playing a game of chess during their working hours,

as well as walking through the park or sharing a bench outside the parish hall. Their physical differences – Amaar is young, handsome, and slim, while Reverend Magee is older, short, and rotund – further accentuate the uniqueness of their friendship. In one episode, the two men actually ran together as a team during the community marathon, wearing matching vests with the words “the God Squad.” These two sets of male relationships, Fred-Barber and Amaar-Reverend Magee reflect a contrapuntal process of rejection and open embrace of cultural/religious differences. While the Fred-Barber pair reflects comically the anxieties and hostility that have marked the post-9/11 encounters between Islam and the West, the Amaar-Reverend Magee pair counterpoises with alternative encounters that are marked by friendship, mutual respect and male bonding. This male-friendship theme is continued in later seasons after the character Reverend Magee is replaced by the new Reverend Thorne, who strikes up an unlikely friendship not with Amaar but with Barber instead.

Despite whatever religious and cultural barriers and differences both Fred and Barber articulate in every episode, there are never any physical traces of segregation between the two communities. In fact, the two groups share a spatial intimacy. In Fatima’s café, the popular neighborhood hangout, Muslim and non-Muslim characters are often shown sharing a booth or sitting side-by-side at the counter enjoying their meals. Rayyan works in the town’s medical clinic and is shown in several episodes examining her non-Muslim patients, including both Fred and Reverend Magee. Ironically, the only visible physical barrier is the one that is in the mosque’s prayer hall to separate the male and female worshippers. It is this spatial proximity between the Muslim and non-Muslim communities that leads to Gilroy’s everyday, spontaneous, and organic moments of conviviality.

One scene exemplifies the process of confrontation and negotiation that finally leads to a moment of conviviality. The scene is a snapshot of a community not troubled by the Muslim presence and open to share its public spaces. The scene occurs in the episode “Swimming Upstream” in season one. After breaking her ankle following a fall, Fatima is urged to take up aqua aerobics at the local public swimming pool as part of her rehabilitation regime. The swim instructor, however, turns out to be a man and she, as a devout Muslim woman, refuses to bare her swim-suited body to the male instructor, despite the fact that he is gay. After a failed attempt to convince the mayor to allocate extra funds to hire a female swimming instructor, Fatima is forced to find another solution by donning an Islamic swim suit, a three-piece outfit that includes a hood that covers her head, a tunic and pants that cover the rest of her body. Only her face,

hands and feet are revealed.

The scene begins with a medium shot of the poolside, showing the gay swimming instructor setting up the CD player for their aqua-aerobics class. That is followed by a close-up of a pair of black legs (Fatima is Nigerian) limping into the swimming pool area. The camera then searches up gradually to accentuate this fully-clad body, revealing it to be Fatima in her bright-yellow swimming suit. This is followed by a medium shot foregrounding Fatima, with two overweight white Canadian women in the background. Instead of being an object of ridicule in her funny suit or a sight of strangeness that triggers discomfort in the white townsfolk, Fatima actually becomes the object of envy as one of the white women says to her friend: “I wonder where she gets that suit? It would really cover my cellulites.” For this full-sized white woman, who earlier in the episode supported the idea of the female instructor as a way to evade male visual scrutiny, this encounter with Fatima becomes a moment of informal female bonding and solidarity as both are united in their desire to subvert the male gaze. Much like Rayyan’s hijab, the Islamic bathing suit is seen positively; it is even given a new utility to cover bodily imperfections.

This fleeting moment of female solidarity then transitions to another encounter between Fatima and her gay instructor. Their conversation, captured by medium, over-the-shoulder shots, is capped off by his sweet compliment to Fatima: “Girl, about that get-up,” he says, pointing at her swimsuit, “you make that work.” The comment is well received, as a close-up shot shows a smiling Fatima delighted by this praise. Once again, Fatima’s perceived foreign presence is not only transcended but welcomed. Fatima finds a way to adhere to the rules of her faith, while the non-Muslim townsfolk, rather than seeing her as a threat or a source of fear, simply find another way of looking at her. The scene finally ends in a boisterous vision of Gilroy’s conviviality as Fatima follows women of various shapes and sizes, all swinging to salsa music as they descend into the public pool for their aqua-fit swimming class (see figure 4.4). This is the everyday convivial culture that, according to Gilroy, looks beyond differences and seeks cross-cultural affiliative solidarity and pleasures. In this overtly idealized scene, tolerance, inclusion and spatial intimacy become counter values that defy the post-9/11 discourse of antagonism.



**Figure 4.4.** A scene of convivial culture from *Little Mosque* with character Fatima, second from left, in her Islamic bathing suit. Photograph reprint permission courtesy of WestWind Pictures.

One of the hallmarks that distinguishes the relationship between the two communities of *Little Mosque* is one of interdependency: Reverend Magee’s Anglican church uses the rent paid by the mosque to stay financially afloat; Fatima needs both her Muslim and non-Muslim customers in her café, and so does Yasir, whose construction business is dependent on the town’s white and non-Muslim clients. Similarly, the white mayor is always courting her Muslim constituencies; and even Fred is parasitic on the Muslims, for it is his anti-Muslim outbursts on the radio that drive his show’s ratings and secure his livelihood. In a way, the situation comedy is recasting that famous phrase coined by Spivak, “White men are saving brown women from brown men” (296), to show how white men, brown men, and brown women are saving each other after 9/11.

In the episode entitled “Eid’s a Wonderful Life,” this mutual reliance leads to another moment of conviviality. The episode starts with the Muslim and Christian communities at odds due to a scheduling conflict that leads to a battle over parking spaces, as both sides want to celebrate their December holidays on the same night. The Christians hope to mark Christmas, while the Muslims hope to mark Eid-al-Adha, the annual Islamic Festival of Sacrifice. As the episode progresses, the two communities are actually able to resolve their differences. What paved the way for this celebration was their mutual lack. Due to a misunderstanding, Reverend Magee had no congregants on the evening of his celebration but a table full of Christmas food, while a comical internal mosque feud resulted in Amaar having a mosque full of Muslim worshippers but no food. The episode ends on a moment of conviviality that accentuates the strong sense of mutual care that exists between the two groups. The whole scene consists of medium shots capturing the togetherness of and fellowship between Christians and Muslims.

These shots also highlight various acts of hospitality: Reverend Magee, surrounded by Muslims, is slicing and serving the Christmas turkey, while Fatima is pouring drinks. This utopian scene is further accentuated by the non-diegetic music, a song that calls for peace and “the world (becoming) as one.”<sup>114</sup>

Undeniably, the show’s rendering of multicultural relations is explicitly sentimentalized and idealized. The show is indeed an act of multiculturalism pedagogy. Conviviality is possible because only acceptable, rather than unacceptable, differences are being addressed. Besides, these differences are already confined within a framework of eventual resolution rather than endowed with any possibilities of contingency. Those with more extreme behaviors that encroach on the communal harmonious order and demand complex encounters that cannot be resolved by a situation comedy’s happy ending are quickly banished from the plot. For example, a mysterious woman in a burka appears in episode two of season two but quickly disappears by the end of the program after the issue of the face veil is feebly addressed. In episode seven of season four, a band of radical Muslims join the Mercy mosque but are quickly expelled when they “frightened” the Anglicans.

The close daily relations between Muslims and non-Muslims, nevertheless, demonstrate how their entangled lives are moving beyond patronizing clichés such as “tolerance” and “respect” for different cultures: their fictional lives are intertwined as they are implicated in various relationships due to necessity. Visually, this is substantial: in the post-9/11 climate of Islamophobia, such acts of mutual responsibility, care, and conviviality are counter-intuitive. It is through this form of convivial relations that *Little Mosque* counter-poses abundant scenes that can visually contest iconic post-9/11 images of hostility and atrocity, from US soldiers’ treatment of Muslim detainees in Guantánamo Bay to the torture and humiliation of Iraqi inmates at Abu Ghraib. The show negates the interpretive grid of a clash between civilizations to model quotidian encounters between two communities that end in loving relationships, friendship, and mutual aid. No longer the minority group that is often represented as one that threatens the social harmony of Western multicultural societies, *Little Mosque*’s Muslims actively mend and solidify those social bonds.

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<sup>114</sup> The song is “Peace Train” by Yusuf Islam (a.k.a. Cat Stevens). The lyrics are: “Now I’ve been happy lately, thinking about the good things to come / And I believe it could be, something good has begun / O, I’ve been smiling lately, dreaming about the world as one / And I believe it could be, someday it’s going to come / ‘Cause out on the edge of darkness, there rides a peace train / O, peace train take this country, come take me home again.”

Perhaps the most subversive quality of convivial culture lies exactly in the show's everyday and mundane moments of friendships, spatial intimacy, and interdependence, utopian as they may be. The frequency and ordinariness of daily encounters between Muslims and non-Muslims diegetically create what Gilroy elsewhere calls "a liberating sense of the banality of intermixture" (*Postcolonial* 150). As the show progresses season after season, these cross-cultural relationships become increasingly agreeable, reducing the post-9/11 exaggerated and racist perceptions of religious and cultural differences to a freeing ordinariness. By presenting the connective possibilities between the two communities, which may or may not already exist in real-life communities, the show not only normalizes the daily relationship between the two groups but it also accustoms its viewers with images that underscore this close and friendly, rather than hostile, relationship.

### **Limits of Visual Resistance**

Much is gained for Muslims in being thus understood, banalized, and represented televisually, but something is also lost. In its eagerness to remedy a belligerent post-9/11 visibility towards Muslims to one that is re-oriented by familiarity and conviviality, *Little Mosque* also has to render the Muslim identity and Islam "safe" and acceptable for a Western and later global audience. A comment by Rayyan uttered to Barber during one of the episodes has succinctly articulated the representation challenges confronting Muslims and Islam, and the tightrope the show must walk: when Barber offers a spirited and formal explication of Islamic prayer to be used for introducing Islam to non-Muslims during the upcoming mosque open house, Rayyan reacts to his content and his ceremonial manner of delivery by saying: "no, that would sound *too weird* for our Christian visitors" (italics mine). In other words, narratives about Islam and the Muslim identity must not be off-putting and disconcerting; sensitivity must be exercised as not to unsettle or disturb.

In the show, Islam is sanctified rather than politicized, made comprehensible and validated solely through its general spiritual practices; it impacts Muslim characters limitedly through religious rituals and spiritual matters, but never in the realm of the political. The show embeds Islam and the Muslim identity solidly within a religious framework and rarely broaches the subject of politicized Islam. This depoliticization is the condition of its new visibility. This depoliticization, which is actually very political, forecloses many oppositional possibilities, given that social commitment and political participation have their places in Islam. Tariq

Ramadan, for example, has detailed the debates, scope, aims, justifications, and responsibilities for political and social involvement for Western Muslims, both personally and collectively (144-173). Buck-Morss, too, as I mentioned in the introduction, has called for a critical exchange with what she describes as the discursive field of “Islamism.” Islamism, which she stresses is not terrorism, refers to the politicization of Islam, through a discourse of opposition that confronts “issues of social justice, legitimate power, and ethical life in a way that challenges the hegemony of Western political and cultural norms” (2).

*Little Mosque*, however, never treads into such complex matters. When it addresses potentially contentious issues, it always manages to circumvent and maneuver its way out. The show never directly criticizes Islam or the prophet Mohammed, exempting itself from the kinds of public outcry from some Muslims that had surrounded Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* back in the late 1980s, the controversial Muhammad cartoons published by the Danish paper *Jyllands-Posten* in 2005, and the more recent 2010 incident involving the depiction of Mohammed by the American situation comedy *South Park*. The Canadian show’s global success is secured through its achievement of non-provocation and normalization of Muslim identities. When this is accomplished visually, it becomes the show’s strength, as it adopts an oppositional stance in the face of the previous hostile visual legacy. But simultaneously, it also means that differences can be celebrated and made ordinary as acts of defiance against anti-Muslim perceptions only because they are firstly shown to be compatible with a Western and secular world, and thus made comprehensible and recognizable.

For *Little Mosque*, post-9/11 belonging for Muslims and Islam still rests on criteria of similitude, conformability, and recognizability. National identity, too, still trumps the Muslim identity. Muslim characters who are not Canadian-born are shown assimilating quite successfully into their fictional Canadian lives. The naturalization of the character Fatima as a Canadian citizen is actually inserted into one of the episodes’ plot. This process of enfolding inadvertently steers Muslim characters toward fictional versions of “Good Muslims,” which Bush, Blair and numerous officials have distinguished from the “Bad Muslims.” Goodness, in the war on terror discourse, is often pivoted on Muslims’ exhibition of sympathy for catastrophe victims, as well as patriotism, underlining the point that the reception of American/British/Canadian Muslims – hostile or amicable – hinges on their loyalty to national civic life and citizenship. The show has further solidified that line between, on the one side, a normal bill-paying and domesticable (Western) Muslim identity that reiterates and affirms national ideals, and on the other, a deviant

Muslimness that is politicized and radicalized. As Richard Johnson questions: “... we have to ask what would happen to them (Western Muslims) if they expressed dissent” (224). An equally significant question is what happens to Muslims, Western or not, when they are dissimilar, unrecognizable, and incompatible? Butler asks in a post-9/11 context in *Frames of War*: “What is our responsibility toward those we do not know, toward those who seem to test our sense of belonging or to defy available norms of likeness? Perhaps we belong to them in a different way and our responsibility to them does not in fact rely on the apprehension of ready-made similitudes” (36). *Little Mosque* cannot address these issues; visual dissent is what it has achieved and there lies the limit of its resistance. The show has, nevertheless, aimed to facilitate a freer visuality and imagination to engage with Muslim bodies and Islam that might pave the way for other forms of intervention on these questions of identity, identification, and belonging, be it on television or elsewhere.

## **Conclusion**

Real-life terrorist attacks perpetrated by Islamic extremists have always impacted and dictated the televisual presence of Muslims and Islam in Western media, both before and after 9/11. Assisted by the situation comedy format, *Little Mosque* introduces different and oppositional ways of seeing into the visual regime, allowing a more banal gaze towards both Muslim figures and the religious practice itself. Distinct from news genres, the situation comedy loosens the bonds that enclose Muslim bodies within a dominant form of media visibility, liberating them and Islam from being consistently portrayed through the mode of realism or global violent events of terrorism and enabling resistant visibility and visuality. This creates new configurations of what can be seen of Muslims and Islam on television. This oppositional televisual transformation has led Muslims’ collective presence to be made banal, with their lives measured and narrated not through news headlines from the Middle East but through the minutiae of everyday life. Moreover, previously politicized Islamic symbols and practices are celebrated, and made visually familiar and ordinary. Their fictional bodies are now relatable through humor, while Islam itself is affectionately and endearingly parodied by Muslims themselves. In addition, Muslim and non-Muslim relationships are interwoven, reconciled, and solidified. New capabilities and possibilities can now be associated with Muslim bodies, and simultaneously, this shift calls upon the show’s viewers to exercise very dissimilar interpretive and affective capacities, as well as emotional investments, than those required by news genres.

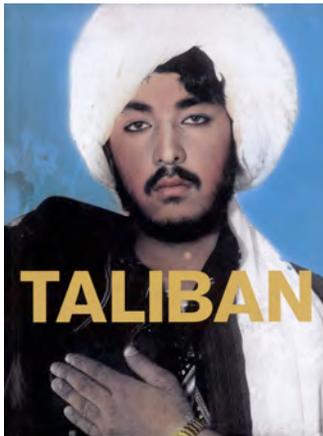
In this way, the character Joe in the show might serve as the ideal addressee/viewer for the show itself, and his fictional development as its hoped-for accomplishment. Joe, as depicted in the premiering episode, is fearful, suspicious and hostile towards his Muslim neighbors. And by calling the terrorist-attack hotline, he is willingly and uncritically accepting his new post-9/11 civic duty to serve as a pair of vigilant eyes in the war on terror. Through regular encounters with his Muslim neighbors and having been initiated into the unfamiliar culture and religion of Islam, Joe is shown in season three, some 44 episodes after his initial alarm of seeing Muslims, sitting comfortably on a bench outside of Fatima's café and chatting with Barber, one of the most conservative members of the Muslim community. In the final episode of that same season, Joe has acquired enough understanding about Islam to explain and enlighten his uninformed friends on Islam's rules concerning representational art, albeit still being somewhat perplexed by those rules himself. Neither fearful nor paranoid, prejudiced nor hostile, he is altered in his behavior, outlook, and visuality.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Faces of the Enemy: Taliban Fighters in a Photography Studio

In the photographic album of the 9/11 catastrophe, panoramic images of the twin towers' destruction might have captured the horror of the event, but it was the ordinary snapshots and the portraits of the missing that personalized the disaster. Hastily affixed to papers and made into posters that were plastered on walls all over New York City, pictures of their faces – showing the smiling and relaxed countenances of daily life – have evoked in viewers tremendous sympathy, respect, and even a sense of grief. When these missing people were confirmed dead, their snapshots and portraits were featured in the “Portraits of Grief” series in the *New York Times*, converting private keepsakes into heavily publicized memorial images.<sup>115</sup>

The object of this final chapter, a collection of studio photographs of Taliban members reprinted in a book, has followed the same trajectory, traveling from the private realm to a wider public viewing. Published in 2003 by Trolley, the London-based publisher of photography and art books, *Taliban* is a compilation of 49 colored private pictures taken by Afghan photographers in Kandahar and discovered by Thomas Dworzak, a German photographer from the international agency Magnum Photos (see figure 5.1).



**Figure 5.1.** The book cover of *Taliban*, which uses one of the hand-colored photographs from the collection. Details of original print size are unavailable. © T. Dworzak Collection / Magnum Photos. Reprint permission purchased from Hollandse Hoogte.

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<sup>115</sup> These profiles of 9/11 victims first appeared in *The New York Times* but were later reprinted in a book entitled *Portraits: 9/11/01: The Collected “Portraits of Grief” from The New York Times*; the series is now an interactive archive at <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/us/sept-11-reckoning/portraits-of-grief.html>, accessed April 20, 2013.

Amongst this collection of reprints are also snapshots and portraits, but they deviate from the “Portraits of Grief” photographs in terms of their aesthetics, politics, intended audience, instrumentalization, and affect. More poignantly, they are the faces of the enemy in the war on terror and not the victims of a catastrophe; they are images of “them” and not of “us” should one uphold that divide. As such, these photographs’ insertion into the post-9/11 visual realm occasions visual antagonism that dovetails with this dissertation’s central theme of artistic interventions into the controlling of the perceptible and the sensible. Affirming once again the aesthetic dimension of the political, this final chapter inquires into this visual engagement and signals its oppositional features by examining these Taliban photographs through their content, the modes of visibility they facilitate, and finally, their efficacy. This line of inquiry leads the chapter to return to Butler’s theoretical considerations of wartime visibility and ethical responses, as well as Rancière’s thoughts on the politics of aesthetics and critical art. Whilst the relevant works of both were broadly outlined in the introduction to the dissertation, their specific writings on photography – seen through the lenses of grief for Butler and dissensus for Rancière – will be explored in this chapter and juxtaposed with one another. Together they will address the intricate relationship between the image and the viewer.

On account of the two vastly different styles of the *Taliban* images (informal snapshots and more elaborate portraits), this chapter pursues several diverging but nevertheless interrelated lines of inquiry, with the first two sections addressing the background of the collection and the photographs’ status as counter images that contest other common visualizations of the Taliban as terrorist-enemy. The latter of the two concentrates on the snapshots and the studio photography genre which jointly challenge the Taliban’s established militant identity and masculinity. The ensuing two sections focus closely on the formal portraits. This transitions to the issue of the images’ political effects with the help of Butler’s thoughts on the ethics of photography, which encourages a compassionate visibility that would approach these Taliban faces through principles of precarity and grievability. Finally, this issue of efficacy is problematized in the last section with Rancière’s aesthetic dissensus, which in contrast encourages a viewing of the Taliban that actually obfuscates legibility and disrupts meaning, thus keeping ethics at bay. I suggest how this dissensual visibility may serve as yet another form of visual resistance against the broader post-9/11 visual realm.

## Finding The Taliban, Serendipitously

According to Dworzak's short introduction to the collection, he chanced upon these photographs while covering the region in 2001 as a Western press photographer.<sup>116</sup> Traveling with the Northern Alliance forces, he arrived in Kandahar in the end of December 2001 and saw outside his hotel various photography studios that were reopening after being shut down during the Taliban reign. Under Taliban rule, these studios were only allowed to take photographs for identification purposes, such as for passports, but occasionally, Taliban followers would request to pose for portraits secretly which could then be retouched and decorated by the photographer. The Taliban's pugnacious attitudes towards representation and idolatry had attracted tremendous global publicity already in 2001 with their destruction of the monumental rock-cut giant Buddhas at Bamiyan. At stake is Islam's ban on *tasweer*, or image-making, which is closely associated with *shirk*, the act of honoring and associating another with Allah, or polytheism. According to Islamic scholar Ahmad Kutty, photography used as a form of communication or for capturing memories without the overtone of *shirk* is not included in the category of forbidden *tasweer*.<sup>117</sup> The Taliban's strict interpretation of Islam, though, does prohibit photography or any depiction of living beings. This is illustrated with four photographs Dworzak had placed at the beginning of the book: photographic faces of female models on hair-care bottles are scribbled over; graphic drawings of a man and an animal on street signs are daubed over with paint.<sup>118</sup> It is, no doubt, this extreme stance of the Taliban towards photography that enhanced these photographs' forbidden status and their sitters' dissenting attitude. Dworzak was told that these photographs of the Taliban were taken in early November of 2001, and the sitters did not return to pick them up since they were forced to flee ahead of opposition forces.

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<sup>116</sup> According to his biography posted on Magnum's website, Dworzak covered the war in the former Yugoslavia, as well as conflicts in Chechnya. His photography assignments have also taken him to Iraq, Iran and Haiti. His full biography and portfolio are available at [http://www.magnumphotos.com/C.aspx?VP3=CMS3&VF=MAGO31\\_9\\_VForm&ERID=24KL5359SL](http://www.magnumphotos.com/C.aspx?VP3=CMS3&VF=MAGO31_9_VForm&ERID=24KL5359SL), accessed April 30, 2013.

<sup>117</sup> Kutty's comments came in the form of a *fatwa*, see <http://www.islamopediaonline.org/fatwa/photography-allowed-islam-especially-it-not-same-painting-or-recreating-being-its-capturing-im>, accessed April 13, 2013.

<sup>118</sup> In a video featuring these Taliban photographs, the Pakistani journalist Ahmed Rashid describes the extent of this ban: "The Taliban would actually destroy any figure and that meant human figure, animal figure, any figure which they said were created by God and therefore could not be depicted. Now this led to some bizarre things like, for example, if you had a mannequin in the shop you would have to chop its head off ... or going into Kabul museum chopping off faces of statues which were 5,000 years old. So you go into Kabul museum and you see all these incredible old statues with their heads chopped off and that is pretty depressing." The video can be viewed at: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gHS2LUssA\\_U&feature=results\\_main&playnext=1&list=PLB6BE265DD04599E7XXXXXX](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gHS2LUssA_U&feature=results_main&playnext=1&list=PLB6BE265DD04599E7XXXXXX), accessed on April 30, 2013.

In the book, these Taliban photographs are arranged in two clusters. One set is the large and more expensive black and white head-and-shoulder portraits taken and developed in the studio. They were then retouched and colorized (see figure 5.1). The other set consists of reprints from color negatives. These photographs were taken in the studio but were developed at one-hour photograph shops in neighboring Pakistan and sent back to Kandahar for retouching (see figures 5.2 and 5.3), according to Dworzak’s introduction (no page number available).



**Figures 5.2 and 5.3.** Examples of reprints from color negatives from the *Taliban* collection. Details of original print size are unavailable. © T. Dworzak Collection / Magnum Photos. Reprint permission purchased from Hollandse Hoogte.

In general, most of the photographs are well lit and focused, with the exception of a few slightly blurry ones. There are no photographs of women. Overall, these images, as they appear in the book, all share similar cropping. Dworzak gives no indication as to whether the photographs are organized chronologically, or alphabetized by the names of subjects, of photographers, or by studios.<sup>119</sup> The sequencing of the photographs merely consists of a cluster of the colorized images, followed by a few reprints of color negatives. This pattern is then repeated several times. There are no page numbers and no captions. All the sitters remain unnamed. Publicity from this book has also led to copies of these images being circulated online as separate and free-standing images at depositories such as Google and Magnum Photos’ own databank.<sup>120</sup> By entitling the collection *Taliban* – the word itself foregrounded on the book’s

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<sup>119</sup> Despite an initial willingness to answer my questions, Dworzak never responded again to my multiple emails in which I pose this and other questions.

<sup>120</sup> As another sign of these photographs’ global circulation and monetary value, Magnum Photos refused to release these photographs for reprint in this dissertation for free. I had to pay its Dutch agent Hollandse Hoogte a reprint fee. After some haggling on my part, they charged me a “reduced” student price of €367. I would like to thank the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis for providing the fund for this cost.

cover in a mustard-yellow color and standing out boldly against the figure clad in black and white, and a bright blue background (see figure 5.1) – Dworzak has established visual, narrative, perceptual, and epistemological boundaries for these images through an identity; not just any identity but one that has gained great cachet as one of the enemies of the West in the war on terror.<sup>121</sup>

The Taliban were, of course, not the primary post-9/11 enemy.<sup>122</sup> It was their status as al-Qaeda’s ally, as the former provider of safe haven to bin Laden and al-Qaeda members, and as hosts of terrorist training camps, that they became the visual surrogate enemy for the infinitely more elusive bin Laden and his global terrorist network at that time. While bin Laden and other al-Qaeda leaders could not be easily located then, the Taliban could be fixed and pinned down geographically. They were then and remain now enemies that come with a location and a battlefield. Rather than the dispersed, “invisible enemy” or the “unknown terrorist,” the Taliban are actually very accessible visually and could be rendered static. This visualization cleaves to a specific visual body (soldier)-space (battlefield)-activity (war) dynamic that becomes a semiotic cue that is significant, even more so because of the vexing absence of a similar body-space configuration for bin Laden and al-Qaeda at the time. This can be seen by considering some of the most conventional depictions of the Taliban through war photojournalism, the primary genre through which the Taliban have been represented in the Western media via mainstream television news, newspaper photographs, YouTube videos and online image archives, such as those from *The New York Times*, *Associated Press*, Getty Images, and Google.

The most common image shows Taliban fighters against a vista of the mountainous terrain of Afghanistan raising their weapons – AK-47s and rocket-propelled grenade launchers – skyward. The battlefield is the rugged mountain peaks and perilous terrains, with its infamous

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<sup>121</sup> No doubt the question remains whether these sitters are really Taliban soldiers. But the primary goal of my research is not to verify the identity, original intent, setting, or circumstances behind these photographs, thus posing a “truth” against Dworzak’s own framing. This chapter is not an exercise in investigative journalism to search and establish more “accurate” information about these photographs and the sitters themselves. Instead, the chapter is more interested in how these men now circulate and exist as “the Taliban” in these images’ global afterlife.

<sup>122</sup> Given that bin Laden was the primary enemy of the war on terror, media representations of bin Laden are also vital, but that discussion falls outside this study which concentrates on the Taliban. For writings on the media representation of bin Laden see, for example, Jasbir K. Puar and Amit Rai’s “Monster, Terrorist, Fag: The War on Terrorism and the Production of Docile Patriots,” *Social Text* 20.3 (2002): 117-48; and Brigitte Nacos and Oscar Torres-Reyna’s *Fuelling Our Fears: Stereotyping, Media Coverage, and Public Opinion of Muslim Americans* (Lanham: Rowan & Littlefield 2007).

“holes” and “caves” envisioned by George W. Bush as the hideouts for terrorists.<sup>123</sup> It is this sweeping landscape that serves as the common backdrop. Other kinds of images, yielded when using the keyword “Taliban” on online image databanks, do not actually contain the Taliban themselves but the impact of their guerrilla-warfare tactics: these photographs show soldiers of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) preparing for attacks against them, or on routine patrols looking for them. There are also photographs of scenes of carnage caused by Taliban suicide attacks. One other hallmark of their global visibility is reflective of the repressive nature of the group. Often criticized for their draconian measures circumscribing public life and their oppression of women, the Taliban are also visualized through this well-established framework. Images abound showing members of the Taliban religious police beating women or performing public executions of women. Available too, are post-Operation Enduring Freedom photographs depicting the return of mundane activities that were once banned under the Taliban regime, such as the re-appearance of rock bands and cock fighting.<sup>124</sup> All these reinforce the infamously extreme ideology of the fundamentalist group.

Seen in relation to these popular visualizations and perceptions of the Taliban enemy, the studio portrayals of the sitters in Dworzak’s collection deviate a great deal from this wartime framework. But this might be exactly the reason behind the collection’s name, for it capitalizes strategically on a visual juxtaposition between an expected warfare imagery and an aesthetics of the everyday. While these studio photographs might have originally been intended for personal keepsake, they now have a global afterlife, thanks to Dworzak, as part of the visual regime of war photographs characterizing the Taliban, even as they simultaneously challenge and counter those exact images. Dworzak’s emphasis on the photography ban essentially positions these images as alternative images, not only in terms of their aesthetics but also in terms of a resistance spirit embodied by the sitters themselves that undermines the Taliban regime itself.

### **Revisualizing The Taliban**

In Dworzak’s collection, a change in aesthetics is prompted by a shift in photography genre from war photography to studio photography, a transition that produces counter images that initiate a revisualization of the Taliban enemy. In contrast to photojournalism’s documentary and realist

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<sup>123</sup> Visualizations of the Taliban no doubt have evolved as the war in Afghanistan progresses through different stages. In this chapter, I am thinking specifically about their depictions at the start of Operation Enduring Freedom in late 2001.

<sup>124</sup> Here I am referring to images I found at Getty Images ([www.gettyimages.com](http://www.gettyimages.com)) by using their search engine with the keyword “Taliban.”

mode, studio photography emphasizes pretense, performance, and idealization. With the help of backdrops, costumes, and props, the studio is a place of posing and make-believe, constructing images that often contain no direct link to reality but, instead, to desires and fantasies.

What is notably different about these Taliban photographs is the absence of that all-important visual reference of the expansive Afghan landscape and the spectacular battlefield. Instead, what one sees are various forms of fake backdrops: one containing a large and encompassing poster, effectively allowing the poster to serve as a totalizing backdrop (see figure 5.4), or a background consisting of smaller and multiple posters (see figure 5.5). In his introduction, Dworzak describes the setting for these photographs as the “back room of the studio” in Kandahar and no other details of the scene are offered. Whether this is a domestic space or an adjoining studio space is unclear. From the photographs, what can be assessed is the possibility of several different studios due to diverse backdrops. The various posters often feature Western-style houses and Swiss chalets. These posters show scenes of idyllic and sylvan perfection, in which a stylish home, and thus family life, co-exists peacefully with nature.



**Figures 5.4 and 5.5.** Left photograph shows encompassing backdrop, and right photograph displays fragmented backdrop with multiple posters. Both are from the *Taliban* collection. Details of original print size are unavailable. © T. Dworzak Collection / Magnum Photos. Reprint permission purchased from Hollandse Hoogte.

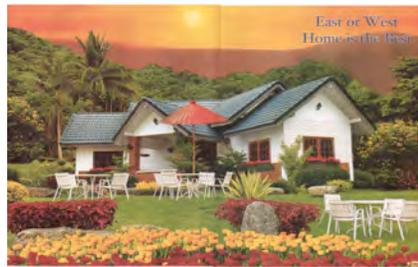
Dworzak describes these backdrops as “the absurd Swiss background of weird Alpine chalets.” Rather than being “absurd” or “weird,” however, the Swiss landscape posters actually have a social history, and the usage of Swiss vistas as backdrops in images also has an aesthetic parallel.<sup>125</sup> The juxtaposition of the Taliban bodies and the Swiss scenes actually encourage a

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<sup>125</sup> I would like to thank Alexandra Schneider of the University of Amsterdam for bringing to my attention the social and aesthetic background of these Swiss landscape scenes.

contrastive way of seeing Taliban bodies that contributes to these images' oppositional and dissonant status.

As part of her examination of the appearance and usage of Swiss landscapes in contemporary Bollywood films, Alexandra Schneider discusses one specific countryside poster that is the exact same one being used as the backdrop in two of the Taliban photographs (see figure 5.6 and backdrop of figure 5.7). This and other such landscape photographic posters can be purchased cheaply and easily from street vendors in India as items to decorate living room walls, according to Schneider.



**Figure 5.6.** An example of a popular composite poster featuring a countryside scene. Posters such as this are used as backdrops in some of the photographs in the *Taliban* collection. See below. Photo courtesy of Alexandra Schneider.



**Figure 5.7.** A photograph from the *Taliban* collection showing two boys posing with what appears to be fake guns in front of the exact same countryside poster in figure 5.6. Details of original print size are unavailable. © T. Dworzak Collection / Magnum Photos. Reprint permission purchased from Hollandse Hoogte.

This specific poster image of a villa is actually a composite image, a collage made by culling different components from different images. More importantly, the image depicts, as she argues, “an imaginary fantasy of a home, rather than a picture of any existing place” (90). Schneider’s study of Bollywood films, which have Indian actors performing their song-and-dance scenes also against backgrounds of Swiss sceneries, can serve as a visual parallel. Although her findings are situated in the Indian cinematic context, there are aesthetic similarities. In her cases, the juxtaposition is between various aspects: Indian and Western, traditional,

national and subaltern, sacred and erotic, all on a single receptor surface. The Swiss sceneries become an imaginary space for the leading characters' inner/interior life in that they project their dreams onto locations. In these Taliban photographs, the sitters, too, are situated in a scene of imagination and fantasy, creating their own illusionary and fictionalized selves.

Consider another related parallel: in her study of the transmutation of private images in urban India, Nancy Adajania explores digitally manipulated images which contain the original portraits of sitters but with inserted pictorial elements like famous tourist landscapes or other suggestive backdrops. This technique produces digitally manipulated composite images that not only underscore the social play of fantasy but also reveal tellingly the desires and aspirations of the sitters.<sup>126</sup> Their incongruous quality is prominent in cases when the original headshots or the full-body shots are positioned disproportionately to the added templates as in, for example, when the heads of a honeymoon couple are positioned towering over the Sydney Opera House. Such incongruity is prominent but also irrelevant. These added pictorial elements reflect and affirm the sitter's own imaginary self. These elements, however jarring, become visual props or referents that may point to one's desired identities and lifestyles (89-98).

It is unclear whether the Taliban sitters were able to choose their own backdrop, but both Schneider's and Adajania's arguments can be applied to reconfigure their wartime bodies and enemy identity. To consider the relationship between the Taliban body and the backdrop as a projection space for their dreams, or as a creation of a longed-for imaginary self-identity, would put their bodies, usually linked to combat, in an alternative mode of yearning. Moving beyond Dworzak's framework of Taliban fighters challenging the representational ban, these images do not just show a desire to be photographed, but also a desire to fashion one's self and identity, whether imaginary or aspired. Note, too, the profusion of artificial flowers that appears in just about every photograph in the series with Swiss backdrops, either as a prop held by the sitters, or simply as decoration jutting into the frame and filling the foreground (see previous figures 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, and 5.8 next page).

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<sup>126</sup> Unfortunately I was unable to secure these images for reprint in the dissertation.



**Figure 5.8.** Fake flowers are prominently featured in this image from the *Taliban* collection. Details of original print size are unavailable. © T. Dworzak Collection / Magnum Photos. Reprint permission purchased from Hollandse Hoogte.

While flowers are generally associated with women and used as conventional studio props reserved for them in the West, this male/floral combination is not an anomaly in Middle Eastern and Central Asian cultures, especially when it comes to popular visual traditions of photography studios. The floral imagery contributes to the studio's space as a dreamworld and site of fantasy, rather than possessing any gender-specific connotations.<sup>127</sup>

If within the standard framing of the Taliban one sees those bodies at war and on the battlefield, in these Taliban photographs one sees contrary bodies in scenes of desires and desiring which require a different mode of perception from those that fix them as the terrorist enemy. Rather than being destined for the battlefield, these Taliban bodies, unencumbered by that visual cue, have wandered away from their prescribed place. That dramatic and treacherous locale of the battlefield is key, not only because it relieves the anxieties of identifying the elusive terrorist by having a geographically fixable enemy, but it is also needed to achieve a concordance between space, identity, body, and time: (violent) Taliban bodies are properly outfitted with weapons, passing their time in a state of combat and war on the battlefield. They are most often seen and perceived through these visual coordinates of war, violence, and extremism, and they are rendered visible and perceivable when they are thus visualized. These are the primary conditions of their appearance and legibility. But in Dworzak's collection, one sees that these Taliban bodies are no longer fixed geographically. Instead, they are relocated to the intimate

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<sup>127</sup> Despite tremendous efforts, it was difficult to find extensive English-language academic works identifying contemporary photography studio practices in Afghanistan. This means I had to resort to more informal research methodology through interviews with people familiar with the region, in particular the Iranian artist Khosrow Hassanzadeh, whose 2004 project entitled *Terrorist* was based on the visual traditions of old photography studios in remote villages of the Middle East. Besides stressing the gender neutrality of floral motifs, he also points to the male/flower combination in popular propaganda photographs of martyrs, for example in Iran and Lebanon, as well as in Eastern memorial images. See his series *Terrorist* and *Ready to Order* (2007-2008) on his website at <http://khosrowhassanzadeh.com/index.php>, accessed April 12, 2013.

interior of a photography studio, a setting where they further transcend spatial and temporal specificities to imaginary locations and create fictitious selves that also destabilize their identity as warring militants and enemies.

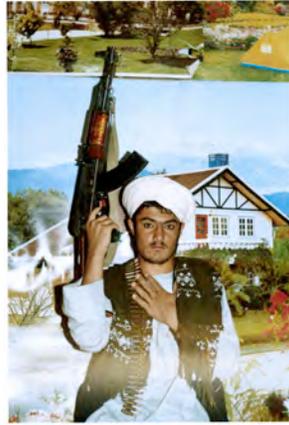
This unraveling of wartime designations continues with other features of these images. The studio relocation has displaced those bodies away from the discourse of war, violence, and extremism and also introduced a different time, one that diverges from nation time and combative time, to private and everyday time, rest time, and play time. They no longer need to attend to the business of war but to the business of posing, performing, and creating memories. These new tasks also inject new ambiguities into their identity, especially on the topic of masculinity, which also undermines the process of visualizing the Taliban.

These acts of posing and performance find their clearest expression through the Taliban sitters' interactions with firearms. Whether weapons serve as a symbol of heroism, power or even violence, the act of posing with and brandishing guns is a common practice in a photographic studio; it is often seen as a display of masculine power to reinforce ideals of manhood. This interlocking relationship between posing, guns, and masculinity as a performative act in the studio becomes a specific and literal enactment of Butler's concept of gender performativity. Butler views gender identity not as a stable and essential state of being, but rather, a forged and normalized practice through repeated performances (Loxely 112-119). As Butler famously argues in *Gender Trouble*:

Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. (140, italics in original)

Gender acts, according to Butler, are compulsively repeated because they never quite achieve the ideal that is demanded (Loxley 126). More specific to this Taliban context, the gender identity is performed right before the camera. What is being performed are the postures and stylizations of bodies according to a specific gun-wielding Taliban masculinity, which is the stock image in the common visualizations of the Taliban in Western media. But in Dworzak's collection, that Taliban body's relationship to firearm is not always so confident and assured.

This performed masculinity can be best seen in figure 5.9. Much like the conventional photographs of Taliban insurgents circulated globally in newspapers and magazines, this photograph showcases a fighter raising his rifle skyward, the position for firing off celebratory



**Figure 5.9.** An image from the *Taliban* collection with a soldier expressing a more aggressive and militarist form of masculinity. Details of original print size are unavailable. © T. Dworzak Collection / Magnum Photos. Reprint permission purchased from Hollandse Hoogte.

shots, and not in the safer direction of downrange. His finger is on the trigger, ready to shoot; his body is accessorized with a bullet chain and he makes the formulaic hand gesture of respect and devotion. This image captures a more determined attempt to embody a specific vision of an aggressive and militarist masculinity. Other images, however, show a less resolute desire to emulate that warrior and masculine demeanor. In those images, while the men are bolstered with weapons of warfare, they do not look exactly battle-ready. Figures 5.10 and 5.11 show these men carrying their firearms more gently or placing their weapons to the side of their bodies. They grip their weapons in a more nonchalant and tentative manner rather than in an assertive and secure way. Some even hold their rifles while in a sitting position, calling attention to the studio setting and highlighting their passivity, given that the more real and authentic act of firing arms would require the prepared postures of the bladed-off stance or the athletic rifle stance. While firearms might signify power and virility, among other qualities, these few Taliban bodies holding them are not always fully immersed in their role. Their gentle handling of these rifles reveals a palpable sense of hesitation, which leads to an apprehensive performance before the camera. It is a self-reflexive moment, where the act of performing itself becomes prominent because the sitters do not confidently display the male bravado and physical aggressiveness that are usually inspired by these weapons. They are seen merely enacting the pose.



**Figures 5.10 and 5.11.** Photographs of Taliban followers posing with their firearms. In these frames from the *Taliban* collection, the sitters' overall gun-toting postures are more passive. Details of original print size are unavailable. © T. Dworzak Collection / Magnum Photos. Reprint permission purchased from Hollandse Hoogte.

Alternatively perhaps this association with guns can be seen through the function of the studio as a site of play, and therefore, as a potential source of pleasure. These firearms would no longer function as actual weapons for battle but studio props instead (see previous figures 5.7 and 5.8). Most of the photographs, however, do not offer evidence of such amusement. This “playing” occurs in an out-of-kilter manner. The majority of the sitters' faces are sombrous, and at times haggard, with only one or two faces displaying ease and a more natural gaze. In one photograph, a man is holding a gun that is clearly too small for his hand (see previous figure 5.8); in another, a man points the gun randomly at the nose of a fellow companion. Overall, these awkward and uneasy corporeal interactions with firearms in the *Taliban* images show a relationship to guns that is more irreverent and less decided.

Relating this to wartime photographic conceptualizations of the Taliban in which they are often portrayed as violent insurgents outfitted with weapons, here, that expected relationship between their bodies and weapons is denaturalized, feigned, and disrupted. We see in these Taliban photographs simultaneously the fortification of that dominant militant warrior posture, but also expressions of masculinity that badly mimic, contradict, or resist this stereotype. These sitters' presence and performance in the studio calls into question the Taliban's widely-circulated representation as the “Taliban.” The posing and performing of their Taliban identity in a studio becomes an analogy of their appearances before the cameras of the Western news media, which one could argue consist of similar imagining, posturing, and performing.

What these images reveal are also multiple expressions of masculinity, a notion that is hinted at by Dworzak, but one whose instrumentalization remains unclear. In his introduction to

the book, Dworzak also describes the masculinity of men from Kandahar, the city that was the former stronghold of the Taliban and the seat of power for the Pashtuns:<sup>128</sup> these men wear too-small colored sandals to show bulging flesh, they accent their eyes with kohl, and they stick flowers in their guns. Following the rhetoric of many typical post-9/11 depictions of the Taliban's woman-less world, Dworzak also stresses Afghan males' limited contacts with females, including a hampered visibility since women were required to wear the burka. Such gender segregation prompts same-sex affections and desires, as Dworzak seems to suggest, given that he also divulged the fact that they groped him unabashedly. As Dworzak claims in his vignette:

If I had had my balls grabbed by the soldiers (considered a neat chat-up line) in the North [of Afghanistan] maybe once a week, in Kandahar it would happen daily. Soldiers there would tickle the palms of my hands; there were furtive caresses in crowds. (parenthesis in original; *Taliban* introduction, no page number available)

These themes of masculinity and the homosocial/sexual behavior of the Kandaharis are given another inflection in the second text in Dworzak's book; this one is by Jon Lee Anderson, a staff writer for *The New Yorker*, who discloses the tradition of pederasty among Kandahari men. Anderson goes on to say, however, that one of the first changes the Taliban initiated after they took power was to punish mujahidin commanders accused of rape and pederasty. He also underlines the Taliban's persecution of homosexuals.

That these issues of masculinity, gender separation, pederasty, and homosexuality are ambiguously and haphazardly highlighted in these essays is perhaps prompted by the homosociality in most of the photographs and two specifically affectionate images in the collection that show male couples clasping hands. These, Dworzak probably thought, required some local contextualization (see figures next page).<sup>129</sup> Dworzak's fragmented narrative,

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<sup>128</sup> The Taliban movement is primarily made up of Pashtuns, Afghanistan's largest ethnic group.

<sup>129</sup> This theme of pederasty is extended with more local background in a short video featuring these Taliban photographs and interviews with Dworzak himself and Ahmed Rashid, a Pakistani journalist. According to Rashid, there is a strong homosexual tradition in the region in which "an elder man would kind of adopt a young man and become lover, become student, and teach him whatever skills he may have." When Mohammed Omar came to power in the mid-1990s, he attacked and killed a local warlord for keeping young boys as concubines, says Rashid. Although Omar banned homosexuality, these long-standing traditions in southern Afghanistan continued, albeit surreptitiously. Rashid is also the author of the well-known book *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil, and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*. The video featuring him and Dworzak can be viewed on YouTube via the following link: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gHS2LUssAU&feature=results\\_main&playnext=1&list=PLB6BE265DD04599E7XXXXXX](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gHS2LUssAU&feature=results_main&playnext=1&list=PLB6BE265DD04599E7XXXXXX), accessed April 5, 2013.



**Figures 5.12 and 5.13.** Hand-colored photographs from the *Taliban* collection with men clasping hands. Details of original print size are unavailable. © T. Dworzak Collection / Magnum Photos. Reprint permission purchased from Hollandse Hoogte.

however, does not elucidate much. If anything, these references to the sitters' masculinity and sexuality are especially curious since they parallel a post-9/11 popular culture landscape replete with hostile representations that construct the terrorist-enemy through the prisms of "failed" and deviant masculinity and sexuality, and homophobia. From stand-up comedians who often take on the persona of terrorists and suicide bombers, and reenact these perpetrators' presumed sexual anxieties and frustrations, to post-9/11 posters of bin Laden being sodomized by the Empire State Building (with the caption reading "The Empire Strikes Back ... So you like skyscrapers, huh, bitch?") (qtd. in Puar, *Terrorist* 37), the typical process of enemification has pivoted on a hostile rhetoric of the enemy's sexuality as perverse and deviant or as failed and repressed. Sexual deviancy has been linked to the process of "discerning, othering, and quarantining" terrorist bodies (Puar, *Terrorist* 38). As Patricia Owens has also reminded us, various post-9/11 constructions of Muslim sexuality have older Orientalist roots. She explains:

Muslims were represented as paedophiles, pederasts and sodomites and, later, also as somehow sexually repressed. Contemporary notions of repressed 'Muslim' sexuality are the reverse image of this older Orientalist construction. They take their place in a long list of European failures to account for the ambiguities of sexual practice and identity, of ethnocentric theories of sexual behaviour and sexual orientation. (1049)<sup>130</sup>

<sup>130</sup> Orientalist assumptions were put into practice most disturbingly at Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo Bay, where the assumed sexual attitudes of Muslim men – in view of Islam's taboo regarding homosexuality and its emphasis on modesty and sexual privacy which allegedly make Muslim males sexually sensitive and repressed – became the framework through which torture took shape in sexual humiliations, acts that were presumably to be especially humiliating and devastating for these men. Owens has offered a detailed discussion of how long-held Orientalist notions regarding the sexual vulnerability of Muslim males became key in interrogation and torture techniques in recent US wars. See her article "Torture, Sex and Military Orientalism," *Third World Quarterly* 31:7 (2010): 1041-

In Dworzak's collection, while his narrative framing shows the legacies of Orientalist thinking, the images themselves also exhibit such leanings. In a few images, the addition of hand-tinted colorization has warmed up the sitters' facial complexion with an apricot and coral tint. (An in-depth discussion of hand-tinted coloration will be presented in the last section of the chapter). Their noses are noticeably contoured and made more prominent. Lips are plumped up with a deeper red-orange hue. Along with their distinct kohl-lined eyes, these men are feminized in a way that contributes to a sexualization of the image.

Within local Afghan traditions, the ultimate aim of colorization may simply be the beautification of the sitter, with the coloring aesthetics universalized irrespective of the sitter's gender.<sup>131</sup> But due to their new Western circulation, these images find themselves at the confluence of Orientalist imagination and viewing, and local aesthetics. A history of Orientalist homoerotic aesthetics weighs on these images, as their subject matter and style, in particular the close-up and more intimate photographs of male couples, resonate strikingly with traditional Orientalist imaginings of homoerotic desires and foreign otherness. Commenting on these Taliban images, Joseph A. Boone places them in a longer cultural and visual trajectory and compares them to the Orientalist homoerotic photographs from the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that catered to Europeans' sexual fantasies of exoticism (576-577). As Boone argues, while the images share uncanny similarities (poses, hand-tinted coloration and props, among others) there is also a major difference in that these Taliban recruits were not consciously posing for homophilic viewers in search of Orientalist thrills (597).

Orientalist staging and local practice, however, were enacted once more when Dworzak added a photograph of himself at the end of the book staged in the style of these Taliban colorized portraits. Not only are his black hair and beard intensified, his facial expression is just as solemn as the Taliban sitters. His cheeks and lips have been given a slight wash of color. The backdrop has a similar vibrant blue hue, accented with a yellow halo-like circle of light. It is anyone's guess whether this mimicked image is a form of Orientalist fantasy, an act of admiration or mockery for painted photography aesthetics, a commentary on the fictional

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1056.

<sup>131</sup> This last point is suggested by Hassanzadeh after viewing these Taliban photographs; he argues that the aim of hand-coloration for studio photographs seeks to beautify the sitter, and the techniques themselves may not be gender specific, resulting, indeed, in faces that seem more feminine, but only in the sense that the faces are made-up.

construct of Taliban representations in general or an observation on the verity of the medium of photography.<sup>132</sup>

Even though Dworzak's narrative framework follows Orientalist and popular culture imaginations, it is less certain how those assumptions are mobilized. By mentioning the persecution of homosexuals and by placing the affectionate photograph between the two men right at the front of the book, Dworzak seems to invite viewers to read these images as acts of opposition against repressive Taliban authorities. Of course two men holding hands might suggest same-sex affections and desires, but not necessarily a homosexual identity in the ways of Western identity politics. This same-sex relationship nevertheless seems to be viewed as a laudatory act of defiance rather than part of the common hostile discourse and imagination to vilify the enemy. Western progressive sexual attitudes seem to be pitted against or put to service denouncing the Taliban's repressiveness and disallowance.

I would argue, however, that despite Dworzak's own ambivalent narrative framing, these studio photographs reveal multiple visual expressions of Afghan masculinity and homo-social/sexual attitudes that disrupt both mainstream media's portrayals of Taliban militants and popular culture's hostile and homophobic depictions of the post-9/11 enemy. They serve as counter images not because they posit a "gay" Taliban follower against a militant one or because they express a dissident, progressive, pro-homosexuality attitude and liberation against homophobia and intolerance, but because the images account for and affirm instead the diversity of homo-social/sexual relations in different cultures. Rather than seeing their homosociability as a result of absent female encounters, repressed or failed heterosexual growth, it is seen through the multiplicity of masculinities and social and sexual practices within Muslim men.

In sum, whatever sense of familiarity one brings to view these *Taliban* photographs based on dominant images, may actually result in non-recognition as the images subvert previous visual encounters with the Taliban. In the photography studio, their militant and enemy status becomes so undermined that a role reversal to victims can even be imagined. Although as violent militants they spark alarm and calls for their extermination through the global war on terror, these photographs seem to evoke very different sentiments. If one were to see these photographs along with the globally circulated images of Western forces in Afghanistan, the contrast is glaring. Compared to the bulging ISAF soldiers who are almost twice their real size thanks to

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<sup>132</sup> Dworzak's mimicked image also raises the possibility that the collection is a hoax, although this is very unlikely since these images are being advertised and sold by the internationally well-established Magnum Photos.

their bulletproof vests, these Taliban fighters become smaller in their physical frame. These Taliban do not don any protective helmets, neither do they carry any high-tech military gadgets. Looking at these photographs through the ten-year chasm of time and with the retrospective knowledge of Operation Enduring Freedom, it is a sense of corporal vulnerability and precarity that actually marks these Taliban insurgents rather than masculine power. It is their injurability at the receiving end of asymmetrical US military violence that is pronounced.

In the *Taliban* introduction Dworzak explains that most of these photographs, according to the Afghan photographers, were taken in early November 2001. These fighters, however, did not return to pick them up since they were forced to flee ahead of the post-9/11 retaliatory military campaign. The studios were willing to part with these photographs, since as one photographer was quoted saying to Dworzak: “Most of them are dead anyway,” (*Taliban* introduction, no page number available). If that is indeed the case, we are looking at images of the deceased. Are they among those invisible Afghan people, relegated to the sidelines of 9/11 history, who died as part of Operation Enduring Freedom by serving as “collateral damage” in the global war on terror? And as such, are they also the “ungrievable lives” that Butler has impelled us to mourn?<sup>133</sup> This possibility of a drastically altered emotional engagement with these pictures will be explored in the next section in which the oppositional potential of the collection will be located in the viewing process.

### **An Ethical Visual Intervention?**

That a photographic collection of one’s enemy would raise a concern for these adversaries’ physical vulnerability and grievability is no doubt influenced by Butler’s post-9/11 writings on violence and mourning, some of which were introduced in this dissertation’s introduction. In her consideration of a non-violent ethics (*Precarious* xvii), Butler examines the Levinasian model that is based on an acknowledgment of the precariousness of life, beginning with the precarious life of the Other. Levinas’s notion of the “face” – the site of the Other’s precarity – is also a scene that makes moral demands on us and requires an ethical response.<sup>134</sup> Already this basic premise of mourning and grieving for one’s enemy seems an oppositional intervention into general proclamations of extermination and eradication of the Taliban. Butler, though, has related this grievability of the Other to the broader post-9/11 wartime visual culture and the role

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<sup>133</sup> See chapter two of Butler’s *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004).

<sup>134</sup> For Butler’s consideration of Levinas’s thoughts, see chapter five of *Precarious Life*.

of photography itself. This section first outlines her ideas and then suggests how her notions might offer a different way of seeing these Taliban photographs that intervenes into the existing sensible field through a compassionate engagement, rather than an antagonistic one, with the enemy.

As I have already summarized in my introduction, Butler's post-9/11 concerns evolve around the unequal distribution of recognition of the human and grievability, in particular for victims of the war on terror. In times of war, such practices of acknowledgement and respect for the precarity of life become infinitely more difficult. In *Frames of War* Butler identifies the obstacles, paying special attention to the act of framing – the structuring of the field of perceptible reality – and also to the frame of the photograph. In this way, her approach to photography is very much situated against a broader context of war, addressing issues such as the effacement of war victims and the dead in the American media, and the photographic representation of the precarious state of those at the mercy of American military violence. For Butler, framing is an “unmarked” act of delimitating the field itself, with certain contents and perspectives shown, while simultaneously excluding something else that is never shown and rendered impermissible to be shown (*Frames* 73). Butler is ever alert to those frames that establish the field of perception as dictated by the US military and are accepted and confirmed by the news media. As an illustration, Butler analyzes the practice of “embedded reporting” in post-9/11 American wars that complies with the military's mandating of a specific visual perspective, which in turn, she claims, structures the public's apprehension of the war (*Frames* 66).

But what preoccupies Butler is not merely that something is being seen and something remains unseen, but equally importantly, how such framing represents war-related suffering, and how that presentation would lead or fail to lead to certain kinds of affect and evoke certain forms of ethical response towards what one sees. She argues: “... whether and how we respond to the suffering of others, how we formulate moral criticisms, how we articulate political analyses, depends upon a certain field of perceptible reality having already been established” (*Frames* 64). In this way, Butler is concerned with the frame itself but also with what that frame determines: who will and will not be accorded the status of the human and be grieved or ungrieved, prompting a response of sympathy and compassion or disavowal and a non-ethical response. For Butler, the post-9/11 war-induced visual regime is one that is structured by mechanisms of restrictions, including elisions and state-directed frames, which have worked to undermine both “a sensate understanding of the war, and the conditions for a sensate opposition to war” (*Frames*

100).

The photographic frame becomes pertinent here as part of the mechanism of visual restrictions through images that foreclose responsiveness, or as an oppositional practice by providing alternative frames. This oppositional and interventionist role would be achieved through its function of documentary and evidentiary imaging, which in times of war has often been bolstered with an ethical imperative to capture the precarity, suffering, and destruction of victims, which might facilitate compassion and even initiate anti-war actions. It is called upon to play a critical role through its (much disputed) potential of awakening social conscience.<sup>135</sup>

One of the most prominent commentators on such a responsibility for photography is Susan Sontag, and it is via an engagement with Sontag's thoughts that Butler considers such a capacity for photography in times of war – its ability to relay affect, incite and enrage, and mobilize people against war. But while that is the underlying question that Butler circles around in the chapter “Torture and the Ethics of Photography: Thinking with Sontag” in *Frames of War*, it is also one that she did not answer conclusively. This intellectual engagement with Sontag, however, does end on one aspect of photography that seems to hold promise in fulfilling Butler's repeated call for the acknowledgement, recognition, and grievability of others: photography's haunting quality.<sup>136</sup> Reiterating Sontag's remark: “Let the atrocious images haunt us” (*Frames* 96),<sup>137</sup> Butler contends: “We see the photograph and cannot let go of the image that is transitively relayed to us. It brings us close to an understanding of the fragility and mortality of human life, the stakes of death in the scene of politics” (*Frames* 96).

Photography's haunting quality, as related to death and Butler's conception of grievability as the precondition of life, has much to do with the medium's unique relationship to temporality. In photography, the original moment captured by the image is in the past, in relation to the viewing of that image in the next or future moment. This relationship with both the past and future, this future of the past, is best captured by the future perfect tense in which something will already be ended or completed by a certain point in the future, and is expressed by phrases

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<sup>135</sup> For a closer look into this photojournalism tradition which adopts the ethical imperative to bear witness and elicit compassion in viewers, see Liam Kennedy's “Framing Compassion,” *History of Photography* 36:3 (2012): 306-314, and Sharon Sliwinski's “A Painful Labour: Responsibility and Photography,” *Visual Studies* 19:2 (2004): 150-162.

<sup>136</sup> Although Sontag's thoughts are related to some of the issues raised here, this chapter is nevertheless focused on an engagement between Butler and Rancière and it does not aim to insert Sontag into this already expansive discussion on photography's capabilities. For Sontag's thoughts, see *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), and Sliwinski's “A Painful Labour: Responsibility and Photography” in previous footnote.

<sup>137</sup> The quote originally came from Sontag's *Regarding the Pain of Others*, page 65.

such as “will have done” and “will have finished.” Thus from the vantage point of a time in the future, the past will have occurred.

According to Butler, enabled by this future perfect, the photograph instates grievability, given the medium’s evidentiary power that documents a life having been lived or one that will have been lived (*Frames* 97). Turning to Roland Barthes’ *Camera Lucida*, Butler reiterates his reflections on the 1865 photograph of Lewis Payne, which was taken ahead of that young man’s execution. Barthes had identified the two temporal modes of the image: “this will be” and “this has been.” As he famously proclaimed: “I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake” (96). Both temporal modes point to an “absolute past,” which leads Butler to ask whether this quality of the image would lead to a more explicit form of grieving. “To confirm that a life was, even within the life itself, is to underscore that a life is a grievable life” (*Frames* 97).

This acknowledgement of life is what the frames of war often fail to bestow when they exclude non-American losses, for example Afghan and Iraqi deaths, from view, thus rendering these victims faceless, unthinkable, de-realized, ungrievable, as well as their lives unlived. It is a form of radical effacement establishing that there never was a life and therefore there never was a death, says Butler (*Prekarious* 146). Marking a loss, in contrast, reflects the existence of a life, in that “someone has lived” and “someone will have lived,” pointing to a time and a loss to come. Butler argues:

... the photograph acts on us in part through outliving the life it documents; it establishes in advance the time in which that loss will be acknowledged as a loss. So the photograph is linked through its ‘tense’ to the grievability of a life, anticipating and performing that grievability. In this way, we can be haunted in advance by the suffering or death of others or we can be haunted afterwards, when the check against grief becomes undone. (*Frames* 98)

Thinking with Butler, one could argue that images which haunt with the depiction of others’ death and suffering, viewed against a post-9/11 visual culture that is keen to vilify and de-humanize terrorist-enemies and overlook Afghan and Iraqi victims, could be seen as an assertive act of resistance that intervenes by establishing lives lived and destroyed, and by facilitating grievability. This would not just be an intervention into the process of visualizing the enemy and the accompanying hostile discourse, but also an intervention into one’s sensate and emotional entanglement with the enemy.

Butler's consideration of the ethics of photography is motivated by the graphic images of torture at Abu Ghraib in particular, and war photography in general. Beyond that, she did not specify what other forms of photography might be subjected to an ethical obligation. Clearly, Dworzak's *Taliban* collection contains photography studio images that convey neither torture nor suffering. And yet, if the Afghan photographer's claim of the sitters' flight and the subsequent death of some is to be trusted, then traces of death, too, hover in these scenes.<sup>138</sup> Even away from the battlefield, in these ordinary moments of fantasy and posing, violence and death stalk the images.

There are also aesthetic traces that presage the calamity to come. Besides the 33 photographs with Swiss-like backdrops, 16 photographs of head-and-shoulder shots are also featured in *Taliban*. What distinguishes them is their post-processing hand-painted colorization. While the series with the Swiss backgrounds were taken with and reprinted from color negatives, these head-and-shoulder portraits were of a large and more expensive format in black and white, taken, developed, retouched and colorized in the studios in Kandahar. Dworzak did not comment any further on the process of this hand-tinted coloration, except to explain that the Taliban, desiring more than passport photographs, would ask to pose for "a more flattering portrait" which would then be retouched and decorated "as best the photographer could manage" (*Taliban* introduction, no page number available). It is unclear whether this need for hand coloration was due to an inadequate color film supply and/or the lack of technical facilities in these studios.

The artificial colors will be discussed in depth in the next section in relation to Rancière's notion of aesthetic dissensus. For now it is vital to note that these colors, applied with too heavy a hand in this case, have imparted the sitters with such an unnatural flesh tone that they appear almost inhuman; the natural flush and texture of the skin have disappeared under the veil of paint. Overpainted images often produce a sharper "hyper-reality" effect due to the heightening of facial features (Pinney 140), and these heavily made-up Taliban faces bear an artificiality that conceals their original countenance (see figure 5.1). This heavy overlay of unnatural complexion coloring has created images that might be best described as "other-worldly." Unlike the bodies from the Swiss-landscape photographs whose slightly dirty clothes and dust-covered hands suggest the daily toil of surviving in an impoverished country, these overpainted Taliban images

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<sup>138</sup> It is difficult to confirm the deaths of these Taliban fighters and the combat circumstances under which they might have perished, whether it was at the hands of the Northern Alliance or through aerial bombings by US-led forces. Although they might or might not have been directly killed by US forces, they might still be casualties of a US-initiated military campaign.

exhibit no such worldly rootedness. They actually evoke the spirit and aesthetic of memorial images. In his discussion of Indian photographic practices, Christopher Pinney examines memorial images that are created when existing black and white images of the deceased are enlarged and hand-painted, just like these Taliban photographs, by the photographer-memorial portraitist (138).<sup>139</sup> This need for photograph treatment is due to a lack of color-processing or the absence of sufficiently large or isolated images of the deceased which relatives desire for keepsake. In the specific Indian context that Pinney discusses, the photographic portraiture of the dead plays a significant role after the subject's death, in particular in rituals of remembrance and worship by surviving family members (138-149).

For the Taliban, the need for memorialization can also be speculated within a broader context of armed conflicts and martyrdom. For example, the desire for memorialization is seen in Palestinian suicide bombers who would have their pictures taken or their farewell speeches videotaped before facing martyrdom. These photographs and videos are also used for future recruitment purposes. Whether this was the original intent behind these Taliban portraits is difficult to determine, but the photographs' status as martyr portraits remains a possibility, which is explored more closely in the following section. Regardless of why and how that memorial aesthetic was inspired, initiated or instrumentalized, the sequence of memorialization is subverted by the Afghan painter-photographer, in contrast to the Indian context. If the timeline provided by Dworzak is accurate, the photographer/painter/memorial portraitist had exercised the craft of painterly memorialization prehumously rather than posthumously, thus prematurely ushering the future into his present through an image from his recent past. The sitters were possibly immortalized aesthetically while still alive due to foreknowledge, prophecy or ill-will, one cannot be sure. In any case, the Afghan photographer had aesthetically announced a death to come, a time when "this will have been done," further solidifying that existing and original link between photography and death, which, for Sontag, "haunts all photographs of people" (*Photography* 64). His colorization affirmed photography's temporality of an anterior future and established in advance a time when the loss of this sitter will be acknowledged and recognized as a loss. And if such a loss can be discerned here, it also attests to a life lived and rescues it from

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<sup>139</sup> Indian photography practices may not be exactly the same as those in Afghanistan, but despite great efforts, as I mentioned earlier, it was difficult to identify contemporary photography studio practices in Afghanistan. While accounts exist of how and why foreigners often point the camera on the Afghans after 9/11, there was a lack of academic information on how Afghans themselves engage socially with photography.

erasure. The sitter's grievability is therefore substantiated and it, in turn, invites the viewer to the task of grieving.

If Butler is correct in her assessment of a post-9/11 wartime visual regime that has prevented a sensate understanding of the war, then these Taliban photographs, as they have now been inserted into the visual field, could be seen as an assertive and direct act of resistance. They intervene by facilitating a more sensate and compassionate encounter, alerting viewers not only to the precarity of life but also solidifying that life and instating grievability. Viewing these photographs in this elegiac mode would rework one's perception of the Taliban, requiring one to see them not as enemies, terrorists or suicide bombers, but as those whose deaths must be mourned. By reconfiguring the restrictive visual frames of enemification and vilification with compassion, these death-bearing images would also displace the mourning for 9/11 victims, which was instrumentalized for patriotic sentiments and retaliatory military campaigns, to the enemy instead. Underpinned by Butler's haunting, these Taliban photographs provide an occasion to engage in this way with the enemy other by creating an ethical relation between the image and the viewing. There is now an ethical demand placed on the viewer.

Grief, though, is a demanding process that would require certain relationality – familial, close, and intimate, to suggest but a few – to the deceased. There are no names to identify these fighters and no captions to detail that moment in the studio or to intimate other aspects of their lives. Placing these caption-less Taliban photographs in the photographic chronicle of 9/11, one sees the discrepancy between the muteness of these Taliban lives and those of 9/11 victims at the World Trade Center, whose lives were eulogized by the capable writers of *The New York Times*' "Portraits of Grief." This narrative scarcity puts tremendous pressure on visibility, which must shoulder quite onerously the responsibilities of ethical persuasion. And even if abundant narratives are available to bridge the (emotional, political, cultural) chasm, the ultimate question still remains whether spectators would accept that heavy responsibility. Is Butler's haunting, then, imploring too much and too quickly? A haunting would require a straight and determinate link between the obliging image and the viewing; it would equate that desired efficacy of photography to elicit emotions with the emotional image itself. In fact, it is a winding road to travel from the grievable Taliban in the frame to the affective impact on the viewer, to the viewer's reception and recognition of that affect, to the viewer's (ethical or not) response to that demand – which would be grief in Butler's thinking – and finally, to political mobilization, should such initiation be possible and needed in the scenario.

Butler's thinking of an ethical engagement with the photograph has nevertheless led us to that problematic relationship between the image, or any artwork for that matter, and the viewing process by the viewer. While that relationship seems unpredictable and unstable, and thus might be considered as an obstacle for aesthetic resistance, this indeterminacy may still hold possibilities for critical interventions. The next and final section examines how Rancière describes that image-viewing relationship through an aesthetic rupture and how that fissure might yield implications for photography's interventionist role and for the *Taliban* collection.

### **A Dissensual Visuality**

While Butler endeavors to ascertain the moral work of photography in wartime, Rancière's discussion of photography arises partly from his broader critique of critical art. Despite their different starting points, approaches, and conclusions, they often converge on the same concerns regarding the relationship between the camera, the photographic image, the viewing of that image, and the possibilities of subsequent political mobilization, or its efficacy. While often turning to art installations, Rancière has also engaged with photographic images, including Martha Rosler's series "House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home" (1962-1972) which contains photomontages that pasted scenes from the Vietnam War onto peaceful American domestic interiors adorned with consumer goods. Using these images as illustrations, Rancière traces the reasoning and logic buttressing the common acceptance of artistic interventions into political events that aim to resist power and domination wherever they arise.<sup>140</sup> This critical art schema consists of several processes: first, in Rosler's case, the collage of heterogeneous visual elements exposes the brutal reality of war concealed by the appearance of a happy and comfortable American existence. The collage highlights the connection between these two worlds – war and capitalism. Second, being exposed to this reality and knowledge, viewers of the image are assumed to be enlightened and awakened to their own complicity in the matter; and third, they would mobilize in opposition to participate in whatever political struggle is in question. Critical art's strategy thus travels from the production and the sensory experience of "strangeness" (Vietnam in an American living room) to a critical awareness of the reason for this strangeness and to a mobilization of viewers due to that awareness (*DS* 142-143).

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<sup>140</sup> Rancière has commented on Rosler's series on several occasions, see chapters two and four of *TES*, chapter ten of *DS*, and the chapter entitled "Problems and Transformations of Critical Art" in *AD*.

Rancière, however, rejects this critical art strategy that traces a straight line from an intolerable image to an awareness of the reality the image aims to produce, and to the wish to act and change. This strategy assumes a smooth and predictable link from artistic representation to intellectual awareness through to political mobilization. The underlying rationale here, he argues, is that “art compels us to revolt when it shows us revolting things ...” (*DS* 135). But this assumption wrongly presumes the ignorance and passivity of the audience and the knowledge of a supposedly enlightened artist, and pits them against each other in a binary opposition. Furthermore, as Rancière stresses, even if artworks manifest overt political views, they would not necessarily lead to a different understanding or perception of the world, much less to mobilization. “There is no straight path from the viewing of a spectacle to an understanding of the state of the world, and none from intellectual awareness to political action,” he claims (*DS* 143).

According to Rancière, what this critical art paradigm suggests is a consensus between cause and effect, intention and consequences, as I also examined in chapter three when discussing Paris’s hip hop music. But not all is lost for critical art; Rancière is not dismissing the political capacity of images wholly. Against the critical paradigm that threads perception, affect, comprehension, and action, Rancière offers his own intervention through the idea of an aesthetic rupture and dissensus, which I introduced in chapter one. The concept of dissensus was also explored in chapter two when discussing the protagonist Changez from *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. There, dissensus was seen as a political process that challenged the sensible by the appearance of the non-part or the inaudible. Dissensus in this chapter is seen as a process initiated through artistic practices. In Rancière’s original conception of dissensus, as related to the police distribution of the sensible, the concept is invoked to challenge the sheer contingency of the police order and to claim the equality of any speaking being with any other speaking being. It is the assumption and the enactment of that equality which are vital (*D* 30). In the case of the Taliban and in regard to aesthetics and visual representations, dissensus has nothing to do with equality; the issue does not concern equal access to the media or to self-representation, as in more general struggles relating to politics of representation. Dissensus here is related to an aesthetic rupture understood within Rancière’s conceptualization of three artistic regimes: the ethical, the representative, and the aesthetic, to which the rupture belongs. Understanding these regimes allows one to assess the relations of artistic practices to society and, therefore, their nature, function, and efficacy, or what they are capable of doing and achieving.

As I have also outlined in chapter one, this loss of destination and functions in the aesthetic regime creates a paradox where artworks have their own specificity in terms of having their own separate sphere of sensory experience, but not a specific place in society. These two possibilities serve as the two “politics” of aesthetics for Rancière. The politics of art points to the two sides of that paradox: on the one hand, “the resistant form,” indicating art that desires its autonomy and evades signification. In its refusal to become part of the normal, ordinary forms of sensory experience, it actually yields its political potential. It is being “apolitically political” (*AD* 42). On the other hand, there is the politics of “art-becoming-life,” which concerns art that refuses to remain in that autonomy and chooses to engage with and intervene in everyday life to bring change, but this intervention also leads to its own self-elimination, as there is no longer a separation between it and other spheres. Critical art would consist of a constant negotiation of these two logics. He argues:

Critical art has to negotiate between the tension which pushes art towards ‘life’ as well as that which, conversely, sets aesthetic sensoriality apart from the other forms of sensory experience. It has to borrow the connections that foster political intelligibility from the zones of indistinction between art and the other spheres. And from the solitude of the work [i.e. art’s autonomy] it has to borrow the sense of a sensible heterogeneity which feeds political energies of refusal. It is this negotiation between the forms of art and those of non-art which makes it possible to form combinations of elements capable of speaking twice over: on the basis of their legibility and on the basis of their illegibility. (*AD* 46)

As Rancière has pointed out, photography is paradigmatically ambivalent, oscillating between art and non-art and shifting between the image “as artistic operation and the image as production of a representation” (*TES* 107-109). This dialectic between autonomous art and art-as-life speaks directly to ongoing developments in the field of photography. T.J. Demos, for example, has discussed this tension between photography’s relation to life and its autonomy (124). The first role puts photography in a documentary mode that insists on photography’s ability to, for example, record the reality of social relations, document social injustices, or expose political abuses. War photography, one that endeavors to bear witness to others’ suffering and to produce images that evoke compassion, operates through this documentary status, as I discussed in the previous section. The second role sees the photographic image more as artificial fabrication, a fictional construct that underscores “a subjective mode of depiction appreciated largely for its

aesthetic qualities, where artistic autonomy has superseded photography's evidentiary or communicative function" (Demos 125).

Traces of these two functions – art and non-art – are discernable in the hand-colored portraits of Taliban fighters, and it is this intertwining of document and aesthetics that can offer a very different conceptualization of the Taliban photographs. They also suggest an interventionist potential via aesthetic rupture and dissensus. Given that the Taliban sitters, with one exception, all face and gaze the camera straight on and assume the same posture, these head-and-shoulder shots might have been intended originally for official identification purposes. As such, their primary ontological designation seems clear as an unequivocal document, where the art of photography merges with daily life as it documents, records, and represents reality, illustrating art-becoming-life. What is immediately conspicuous about these images, however, is the added colors that appear artificial and garish. The photographers had transformed an ordinary black and white image into something livelier. The addition of these vibrant, if not startling, blue and deep turquoise, as well as red, yellow, and green hues in the background (see figure 5.14) introduces new sensory elements that intensify visual/sensory stimulation and transform the original document into a more artistic and sensorial experience.



**Figure 5.14.** A photograph from the *Taliban* collection showcasing hand-tinted coloration and a colorful added-on backdrop. Details of original print size are unavailable. © T. Dworzak Collection / Magnum Photos. Reprint permission purchased from Hollandse Hoogte.

Although hand-tinted coloration might not be so common in the West for ordinary snapshots due to the general ubiquity of color film and processing, it is very much a part of contemporary art practices. These Taliban photographs immediately evoke the aesthetics of works by the French duo Pierre et Gilles, whose retouched photographs are often noted for their

religious and mythic symbolism and homoeroticism.<sup>141</sup> Aesthetic affinities can also be seen with the works of Iranian artist Khosrow Hassanzadeh, in particular his series *Terrorist* (2004) and *Ready to Order* (2007-2008), both of which showcase Eastern memorial portrait imagery, religious motifs, and visual forms of photography studios in the Middle East.<sup>142</sup>

In the *Taliban* collection, the engagement with sensible materiality is heavily emphasized as traces of the photographer-painter's artistic intrusion disrupt the photographic surface through an act of self-disclosure. For example, the tint used on the sitters' faces and for the background has seeped onto the edges of their white turbans, and the outline of those turbans has been retraced by hand as harsh lines can be clearly seen. Accidental drips of paint and stains are also noticeable. The presence of the photographer/painter is foregrounded, whether intentionally or not. His presence, as well as his own aesthetic role and creative proficiency become prominent. This post-production and the engagement with materiality actually overshadow the image itself. It becomes not just a photograph of a Taliban fighter but also an image about colorization and the disruption of the photographic surface. Nevertheless, this interaction between surface and paint is not a complete retreat into materiality and a demonstration of pure form's lack of signifying function; it is not endeavoring to secure the autonomy of sensory experience. Rather, it is a shifting between the images' sensible form and its documentary mode and (political) meaning.

In figure 5.14, the image's documentary (non-art) roles – whether it is for the quotidian purpose of keepsake, or as official photographs of identification, thus reflecting the state's controlling gaze, or intended for the more somber purpose of establishing grievability, as I explored in the last section – all have to negotiate with the add-on conspicuous colorization which supplants political understanding. Materiality, thus, continuously obfuscates meaning and understanding. Tensions arise between the politicized and apoliticized of the image, as viewers have to negotiate with legibility (male faces, citizenry, dead Taliban) and sensorial strangeness (bright colors). This interplay can be seen again in two colorized photographs that have as their backdrops an added oval ring of orange rim and yellow glow that encircles the sitter's head (see figures 5.15 and 5.16).

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<sup>141</sup> For a selection of their works, see their page on artnet, <http://www.artnet.com/artists/pierre%20et%20gilles/>, accessed May 1, 2013.

<sup>142</sup> To view both series, go to Hassanzadeh's webpage at <http://khosrowhassanzadeh.com/index.php>, accessed May 1, 2013.



**Figures 5.15 and 5.16.** Two photographs from the *Taliban* collection with a halo-like symbol in the background. Details of original print size are unavailable. © T. Dworzak Collection / Magnum Photos. Reprint permission purchased from Hollandse Hoogte.

This halo-like symbol injects religious overtones into the image. The usage of a halo in connection with sainthood is part of Christian iconography, but there are artistic parallels in other religions utilizing the symbolism of light, with depictions of rays of light radiating from the holy person's head or an enfolding illumination as a backdrop. Although Islam is a monotheistic religion, the veneration of holy and saintly men and imams does exist for some Muslims.<sup>143</sup> Take as an example popular depictions of the Wali Sanga, the revered saints of Islam on the island of Java, which exhibit an enveloping glow (see figures below).



**Figures 5.17 and 5.18.** Depictions of two of the Wali Sanga, or “9 Saints,” of Java. Details of original print size and photograph credits are unavailable. Images accessed from <http://www.indonesiamatters.com/1697/syncretism-example>. Copyrights belong to original source.

For the Taliban images, assuming that yellow oval is suggestive of a religious motif, the painter-photographer has advertently sacralized both the scene and the sitter, imbuing what was

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<sup>143</sup> This veneration has common manifestations, including visits to saints' tombs and shrines. Another practice, according to Hassanzadeh, is that photography studios in rural Iranian villages offer images of respected imams as backdrops against which customers can have their photographs taken.

once a more banal photographic document for identification purposes with the weight of the sacred. This addition of color might be introduced to elevate the sitters' status as religious martyrs worthy of veneration and hero worship. Added to the previous functions of memorializing and designating a life and its death, the images are now also reflecting the sitter's hopes of honor. What we see on these photographs are not just the Taliban faces they literally show, but a somewhat morbid relationality between these faces and the photograph's material surface: paints that already prophesized these sitters' impending deaths and hoped-for martyrdom, creating an interplay between materiality and meaning. At first sight, sensorial elements seem to be aiding an understanding of images rather than contending with it. But are they? The colorization is also simultaneously multiplying and challenging meanings and refusing to be overtaken by solid understanding: can the images also be seen as a mockery or parody of the martyrdom arising from the fundamentalist religiosity of the Taliban regime? Is this photographic apotheosis of Taliban fighters (playfully?) aimed at stoking the Taliban regime's iconoclastic ire? For by sacralizing the image, the photograph might invite a viewing through the lens of reverence and worship, precisely the main concern behind the prohibition of *tasweer*. The force of the images' legibility and the force of their non-legibility continue to compete. Sensoriality is not overpowered by meaning, but neither is meaning disregarded by sensoriality. Seen within Rancière's paradigm, what these two politics of the images – traces of the photography-becoming-life through the function of the legible document, and traces of autonomous aesthetic qualities through colorization – produce is a tension between the mind's intellectual faculty that searches for understanding and the sensoriality that engages with materiality.

Here I have used the word tension, but as I detailed in chapter one Rancière has described this state as a “free play” of one's faculties between the sensuous and the rational, a situation opposing the usual subordination of the former to the latter.<sup>144</sup> Subsequently, this freedom between the faculties creates in viewers what Tanke has interpreted as a state of reflection in which the artwork “disrupts reason's ability to think and dispense with sensible material” (106). What this suggests in practice is that an understanding of these hand-tinted Taliban images and an interpretation of them are neither forthright nor readily accessible and attainable, as one is required to shuffle between the images' potential political messages, including the gravity of notions such as mourning and grievability, and the glare of bright and cartoonish backdrop

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<sup>144</sup> For Rancière's discussions of “free appearance” and “free play,” see *AD* 27-32; *TES* 64-69; *DS* 115-119 and 176.

colors. That undecidedness of the representation is not easily resolved and should be left intact.

What troubles Rancière about the critical paradigm that fuels politicized art, such as Rosler's works, seems to be how the sensory strangeness created by heterogeneous visual elements in those cases is suppressed rather than nurtured, given that the strangeness soon dissipates with the intended aim to provide awareness and legibility, and further, to be instrumentalized for a determinate political efficacy of mobilization. In the Taliban context, a tension-filled, unstable, and precarious encounter with the faces of the enemy occasions what Rancière would call an efficacy of dissensus (*DS* 139). As already explained in chapter one, dissensus can be best understood by highlighting the two definitions of "sense": the first entails sensory presentation and sensate (i.e. bodily) experiences, and the second meaning and understanding, just like the two elements of the sensate and meaning that compete in a state of play. In addition, an efficacy of dissensus points to that conflict between these two senses occurring at the intersection between the image and the viewing of that image. "Dissensus is a conflict between a sensory presentation [of the art object] and a way of making sense of it [in the spectator], or between several sensory regimes and/or 'bodies'," says Rancière (*DS* 139). Dissensus stresses and values the suspension of a straight line, a determinable link, between the artist's intention, an artwork or photographic images in this case, and the spectator's gaze. Consequently, Rancière has warned that because of this aesthetic disconnection, artworks cannot anticipate or predict its effects, especially when it comes to its oppositional ambitions. To do so would also be to presuppose the viewers' imbecility, passivity or gullibility. As he contends: "Images change our gaze and the landscape of the possible if they are not anticipated by their meaning and do not anticipate their effects" (*TES* 105).

But paradoxically that lack of anticipation and the uncertainty of effects is an oppositional resource when one is confronted with such an image of the Taliban enemy. These images can produce effects, but they do so only because of an original rupture that challenges the direct cause-effect relationship (*DS* 142). Dissensus breaks that relationship between representations within the frame and the viewing of that frame, problematizing any claims of a smooth transmission of pathos, sentiments, knowledge or awareness. Butler's haunting would be difficult to defend when seen against dissensus. Instead, this dissensual encounter with the Taliban fighters through the colorized images introduces a new mode of sense perception to engage with the post-9/11 terrorist enemy, modifying both what can be seen of them and what can be thought of them and how the two – sense and sense – can even be related to each other. It

does so not necessarily on the level of representation by providing alternative or more accurate images of the Taliban, or on the level of representability by contesting who can or cannot be represented, but by inserting a dissensual way of seeing them that is in itself fundamentally precarious, undetermined, and contingent.

Dissensus has introduced a different kind of affective association: one of indeterminacy. This kind of dissensual visuality contests the restricted wartime realm of the visible because it cannot help but question all other forms of seeing the enemy and the affective relations that arise, whether it is one influenced by dehumanizing frames that sustain calls of extermination or a form of seeing through humanizing frames that encourage mourning and non-violence. Seeing these colorized Taliban photos dissensually will likely accomplish neither, resisting all such deterministic, static, and predictable viewings and reinforcing the elusiveness of one's enemy instead. This uncertain task of sensing and making sense of the enemy is exactly the opposite of a visual culture that seeks to visually solidify and know the enemy for security purposes. A lucid form of seeing and knowing is especially vital in the war on terror, as the more traditional practices of enemy construction and visualization are complicated by the nature of terrorism, which is characterized by the radical uncertainty of the "unknown unknowns."<sup>145</sup> But these colorized Taliban photographs refuse to satisfy this heightened demand and anxieties for visual and ontological access to the enemy.

Recall, too, that Dworzak had described this collection of Taliban photographs as objects of a serendipitous discovery. He underscores the fact that they were "found" rather than taken by himself. By attributing these photographs as works of the local Afghan photographers, several of whom Dworzak dutifully names and thanks in his introductory text, these images gain extra cachet for their "native" aesthetic and credibility. This implies that they might serve as an "authentic" visual encounter with the Taliban. This "discovery" premise is also voyeuristic in that viewers are offered access to see private images that were not meant to be seen in the first place; the images acquire a "revelatory" effect and promise possibilities of unintended intimacy. Through this framing of "an accidental discovery," the visual (and even epistemological) seduction is intensified. But while *Taliban* excites in viewers a longing to see, its images have the oppositional potential to thwart seeing. One actually does not see them properly but dissensually. They produce an antagonistic form of visuality that actually obstructs the pursuit of

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<sup>145</sup> The "unknown unknowns" are the famous words of the former US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, spoken during a NATO press conference in Brussels on June 6, 2002. For the transcript, visit <http://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2002/s020606g.htm>, accessed May 1, 2013.

visual lucidity, creating more productive possibilities to modify what is perceptible and knowable.

## **Conclusion**

Akin to the post-9/11 “Portraits of Grief,” these Taliban images have been displaced from the private and the domestic to the public and global, acquiring new political capacities and being glimpsed at by unintended and accidental viewers/addressees along the way. The pictures depict the Taliban fighters through studio photography aesthetics that make these images incongruous with other standard photographs of the Taliban represented through the genre of war photojournalism. More importantly, they inaugurate a transformation of the expected wartime Taliban (body)-battlefield (space)-war (activity) association to a body-space matrix guided by pretense and desires. They also articulate various expressions of masculinity and sexual attitude. As such, these Taliban photographs might be considered resistant images in that they undermine existing limits of what can be seen through the insertion of alternative and counter images to enlarge the previously circumscribed sphere of appearance and visibility. Seeing the Taliban becomes more demanding as the images solicit a form of visibility motivated by ethical concerns, and foster illegibility and uncertainty wrought by an aesthetic dissensus. Seeing the Taliban also means seeing them differently, ethically or dissensually. These three ways of seeing diverge at times but also converge to show that the Taliban are no longer spatially or genre stable. They are neither evil as those to be killed nor transparent as those to be known, thus ushering more perplexing and enigmatic visual and imaginative encounters.

## CONCLUSION

With the momentous events of 9/11 serving as the anchor, *Sensible Interventions* has crystallized and assessed multiple forms of artistic interventions that counteracted against established and normative narratives, sounds, and images commonly defining the catastrophe. These interventions, developed through four heterogeneous yet interconnected cultural objects, have extended the practice of resistance by shifting the stage of post-9/11 politics to the realm of aesthetics, an approach enabled by the theoretical thoughts of Rancière. His concept of aesthetics refers not to art theory, but more broadly to his much-discussed notion of the distribution of the sensible and the conceptual structures of audibility and visibility that govern the political scene.

Resistance in this mode has endeavored to contest the various aesthetic borders that delimit and constrain the perceptible or sensible, what can be seen or heard. What these four objects have resisted against were more diffused forms of power that were intangible at times, but nevertheless, manifested their forces by constraining, marginalizing or effacing. The underlying power being challenged here was neither the discernable state power and its apparatus nor the favorite target of global resistance movements: the neo-liberal capitalist world order, but rather, the configuration of the sensible order with its distribution and division of roles and associated capacities and competences, which prescribes whose voices are audible and which bodies are visible where and how. Resistance has been envisioned through sensible interventions, with “sensible” occupying both meanings of the word “sense”: first, “sense” as in what is experienced through the senses, thus a contestation at the level of audibility and visibility, and second, “sense” as a regime of meaning and understanding, thus a contestation at the level of signification. The interplay between the sensate and meaning has also been accentuated assertively through Rancière’s notion of dissensus.

My four cultural objects – from the monologic narrative voice of *Changez* to the literal hip hop voice and instrumental sounds by Paris, and from the banal visuality initiated by *Little Mosque* to the counter, ethical, and dissensual visualities generated by the Taliban photographs – all have extended the aesthetic boundaries that have hitherto circumscribed ways of experiencing 9/11. Such a reconfiguration of the aesthetic realm, or Butler’s sphere of appearance, can also disrupt comprehension and meaning since the sensible divisions and structuring also affect what becomes conceivable, discussable and contestable (Tanke 2). The four case studies, while diverging in terms of medium, have jointly problematized the meanings of post-9/11 identities,

be it American/Pakistani, African-American, Muslim, militant, or enemy. Changez's personal memory and Paris's remembrance of black exploitation have also destabilized an understanding of the entrenched national history of 9/11 and the war on terror. Similarly, *Little Mosque* has sought to facilitate popular understanding by inserting recognizable and legible Muslim bodies on television and eschewed more opaque cultural and religious differences, while the *Taliban* collection has advanced illegibility through Rancière's dissensus that prevented the solidification of unequivocal meaning.

At times, these four cases deviated and tackled different concerns; acts of post-9/11 cultural resistance have been diffused because power was also diffused and manifested at various intersections of power relations. But operating concertedly, they have brought to the fore sensible constraints and interventions. Viewing these oppositional objects not through celebratory sentiments but with a proper acknowledgement of their potential power, this dissertation has also pinpointed some of their blind spots, whether it was the knowledge gap enacted by Paris between himself and his listeners or *Little Mosque's* submission to the politics of recognition, similitude, and commensurability when constructing a post-9/11 Muslim televisual identity.

In all, this sustained analysis of 9/11 and cultural resistance has been enlivened by Rancière's sensible. This process, however, has also helped raise two questions for further study, both of which concern his works' impact and limits in relation to the broader theme of resistance. First, while the sensible has offered a befitting approach to rethink 9/11, given the catastrophe's multiple sensible and experiential dimensions, how does it relate to other contemporary resistance projects, whether resistance is envisioned through the more traditional forms of collective protests or through artistic interventions? Indeed, the sensible has propelled the discussion of cultural resistance in this project by identifying a new target and new forms of interventions through attempts to breach sensible constraints, but there is also a gap between the politics of the sensible and the current state of popular expressions of collective dissent.

At the time of writing in the summer of 2013, large-scale protests have swarmed through scores of cities around the world, prompting *The Economist* magazine to dub this latest sweep of popular discontent as "The March of Protest."<sup>146</sup> From Brazil to Indonesia, from Egypt and Turkey to Bulgaria and the Eurozone, these street demonstrators challenged specific targets (the state, incumbent presidents, local authorities) and expressed grievances (failure of government,

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<sup>146</sup> See the June 29-July 5, 2013 edition of *The Economist*.

bus fares, fuel prices, building projects, austerity measures). They issued clear demands (overthrow, reforms). While these events are dissimilar with national-specific political, economic, and social circumstances, protestors had, nevertheless, easily accessible, definable and locatable enemies and issues to confront. Transplanting Rancière's politics and his police distribution of the sensible as a source of domination to this familiar scene with clear battle lines, immediately highlights a disjunction. As a resistance target, sensible constraints – arising from a police order that partitions identities, roles, competences, and capacities – do not quickly yield a visible and fixed enemy. The sources of power within the hierarchies of the police order cannot always be so easily and singularly identified. This simple point has much to do with some fundamental differences in Rancière's approach to equality and emancipation that are discordant with these latest protests.

This dissonance evolves around the question of exactly what equality means for Rancière and for these protestors. Rancière's equality has more to do with contesting the police distribution of the sensible by undermining given roles, competences, capacities, and orders. He has enabled the political stage to be shifted, creating a unique space for politics and making us alert to the police framing and the partitions of roles and competences. Within his conceptualization, what is unequal is the embedded structuration of the political community. His egalitarian moment – the emergence of the non-part, the enactment of a previously unacknowledged capacity for enunciation, and the verification of the equality of any speaking being with any other speaking being – seeks to alleviate such inequality.

This, however, does not seem to resonate with the outrage and frustrations of these present resistance projects, which point to concrete and pressing aims that often converge on hopes of increased fairness and equality in terms of economic resources and opportunities, education, and better government and public services, to name but a few. These issues are, no doubt, interconnected to the unequal ways that political communities are assembled and partitioned. But if anything, within Rancière's paradigm these protestors might be faulted for protesting within and affirming their assigned roles (the ruled, the dominated) established by the police order, given that they seek changes from their governments and local authorities and see equality as something that is owed to or granted to the population by those who govern (May, "South Carolina" 109-110). For Rancière, equality is not something that is given, but presupposed, demonstrated, verified, and claimed. As Ruth Sonderegger explains: "Rancièrian equality is active, it is *taken* as opposed to *given*. It is made visible on a local and temporal level

only, namely every time that there are subjects who claim and take their part” (68, italics in original). These moments of claiming and seizing can reshape the sensible coordinates but they do not, as I mentioned earlier in chapter one, necessarily lead to new regimes or an elimination of social inequalities (*TPA* 3). Can equality conceptualized on this level and can Rancière’s momentary enactment become a value and an aim for protestors who are contesting material lack and restrictions and who are demanding immediate results? How can these notions help them re-envision their campaigns on the streets? More analysis can proceed to consider how these disconnections between Rancière’s theoretical thoughts and the aspirations of popular protests can be productive rather than unbridgeable.

The second question has to do with Rancière’s dissensus in the artistic context, and specifically relating to the issue of spectators, given their particular role in any oppositional artistic practices. No doubt a book, an album, a television show, and a collection of photographs are not oppositional in a similar fashion as the throngs at Tahrir Square or Gezi Park; artistic expressions manifest different agency and are also animated by aesthetic forms, commercial production, and market mechanisms. Most importantly, their resistance is implicated in a key relationship with an audience, necessitating a tripartite equation of artist-artwork-spectator, in which the latter is also enfolded within the opposition. How spectators may respond to the object, in particular to its oppositional elements and aspirations, and how they may subsequently act and mobilize for whatever contestations to the existing order, therefore, become complementary matters in the broader discussion of artistic cultural resistance.

As stipulated in the dissertation’s introduction, this project aimed to accentuate the first two parts of the triad, mainly looking at the motivations and intentions of the creators and even more intensely at the objects, identifying the resistant possibilities and potentials that have been opened up by the objects themselves. Their resistant designation, as I stated earlier, pointed to their self-assigned ontological status and my descriptive and analytical evaluation. My analysis did not have as its central inquisitorial concern whether and how readers, listeners, and viewers have received these 9/11-related objects as oppositional. Here, the challenge of measure becomes evident. Nevertheless, this issue of spectator engagement was keenly acknowledged in the hip hop chapter via my discussion of the reception of Paris’s music on YouTube, and also prominently in the final chapter on the *Taliban* which underscored, aided by Butler’s reflections, the ethical responsibility of the viewer. Although not always positioned in the foreground, the significance of the spectator still has been recognized in the preceding pages.

Rancière has argued unequivocally for the equality of the spectator. But the question remains how an equality in an aesthetic setting relates to other aspects, more specifically in view of the theme of the dissertation, to broader resistance aims? I will first point out some ambiguities in his arguments then offer a critique of his “emancipated” spectator in view of his earlier works on political equality. I will conclude by suggesting a more congenial artist-spectator relationship already heralded by my case study on hip hop music.<sup>147</sup>

As the dissensual visibility initiated by the Taliban photographs has demonstrated, the encounter between a viewer and an object is now contingent due to the aesthetic dissensus. The possibility of opposition is shifted to spectators who are freed from the imposed and intended messages of the artist, contesting the cause-effect assumption of political art. Rancière’s spectator is not bound by the judgment that being a spectator inevitably denotes a state of passivity, ignorance, inarticulateness, and non-creativity. Such a presupposition of spectator incapacity is one that Rancière consistently denounces, especially as it reflects a police distribution of the sensible that prescribes roles and competences, or more accurately, the supposed incompetence and incapacity of the spectator to know and act.

It is helpful to remember that Rancière’s notion of the emancipated spectator arises out of his theory of intellectual emancipation asserted in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, which I discussed in chapter three. Through that work, one sees how the traditional pedagogical model with the teacher serving as the master explicator and the student as the ignoramus underscores and perpetuates an inequality of intelligences. This in turn can also serve as a parallel of the unequal relationship between an artist and a spectator. Challenging this inequality, Rancière advocates, as always, the presupposition of equality. As he argues in an interview: “... equality is not a goal to be attained ... Equality must be seen as a point of departure, and not as a destination” (Guénoun and Kavanagh 3). I see two outcomes from this presupposition: first, there is a rejection of that figure of mastery, whether it is the expert, the teacher, or the artist; second, greater agency now lies with the spectator, as the previous distribution of defined roles, specificities, and competences between artists and spectators becomes more flexible and blurred. Consistent with his conceptualization of equality, the emancipated spectator is another illustration of previously disqualified figures made qualified and the incompetent made competent.

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<sup>147</sup> Although Rancière’s discussion of the spectator is primarily related to the theater, he does offer a broader definition of “theatrical spectacle,” by which he means “all those forms of spectacle – drama, dance, performance art, mime and so on – that place bodies in action before an assembled audience” (*TES 2*). I, therefore, have extended spectatorship to the context of a live hip hop performance.

But unlike Rancière's earlier proposition on politics that involves the disruptive presence of the non-part in an act of verification of their capacity, no such act of demonstration seems to be required for the emancipated spectator. In the Rancièrian paradigm, a political activity would disrupt the perceptible divisions of the police order – partitioning of social places or functions – by the appearance and recognition of “the part of those who have no part.”

This kind of polemical verification of equality is vital for Rancière, in that the logic of equality confronts the logic of the police order, which in this case would be preoccupied with partitioning the artist to fulfill a role of activity and competence, and the spectator to passivity and deficiency. Rancière, though, does not seem to stress explicitly or demand this extra act of assertion and demonstration from his spectators. The equality of the spectators remains a principle, one that is affirmed when aesthetic works do not stultify their addressees; but what about the spectators themselves? Agency and capacity are conferred but there is no further probing as to how their newly-supposed competence might first be manifested and be corroborated. This claiming and seizing of a part is significant, and without it, Rancière's spectatorial equality remains an abstract presupposition, and one that idealizes and over-valorizes the spectator. Indeed, the spectator may be equal in intelligence: s/he may be actively, knowingly and creatively interpreting and translating the performance rather than assuming the position of a passive voyeur, but does this equality also extend to being equal to the artists' technical and creative virtuosity or their commitment to their artistic craft?

In addition, it remains unclear how Rancière envisages this artist-spectator relationship now that equality holds sway. A new ambivalence seems to emerge: on the one hand, there is the rupture between the object and the spectator, thus marking an intellectual/perceptual/intentional/creative dissociation between the artist and the spectator, but on the other hand, they no longer occupy distinct roles and functions but share a blurring of competences, which surely suggests a more convivial relationship than the previous one characterized by the active mastery of one and the passive ignorance of the other. The question remains: what comes next? How does this relationship impact the process of social, cultural, and political affiliation? Does this emancipation reveal a power in that it encourages solidarity between artists and spectators and energizes collective mobilization? How can this Rancièrian emancipated spectator be related to collectivity and other hopes of equality, for example, access to education, employment opportunities, and economic resources, as desired by protestors in demonstrations around the world? To put it directly: What resistance potential lies beyond the art

encounter?

For Rancière, the collective power wielded by his spectators does not derive from being part of a viewing community, as in the context of a theatrical performance, nor does it manifest as a result of interactivity; rather, this power lies in each spectator's individualistic, equal, and unique creative mind and intelligence (*TES* 16 and 17). He claims: "What our performances – be they teaching or playing, speaking, writing, making art or looking at it – verify is not our participation in a power embodied in the community. It is the capacity of anonymous people, the capacity that makes everyone equal to everyone else" (*TES* 17). With this equality as the overriding concern, issues such as interaction/participation, solidarity, and mobilization become redundant or unattainable. Spectator participation is no longer stressed, given that within Rancière's paradigm, the viewer is already active and needs not be activated; solidarity is indeterminate since each spectator is plotting her own path, in her own intellectual adventure (*TES* 16 and 17); collective or individual mobilization inspired by artistic interventions, whether the subsequent mobilization would be against globalization, economic exploitation or whatever ills of the moment, seems too optimistic if not unlikely, due to the rupture between the artwork and the spectator. As a result, the potential of art-inspired mobilization is undermined.

Contra Rancière and with these issues in mind, I would suggest a different spectator emancipation model and its relation to cultural resistance. This well-established and popular-culture practice not only predates Rancière's theory, it also extends and challenges his ideas on the three aforementioned issues: the verification of spectator competence, relationality, and community and mobilization. The model is that of the call-and-response mechanism, which I already highlighted in chapter three when exploring Paris's album *Sonic Jihad*. In that case, the call-and-response occurred between Paris and his guest rap artists, but the practice is also common during live hip hop performances when it connects artists to spectators, with artists like Paris initiating the call and the audiences responding.

While often associated with hip hop, the call-and-response strategy springs from broader communication traditions of black cultures, relating to the sacred – gospel music and church worship services – and the secular (Daniel and Smitherman 27-37). As such, its functionality, significance, and instrumentalization offer a richer and more multi-faceted conceptualization of spectatorship than Rancière's emancipation. Call-and-response exhibits a cause-and-effect dynamic which Rancière would surely question, but the tactic distinctively places an emphasis on commonality, communality, and group experientiality. In that sense, the cause-effect has little

to do with a direct transmission of political content or awareness/consciousness, but more to do with a general emotive engagement between artists and spectators. This support for call-and-response should not be confused with my earlier critique of Paris, who champions his own music as a way to “knowledge and truth,” therefore inadvertently presuming the ignorance and incapacity of his listeners.

In a call-and-response, the response by the audience is not merely a sign of a successful activation from their passivity to participation, neither is it the perfunctory reception and repetition of the call. Instead, it punctuates the lyrical content, affects the collective energy, establishes the scene, and helps to define the overall experience. Much is required of spectators to demonstrate their own hip hop skills: proficiency with ever-shifting verbal expressions, and familiarity with popular bodily gestures and dance movements. Rather than just participation, the response sparks a moment of demonstration and verification of the spectators’ own capacity and competence to engage with artists on stage, who in turn, capitalize on audiences’ responses to issue further calls. Performing and receiving become two capacities that both the artist and the spectator must display and demonstrate. Artists may still have the main spotlight; their artistic excellence and virtuosity can still be affirmed via their music’s formal sophistication, but there is also reinforcement from the crowd. This sonic interplay suggests a relationship between artists and spectators that is distinguished temporarily by spontaneity, interdependency, mutual assistance, and complementarity.<sup>148</sup>

Furthermore, the relationship between the spectators themselves is also communal, for while they may experience and interpret the call individually, they – being under the force of the same rhythm, pitch, and flow – nevertheless act and counter in unison, offering a collective response. No doubt such a relationship can be fleeting, being limited to the concert moment, with spectators sharing only cultural and musical affinities.<sup>149</sup> These connections, however, may also

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<sup>148</sup> This interpretation of the call-and-response mechanism might share some affinities with contemporary art’s relational aesthetics, which has been examined by Nicolas Bourriaud and challenged by Claire Bishop. As mentioned earlier, however, the call-and-response communication strategy has a very different genealogy, and it functions in very different musical, social, and religious contexts. For more on the mechanism, see chapter four of Samy H. Alim’s *Roc the Mic Right: The Language of Hip-Hop Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2006), and Jack L. Daniel and Geneva Smitherman’s “How I Got Over: Communication Dynamics in the Black Community,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 62 (1976): 26-39. For discussions on relational aesthetics, see Bourriaud’s *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 2002) and Bishop’s “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,” *October* 110 (2004): 51-79.

<sup>149</sup> Some have endowed this moment of live performance with more resistance potential. See Robin Balliger’s discussion, via Paul Gilroy, of the cultural solidarity and empowerment that develop through performance, and of music as the site of the “temporary autonomous zone” in “Sounds of Resistance,” *The Global Resistance Reader*, ed. Louise Amoore (London: Routledge, 2005).

lead to more consistent and long-term manifestations of political identification, providing impetus for other forms of collective material resistance and activism, as some have argued when detailing how hip hop's cultural influence intersects with political forces in America.<sup>150</sup> This is not to advance call-and-response as a perfect model but to suggest its features as contours of what resistance can be and has been.

On account of his commitment to dissensus and spectatorial emancipation, Rancière has fractured the tripartite relationship between artists, artworks, and spectators. Within his model, the power and potential, actual or symbolic, of cultural resistance are downplayed and undervalued. With equality as a starting place, Rancière sees aesthetic engagements as more than just a one-direction artist imposition on the spectator via a "straight uniform transmission" of message, knowledge, and capacity, which no doubt would assume the spectator's lack thereof. More than just this critique, a broader vision of this relationality is needed, one that does not merely emancipate the spectator but one that can also see artists and spectators working in tandem and empowering each other. Call-and-response precisely generates a circular flow between the artist, the music, and the audience. While there is still room for dissensus, when artistic intention does not necessarily match up with interpretation, the three elements nevertheless aggregate and operate in hope of transformation. It is a mechanism that can serve as an analogy for other creative works, in that artists, objects, and spectators, are fused together for resistance. The various links within the triad may not be determinate, but the overall vision and longing is one of contestation. For in these moments when artistic practices are initiating, enabling, uniting, mobilizing, and transforming – for both the artists and the spectators – they become a potent force against the targets they hope to conquer. However imposing the stakes may appear – 9/11 sensory and signification constraints, the war on terror, a repressive state or global finance – even they seem surmountable when set against the boldness of this imperfect but nevertheless creative and formidable resistance.

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<sup>150</sup> For more on how hip hop culture's influence feeds into political activism, see Bakari Kitwana's "The State of the Hip-Hop Generation: How Hip-Hop's Cultural Movement is Evolving into Political Power," *Diogenes* 51 (2004): 115-120, and *The Hip-hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis in African American Culture* (New York: Basic Civitas, 2002). Also consult Angela Ards's "Organizing the Hip-Hop Generation" in *That's the Joint!: The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*, ed. Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal (New York: Routledge, 2004). Her article identifies some of the earlier challenges and obstacles of politicizing young hip hop communities in America.

## APPENDIX I

### Abbreviations of Rancière's Works

<i>AD</i>	<i>Aesthetics and Its Discontents</i>
<i>D</i>	<i>Dis-agreement: Politics and Philosophy</i>
<i>DS</i>	<i>Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics</i>
<i>TES</i>	<i>The Emancipated Spectator</i>
“FPA”	“From Politics to Aesthetics?”
<i>TIS</i>	<i>The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation</i>
<i>OSP</i>	<i>On the Shores of Politics</i>
<i>TPA</i>	<i>The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible</i>

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## ENGLISH SUMMARY

*Sensible Interventions* is anchored in the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in America and its cultural legacies, most prominently in the forms of cultural resistance. It conjoins 9/11 and oppositional practices by probing the politics of the attacks and their repercussions, and simultaneously, by investigating 9/11-inspired artistic resistance and its agents, targets, modes, and motivations.

Like so many other fields such as politics, global finance, and the military, the domain of culture has sustained wide-ranging effects from the attacks, but it has also been, in a strange way, galvanized as well. Scanning through the myriad of American cultural objects with any kind of 9/11 connection, one can quickly see that, whether they merely contain brief 9/11 references or actually portray the catastrophe as their primary theme, these cultural responses (including films, television dramas, documentaries, political cartoons, music, and video games), generally adhere to several conventional themes and functions: first, to eulogize the firefighters, other emergency workers, and the victims through the prisms of heroism and patriotism; second, to create immediacy with both imagined and real descriptions of panic and fears inside the towers and the hijacked planes; third, to enable acts of mourning while providing healing and catharsis through personal accounts by survivors and victims' families; fourth, to explain and inform by detailing the inner workings of globalized terrorism, al-Qaeda, and anti-terrorism efforts; and finally, to critique the Bush administration, post-9/11 paranoia, and threats to civil liberties.

Nestled among these cultural responses are also works that deviate from these main classifications. These objects might share some of the antagonistic vehemence with those works in the last category of critique, but they also exhibit something more. Four such objects serve as the fount of curiosity for this study: the novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the hip hop album *Sonic Jihad*, the Canadian television situation comedy *Little Mosque on the Prairie*, and the collection of studio photographs entitled *Taliban*. Because of their diverging genre, medium, themes, and circulation, thus located far off from each other on any schematic of 9/11 objects, their visibility is diminished, operating somewhat inconspicuously as isolated points in a constellation with more illustrious and better-known objects. But taken together, their potential as critical artistic interventions becomes prominent. This dissertation distills their oppositionality, exploring them at the confluence of aesthetic forms, political ardor, and commercial circulation.

Foregrounding artistic endeavors – literature, music, television program, and photography – and fastening them to politics also forces this inquiry to step into the quagmire that is the tumultuous relationship between politics and the arts. Are the arts only a supplementary element in oppositional movements, or as Boris Groys asks: “Does art hold any power of its own ... ?” To consider this knotted relationship between politics and the arts, the 9/11 and resistance nexus is further extended by a third component, that of the theoretical works by Jacques Rancière. His thoughts have great relevance here because, although his works traverse different topics and disciplines, they do converge and return time and time again to that exact relationship between politics and aesthetics. The qualifier “sensible” in my title signals Rancière’s presence in this study, as the word is echoic of his particular way of theorizing politics through his best-known concept, the distribution of the sensible. This notion of the sensible is deployed through the two definitions of the word “sense,” as Rancière himself explains: first, sense as in the realm of sensations and what is apprehended and perceived by the senses, and second, sense as in meaning and the process of making sense and establishing the coherence of something. “Sensible interventions” signify my four objects’ oppositional undertakings at the level of sensory presentations and at the level of meaning and signification, as well as the interplay between the two senses when an object breaches the coherent and determinate connection between the pair. In all, *Sensible Interventions* points to a convergence of 9/11, cultural resistance and Rancière, where artistic practices counter 9/11’s cultural legacy through the multiple dimensions and definitions of the sensible.

### **Chapter Overview**

Chapter one establishes the theoretical foundation of the dissertation by considering Rancière’s works on the relationship between politics and aesthetics, beginning with his discussion on the political community and ending with his conceptualization of aesthetic dissensus. In order to avoid the danger of reductionism, Rancière’s thoughts are surveyed in great detail because his important concepts, such as dissensus, are often embedded in a long line of argument and should not be merely extracted without specifying their original context. Rancière realm of the sensible and the perceptible is also connected to the specific events of 9/11 and elaborated from a different angle through Judith Butler’s term “sphere of appearance.” The chapter concludes by clarifying Rancière’s influence on the dissertation, marking both its impact and limits.

Chapters two and three identify the key sites of post-9/11 resistance by exploring

disruptions relating to national identity, patriotism, and the war on terror. Both chapters also orient post-9/11 politics toward the aesthetic by considering the issue of audibility, or what can be heard. In chapter two, I examine how Mohsin Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* challenges the divide of "us versus them," the dominant refrain of the post-9/11 era, by focusing on the figure of the foreigner and its precarious position in America post-9/11. Highlighting issues of national identity, cultural affiliations, and enemification, Hamid's novel features a transplanted and excluded Pakistani protagonist, Changez, whose alternative encounter with the terrorist attacks denies the naturalization and normalization of patriotism and mourning. In the post-9/11 moment, when the enemy and the terrorist are often envisaged as absolutely external and other, Changez is an ambivalent character who is more American than Americans themselves but also a possible enemy of the state. This and other identity disorientations, as a result of the catastrophe, generate spaces for resistance against prevalent post-9/11 identity categorizations, spatial demarcations, narrative constraints, and a dominant and conventional memory of the disaster. The novel also provides a pathway into the post-catastrophe sensible order that privileges certain victimized or heroic bodies and their narratives. Utilizing the unconventional form of a dramatic monologue for his novel, Hamid highlights the struggle over audibility and inaudibility by allowing Changez to be the sole speaker of the novel, while relegating another character to inaudibility.

Building on this, chapter three continues to explore the aesthetic borders that delimit the sphere of appearance by considering the post-9/11 hip hop album *Sonic Jihad* by the American political rapper Paris. Transitioning from the voice and audibility of a character in a novel, this case study considers the literal and ferocious voice of resistance through Paris's sonic attack against Bush's war on terror, and 9/11's military and cultural legacies. Themes from the previous chapter such as national identity, cultural affiliations, and enemification are expanded through an African-American artist who contrasts his national identity with other forms of subjectivity and identification, demonstrating an internal alterity that hampers any facile attempts to distinguish between post-9/11 friends and foes, citizens and aliens, the included and the excluded, terrorists and patriots. Unlike Changez who is more American than Americans themselves, Paris is an American who refuses to be an American and aligns symbolically, instead, with the terrorists. Dissociating himself from the post-9/11 patriotic fervor, Paris restages Bush's war on terror and nationhood and offers an alternative sonic experience of America through the history of black oppression and through his own global and diasporic affinities.

Moving beyond the realm of audibility, chapters four and five address the issue of visibility by investigating the multiple catastrophe-induced ways of seeing. To do so, these two chapters concentrate on two iconic and controversial figures in the war on terror: Muslims and Taliban soldiers. The previous questions concerning oppositional identity, both national and cultural, are now complicated with the added dimension of Islam. The object of inquiry in chapter four is the Canadian situation comedy *Little Mosque on the Prairie*, a series that showcases the everyday, mundane experiences of a Muslim community by translating those experiences into the beloved and easily recognizable television format. This premise offers resistant possibilities as the show contests hitherto hostile terrorism-related televisual representations and inserts a more banal mode of seeing Muslims and Islam. I situate Muslim figures within a wider Rancièrian regime of visibility and detail a new visibility and visuality anchored in what I will call “oppositional banality.” I also question later in the chapter, however, whether this oppositional process of visual normalization also enfolds Muslim identities and Islam too conveniently and uncritically within the bounds of national loyalty.

Disrupting the post-9/11 visual realm by inserting alternative ways of seeing is also central in the final case study which reflects on counter visualizations of the enemy in the war on terror: the Taliban. Chapter five investigates a collection of studio photographs of Taliban followers taken in 2001 by Afghan photographers in studios in Kandahar. Representing the faces of the enemy, these snapshots and portraits are produced away from the battle scene but it is very much against a broader context of war that they circulate and gain their oppositional significance, as they challenge mainstream media visualizations of the Taliban as the terrorist-enemy. Besides troubling the Taliban’s expected militant identity and masculinity, these images also problematize the post-9/11 “us versus them” divide by inviting a more compassionate, and thus countering, form of viewing that no longer sees them as the enemy. This sympathetic visuality, however, is also scrutinized by returning to Rancièrè’s notion of aesthetic dissensus, for the final time, in order to assess how a dissensual way of viewing the Taliban may countervail the controlling of the perceptible and the sensible.

In the conclusion, I cast a final glance on all four case studies, pinpointing their moments of convergence and divergence, as well as my main arguments. These concluding pages also enlarge the scope of this dissertation by treading into the broader discussion on the role of the spectator in artistic manifestations of resistance. This invites a brief consideration of Rancièrè’s notion of the “emancipated” spectator and my own critical assessment of his thoughts.

## SAMENVATTING

*Sensible Interventions* is verankerd in de terreuraanslagen van 11 september 2001 in de Verenigde Staten en hun culturele erfenis, het culturele verzet in het bijzonder. Het proefschrift brengt 9/11 en verschillende oppositionele praktijken samen middels het analyseren van de politiek van de aanslagen en hun repercussies, alsmede het onderzoeken van het 9/11- geïnspireerde artistiek verzet en zijn deelnemers, doelwitten, werkwijzen en motivaties.

Net zozeer als de politiek, de financiële economie en het militaire apparaat, heeft het culturele veld vergaande gevolgen van de aanslagen ondervonden. Een vluchtig overzicht van de talloze Amerikaanse culturele objecten over 9/11, toont aan dat er een reeks conventionele thema's en functies voorhanden is. Of het nu gaat om terloopse verwijzingen naar 9/11 of de representatie van de catastrofe als het hoofdthema, al deze reflecties (films, tv-drama, documentaires, politieke cartoons, muziek en video games) worden gekenmerkt door een of meer van de volgende motieven: het herdenken van brandweermannen of andere noodwerkers en slachtoffers door een prisma van heroïsme en patriottisme; het creëren van een gevoel van urgentie door zowel ingebeelde als echte beschrijvingen van paniek en angst binnen de torens en gekaapte vliegtuigen; het rouwproces in gang zetten door het verschaffen van heling en catharsis middels persoonlijke getuigenissen van zowel overlevenden als families van slachtoffers; het uitleggen van en informeren over geglobaliseerd terrorisme, al-Qaeda en antiterrorisme; het bekritisieren van de Bush-administratie, post-9/11 paranoia en beperkingen van civiele vrijheden.

Er zijn echter ook culturele objecten voorhanden die afwijken van deze gangbare thema's. Deze werken behouden weliswaar veel van de antagonistische kracht van de hierboven genoemde laatste kritische categorie, maar ze maken ook nadrukkelijk iets anders waarneembaar. Vier van deze objecten fungeren als bron voor mijn proefschrift: de roman *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, het hiphopalbum *Sonic Jihad*, de Canadese tv-sitcom *Little Mosque on the Prairie* en de verzameling van studiofoto's getiteld *Taliban*. Vanwege hun uiteenlopende genre, medium, thema en circulatie, aldus ver van elkaar verwijderd in elk schematisch overzicht van 9/11 objecten, wordt hun zichtbaarheid verminderd, waardoor ogenschijnlijk imponerend als enigszins geïsoleerde punten in een constellatie die grotendeels bestaat uit illustere en meer bekende objecten. De potentie van hun artistieke interventie wordt echter duidelijk als ze in onderling verband bestudeerd worden. Dit proefschrift identificeert de oppositionele eigenschappen van deze vier objecten, alsmede hun esthetische vorm, politieke intensiteit en commerciële circulatie.

Door de artistieke objecten van dit proefschrift – literatuur, muziek, televisieprogramma en fotografie – in een politieke context te plaatsen, moet noodzakelijkerwijs ook ingegaan worden op de wrange relatie tussen kunst en politiek. Is kunst slechts supplementair aan oppositionele bewegingen, of behoudt kunst, in een vraagstelling van Boris Groys, “ook macht in eigen vermogen?” Om de complexe vervlechting van kunst en politiek in ogenschouw te nemen wordt de nexus tussen 9/11 en verzet ondersteund door een derde element: het theoretische werk van de Franse filosoof Jacques Rancière. Zijn theorieën keren, ondanks dat die verscheidene onderwerpen en disciplines doorkruisen, telkens weer terug naar precies deze relatie tussen esthetiek en politiek en is als zodanig van groot belang voor mijn onderzoek. Het begrip *sensible* in de titel van het proefschrift is dan ook een directe verwijzing naar Rancières invloed op mijn proefschrift. Het resoneert met de specifieke wijze waarop hij het politieke heeft getheoretiseerd door middel van zijn meest bekende concept, *the distribution of the sensible*: een verdeling van het zintuiglijk waarneembare. Deze notie van het zintuiglijk waarneembare wordt gebruikt met een tweevoudige definitie in gedachte, zoals Rancière zelf uitlegt: in de eerste plaats kan het zintuiglijk waarneembare begrepen worden als het domein van de waarnemingen en de wijze waarop de zintuigen fenomenen kunnen waarnemen. In de tweede plaats kan zintuiglijk geduid worden als zinnig: het vaststellen en waarborgen van een coherente betekenis. *Sensible Interventions* verwijst dus naar de oppositionele werking van mijn vier objecten qua zintuiglijke presentatie en zinnigheid, alsmede naar het spel tussen de twee definities op het moment dat een object de coherentie of gedetermineerde connectie tussen beide verstoord. Samengevat, richt *Sensible Interventions* zich op een convergentie van 9/11, cultureel verzet en Rancière, waar artistieke praktijken verzet bieden tegen de culturele nalatenschap van 9/11 door middel van de verschillende dimensies en betekenissen van de zintuiglijke waarneembaarheid.

## **Hoofdstukoverzicht**

In het eerste hoofdstuk werk ik mijn theoretische kader uit aan de hand van een overzicht van Rancière's werk omtrent de relatie tussen politiek en esthetiek. Ik begin met zijn idee van de politieke gemeenschap en eindig met zijn conceptualisering van esthetische dissensus. Omdat Rancières notie van dissensus ingebed is in een complexe historische argumentatie en als zodanig niet simpelweg uit zijn specifieke context gehaald kan worden, analyseer ik de publicaties van Rancière in detail. Zijn concept van het zintuiglijk waarneembare wordt ook toegepast op de specifieke gebeurtenissen van 9/11 en verder verhelderd door Judith Butlers notie “sfeer van verschijning.” Het hoofdstuk sluit af met een verduidelijking van Rancières invloed op mijn onderzoek, waarbij zowel de impact als de

beperkingen worden aangeven.

In het tweede en derde hoofdstuk analyseer ik de kern voorbeelden van het post-9/11 verzet middels het exploreren van de ontregelende elementen in relatie tot nationale identiteit, patriottisme, en de *war on terror*. Daarnaast oriënteer ik de post-9/11 politiek richting Rancières esthetiek door het bestuderen van de “audibiliteit”: hetgeen dat gehoord kan worden. In hoofdstuk twee verken ik de wijze waarop Mohsin Hamids roman *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* het onderscheid tussen “wij tegen zij” aanvecht, het meest dominante refrein in Amerika na de aanslagen van 9/11. Ik doe dit door de aandacht te richten op de figuur van de vreemdeling en zijn precare positie in Amerika na 9/11. Door het benadrukken van zaken als nationale identiteit, culturele affiliatie en constructie van de vijand schetst Hamid in zijn roman een ontheemde en buitengesloten Pakistaanse protagonist, Changez, wiens alternatieve ervaring met de terreuraanslagen de naturalisering en normalisering van Amerikaans patriottisme en rouwprocessen ontregelt. In het politieke landschap na 9/11, waar de vijand en de terrorist doorgaans als absoluut extern en anders wordt begrepen, blijkt Changez een ambivalent karakter die merkwaardig genoeg meer Amerikaans lijkt dan Amerikanen zelf, terwijl hij tegelijkertijd een mogelijke vijand is van de Amerikaanse staat. Deze en andere desoriëntaties van identiteit, als een gevolg van de catastrofe, genereren mogelijkheden voor verzet tegen de prevalerende post-9/11 identiteit categorieën, ruimtelijke demarcaties, narratieve knelpunten alsmede dominante en conventionele herinneringen aan de ramp. De roman biedt ook een alternatieve zintuiglijk waarneembare sfeer rondom de catastrofe, die normaliter de voorkeur geeft aan verhaallijnen over een zeer selecte groep slachtoffers en helden. Hamid benadrukt de worsteling tussen audibiliteit en inaudibiliteit door gebruik te maken van de dramatisch monoloog als onconventionele vertelvorm, waardoor Changez de enige spreker is in de roman en het andere personage aldus onhoorbaar blijft.

Hoofdstuk drie bouwt voort op dit inzicht middels een analyse van het post 9/11 hiphopalbum *Sonic Jihad* van de Amerikaanse politiek rapper Paris. Hier vindt dus een transitie plaats van de stem en audibiliteit van een romanpersonage naar een letterlijke en woeste schreeuw van verzet door Paris’ tegengeluid betreffende de *war on terror* van George W. Bush en alle militaire en culturele gevolgen van dien. Thema's uit het vorige hoofdstuk, zoals nationale identiteit, culturele affiliatie en de constructie van de vijand, worden verkend door deze Afrikaans-Amerikaan die zijn nationale identiteit contrasteert met andere vormen van subjectiviteit en identificatie. Een zogenoemde interne alteriteit komt zo aan het licht, die elke simpele poging om een onderscheid te maken tussen vriend

en vijand, burger en vreemdeling, in- en uitgesloten, terrorist en patriot problematiseert. Anders dan Changez, die meer Amerikaans is dan Amerikanen zelf, is Paris een Amerikaan die een dergelijke identificatie weigert en daarvoor in de plaats een symbolische alliantie aangaat met de terroristen. Door deze weigering van post-9/11 patriottisme voert Paris de *war on terror* en status van de natie op andere wijze ten tonele en laat daarmee een ander geluid horen aangaande de geschiedenis van onderdrukking van zwarte mensen en zijn eigen globale en diasporische affiniteiten.

Hoofdstukken vier en vijf gaan voorbij aan het hoorbare en onderzoeken het domein van de zichtbaarheid via het analyseren van multiple catastrofe geïnduceerde zienswijzen. Hiertoe concentreren de twee hoofdstukken zich op twee zowel iconische als controversiële figuren in de *war on terror*: moslims en Taliban-strijders. De eerder opgeworpen vragen omtrent oppositionele identiteiten, zowel nationaal als cultureel, raken nu verder gecompliceerd door de toegevoegde dimensie van de Islam. In hoofdstuk vier richt de aandacht zich op de Canadese sitcom *Little Mosque on the Prairie*, die de alledaagse bezigheden van een moslimgemeenschap toont en deze vertaalt naar het populaire en makkelijk te verhapstukken genre van de *situation comedy*. Deze opzet opent mogelijkheden voor verzet omdat het tv-programma de vaak gebruikte vijandige terrorisme-gerelateerde beeldvorming van moslims ondervraagt en daarvoor in de plaats een meer banale blik werpt op moslims en Islam. Ik plaats moslimfiguren in een breder Rancièriaans visueel regime en beschrijf een alternatieve zichtbaarheid en visie die verankerd is in wat ik “oppositionele banaliteit” noem. Echter, ik vraag me in het hoofdstuk ook af of dit oppositionele proces van visuele normalisering van moslimidentiteiten wellicht al te gemakkelijk en onkritisch wordt aangenomen binnen de geldende nationale normen en waarden.

De ontregeling van het post-9/11 visuele landschap door de introductie van alternatieve zienswijzen staat ook centraal in mijn laatste case study, waar ik inga op de contra-visualisatie van de vijand in de *war on terror*: de Taliban. Het hoofdstuk bestudeert een reeks foto's van Talibanvolgers die in 2001 gemaakt zijn door Afghaanse fotografen in studio's in Kandahar. Deze foto's en portretten, gemaakt buiten het strijdveld, representeren het gezicht van de vijand. Wanneer geplaatst in de bredere context van oorlog, krijgen de foto's hun oppositionele betekenis, doordat ze contrasteren met de dominante beelden die gepromoot worden in de visuele circulatie. De foto's keren zich tegen de gangbare beeldvorming in de media van de Taliban als de “terrorist-vijand.” Naast het verstoren van de veronderstelde militante en masculiene identiteit van de Taliban, problematiseren de beelden ook het gangbare “wij-zij”-onderscheid omdat het uitnodigt tot een meer compassievolle zienswijze, waardoor ze niet langer als slechts de vijand worden gezien. Ik

ondervraag deze sympathieke visualisering echter door Rancières notie van esthetische dissensus toe te passen op de Taliban foto's teneinde te toetsen in hoeverre zo'n dissensuele zienswijze de controle over het waarneembare en het perceptuele kan aanvechten.

In de conclusie neem ik de vier case studies nog een laatste keer in overweging, om zowel hun convergenties als divergenties te verhelderen alsmede mijn kern standpunten. Ook verbreed ik het focus van mijn proefschrift door in te gaan op de discussie rondom de rol van het toeschouwerschap in deze artistieke manifestaties van verzet. Dit nodigt uit tot zowel een overweging van Rancières notie van de "geëmancipeerde" toeschouwer als mijn eigen kritische visie op zijn gedachtegoed.

– Translated by Thijs Witty and Menno van Watingen