

Muslim-Canadian Women's Enunciations: Sofia Baig's Performative Identities

Somaya Sami Sabry

Associate Professor,
Faculty of Arts, Ain
Shams University,
Egypt.

Abstract

In Sofia Baig's debut album *Daughter of Sand* (2009) the contested experience of Muslim-Canadian women's identity is explored and complicated through artistic enunciations of spoken word art. Within mainstream and popular culture, the Muslim woman's body has been a prominent terrain embodying the West's "Other," a space upon which many prejudices and preconceptions are mapped out and propagated. This is why, through the homogenizing discourses of mainstream media, Islam, with its various cultural and spiritual aspects, has been increasingly constructed as the violent "Other" and the oppressed Muslim woman as its poster girl. Despite real instances of oppression against Muslim woman which are

shaped by various social, political and historical aspects that cannot be simplistically reduced to religious practices, what interests me in this paper is the representations of Muslim women and Muslim-Canadian women artists' resistance and engagement with the prevailing stereotype of the victimized Muslim woman. What is alarmingly disconcerting about such a victimized image is that it robs these women of their subjectivity, reviving Orientalist discourses of "Othering" which objectified these women as exemplified in past nineteenth century Orientalist discourse and art.

Keywords: Spoken Word Art, Muslim Women, Canadian Muslim Identity, Feminism, Race and Identity

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In the representational pursuit over Muslim women's bodies, Muslim artists and performers contend with an accumulation of Orientalist spectres and discourses. These spectres and stereotypical discourses play an important role in shaping what I would like to refer to as a discursive racialization, which is shaped by the revival of reductive Orientalist discursive frameworks. By discursive racialization, I am referring to a process through which a religion like Islam, with all its varied cultural and historical aspects, has become raced in discourse. By raced I mean that this system of thought and spirituality has been narrowly materialized in mainstream Western culture, in the form of reductive discourses, which are assigned unquestioned actual and conceptual characteristics. In mainstream media, this discursive racialization was further complicated, by its being shaped against the political backdrop of the war in Afghanistan (2001), that was politically incorrectly termed "war on terror," and instances of hostility against Muslims in the West post 9/11. Moreover, this discursive racialization is what shapes how the Muslim woman's body is represented in mainstream media. In Sofia Baig's debut album *Daughter of Sand* (2009) the contested experience of Muslim-Canadian women's identity is explored and complicated through artistic enunciations of spoken word art. Within mainstream and popular culture, the Muslim woman's body has been a prominent terrain embodying the West's "Other," a space upon which many prejudices and preconceptions are mapped out and propagated. This is why, through the homogenizing discourses of mainstream media, Islam, with its various cultural and spiritual aspects, has been increasingly

constructed as the violent "Other" and the oppressed Muslim woman as its poster girl. Despite real instances of oppression against Muslim woman which are shaped by various social, political and historical aspects that cannot be simplistically reduced to religious practices, what interests me in this paper is the representations of Muslim women and Muslim-Canadian women artists' resistance and engagement with the prevailing stereotype of the victimized Muslim woman. What is alarmingly disconcerting about such a victimized image is that it robs these women of their subjectivity, reviving Orientalist discourses of "Othering" which objectified these women as exemplified in past nineteenth century Orientalist discourse and art.

This "Othering" has its discursive origins in Orientalist discourses of the nineteenth century which continue to play a formulative role in how Muslim women are represented in mainstream media to this day. Through the power of "cultural quotation" the repetition of certain cultural signs has served to fix these women within a limiting "nexus of various modes of representation" (Lowe 2-3). Currently in Canada, the traces of this Orientalism manifest themselves in the manner through which many issues about Muslim women are framed in Canadian mainstream media. A telling example was the representation of the debate on Sharia and how it escalated to crisis status, "a small event came to stand in for a crisis of giant proportions, one on to which was projected social anxieties about Muslim bodies" (Razack 149). Irrespective of the arguments for or against faith-based arbitration, what is worthy of analysis here is how this issue was framed within what Razack refers to as a

modernity/pre-modernity distinction which invokes the “spectre of a clash of civilizations” (170-171).

This modernity/pre-modernity framework is a governing factor in the representation of Muslim women’s issues, predetermining how the Canadian public and readers understand topics like faith-based arbitration. The binary mode of thought inherent within this framework often restricts Muslim women’s own attempts at relating their experiences, as a result of their being imprisoned by these polarizing positions. What is needed in the analysis of Muslim women’s experiences is a dynamic framework that strives to achieve a position that concentrates on the processual negotiation of cultural identities. Performance, as a space for enacting and imagining new identity positions, provides this dynamic possibility for observing Muslim-Canadian Women’s cultural negotiations on their own terms.

The Role of Spoken Word Art

Contemporary Muslim-Canadian spoken word artists, like Sofia Servando Baig use the performative space to re-imagine Muslim women’s representations and social arrangements in Canada. Baig recasts Muslim-Canadian women as active agents, challenging the limitations of the exotic/oppressed mainstream representational paradigms. By examining the performative aspects of Baig’s art, we can assess its endeavours at using a material representational site, like performance, to rewrite rooted reductive frameworks. Within such a context, several questions impose themselves such as how does Baig shape performance to practice the possibility of representing herself as an active agent and her Muslim-Canadian identity as dynamic? To what extent can performance be resistant when it is inscribed upon a Muslim woman’s body, if she wears a headscarf? Moreover, in

what ways do Baig’s poetic performances reposition Muslim-Canadian women’s voices?

After 9/11, mainstream North American media discourses seized the body of the Muslim woman as a “bundle in black” to frame the invasion of Afghanistan as an attempt to save Afghani women. Lila Abu-Lughod interrogates such reasoning pointing out:

Plastering neat cultural icons like ‘the Muslim woman’ over messier historical and political narratives doesn’t get you anywhere. What does this substitution accomplish? Why, one has to ask, didn’t people rush to ask about Guatemalan women, Vietnamese women (or Buddhist women), Palestinian women, or Bosnian women when trying to understand those conflicts? The problem gets framed as one about another culture or religion, and the blame for the problems in the world placed on Muslim men, now neatly branded as patriarchal.” (Lila Abu Lughod Interview)

Here, Abu-Lughod questions the role of the “Let’s save the women” discourse and how it is manipulated for political purposes. Irrespective of the actual real suffering and un-islamic treatment that many Afghani women have experienced and continue to experience, we must question and be wary of grandiose narratives that claim that the colonizing of any country takes place to free its women. This manipulation of women and their bodies has been a governing factor in colonialist discourses ever since the nineteenth century in France’s colonization of Algeria and England’s colonization of Egypt. Sofia Baig, a Muslim-Canadian performing poet and spoken word artist, questions reductive representations of Muslim women challenging the

representational frameworks and stereotypes that rob Muslim women of agency. She draws attention to the wide range of intersecting identity positions which these women traverse and how they live with and despite these intersectionalities. Paradoxically, such stereotypes only collude with extremist interpretations of Islam that limit women's roles and responsibilities in society.

Spoken word art provides Baig with the experimental, imaginative space where questions of race, gender and identity are foregrounded, by exploring them on the stage. This form of art originated as a section at record stores for LP's (long play albums) introduced in 1948, usually without accompaniment music. These recordings were mostly either poetry or recordings of play readings. Today, the section still exists and includes speeches and poetry, though the poetry is no longer necessarily music free as is clear in Baig's C.D. which uses percussion and music as background to her poetry. Spoken Word Poetry is a form of poetry that is performed aloud. It experienced a resurgence since 1990 but still lacks literary approbation leading to the "underrepresentation of spoken word poets in major poetry publications" (Fowler 182). As a Performance artist, Baig's attempts are at the cross-section of the realms of the political and artistic because her poetic attempts are not merely concerned with "the superficial structure of performance, but also with its effect on [...] culture and the search for modes of effective social change" (Dolan 97). After all, "[the] assertion of identity is not the goal of performance, but the point of departure where "[i]dentity becomes a site of struggle, at which the subject organizes and reorganizes competing discourses [such as gender, race and class] as they fight for supremacy" (96-97). In her performance then, audiences and listeners become actively involved in the struggle to redefine Muslim-

Canadian women's experiences as women, daughters, wives. Since its inception this mode of art was recognized as having potential to encourage civic engagement and the critique of social practices. In it the role of the poet becomes to awaken and motivate others directly through the oral tools of tone and rhythm counter-voicing the political hegemony (Desai 7-9)

Spoken Word as a Venue for Identity Negotiation

Accordingly, Baig's performance, in the form of (spoken word) poetry recital, foregrounds itself as a site of resistance and as a space for negotiating roles and affiliations. This performative mode explores the connections that constitute Muslim-Canadian women's identification positions, which are shaped by a complex conglomeration of geographical, historical and political conditions. However, an awareness of the supple nature of these conditions and their contingent nature is indicated through Baig's own diverse background, as a Pakistani-Chinese Muslim. Baig embodies the problematics of living the borders of various identity positions as a Pakistani, Chinese and Muslim woman. In a sense, Baig literally performs the malleability of the gaps and bridges shaping transformative cultural identities, through an interrogation of popular representations of the cultural assumptions which discursively formulate Muslims and Muslim women. Stuart Hall points out in his essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" that it is important to perceive cultural identities as multiple and simultaneous so that we are aware that cultural identities are not additive but rather transformative, since our experience of each identity affects the other. He points out, "Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation [...] they are subject to the

continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power.” (*Contemporary Sociological Thought*, 445). Such an understanding of cultural identities as transformative is useful in helping us conceive how and why Muslim and Canadian identities are negotiated and articulated within our current historical and political context, in Baig’s work.

In Baig’s performance, the resistant urgency of her need to negotiate her Muslim and Canadian identities co-mingles with the complexities of being Muslim and Canadian in a post 9/11 context. These attempts at negotiation are what shape her need for a form of women’s storytelling. Trinh T. Minh-ha foregrounds the agential performative potentialities latent in women’s storytelling, when she discusses storytelling as a formulating aspect for re-organizing marginalized voices within feminism (148-149). Baig’s poetic performance, as a storytelling attempt, can be regarded as playing a role in re-organizing marginalized women’s voices, attesting to the fact that feminism is not necessarily at odds with Islam or really a Western invention.

Islam and Feminism

*Islam does not need to be inherently oppositional to feminism, but can be seen as a space where Muslim scholar-activist women forge attempts at pro-active involvement not merely intellectual speculation, as most secular feminists accuse pro-faith Muslim feminists. In this, Muslim scholar feminists are positioned in a mutually exclusive conceptual space because they refuse the boundaries that both traditionalists and secularists impose upon them. Performance as a space for imagining new identity possibilities and as a space of becoming provides a productive arena for exploring the potential of Muslim scholar-activist women. Through engaging with Muslim scholar-activism and art, we are actually encouraging marginalized voices to

join into the conversation so that all views and stances are explored.

Due to her choice of spoken word performance, as an artistic medium through which she can challenge prevalent representations of herself and her culture, Baig walks this fine line. There is urgency in Baig’s need to voice her experience. Race and gender, as prominent factors in shaping her experience, become central issues in the context of Baig’s performance as she directly faces the stereotypes that frame how she is represented in mainstream Canadian media. Performance art, as a means of self-definition, becomes a primary tool for Baig to question prevalent stereotypes. What performance as a genre offers her is “a practice that lets [her] rehearse new social arrangements, in ways that require visceral investments of bodies, of time, of personal and cultural history” (Dolan 16). Through her poetic performances then, she is able to practice the possibility of representing herself as a public, active agent and her Muslim-Canadian identity as dynamic. She questions modernity/pre-modernity binary narratives through viscerally unwinding them on the stage. Through constantly rehearsing the intersection of the prevalent cultural histories of Muslim women’s representations and her positioned personal history, she undermines this binary opening space for crafting a more dynamic representational framework within which Muslim women can represent themselves and be represented. This is why Raphael D’abdon and Natalia Molebatsi argue that “[s]poken word poetry is a literary and cultural (and thus political) phenomenon that cannot be easily overlooked or dismissed” (60). Such a framework privileges the complexity of negotiating cultural identity positions and questions simplistic victimization roles that robs women of their subjectivity.

In her poetic performances, Baig directly undermines attempts to freeze the Muslim-Canadian woman within the framework of oppression and silence. In fact, her whole public performance seems to be a challenge to this reductive representation. Throughout her performance, we sense a great deal of anger and resentment, clearly expressed in her voice modulations which seem to spring out at the listener in heated retaliation. In fact, the disclaimer at the end of her C.D. expresses an awareness of this anger as Baig attempts to explain it to the unassuming listener, who may feel offended by it. She points out that she speaks of hate and resentment in order to achieve love and perfection. She suggests that she rarely writes of love because in her opinion it is beyond expression; she feels no need to directly express such emotion since she believes her words are “veiled with anger and soaked with love.” In her unconventional expression of love, anger and retaliation against prevalent media representations, and her embrace of unconventional images, her style and ideas are reminiscent of the Beat poets of the 50s and 60s. These poets were influenced by Eastern religions and known for their use of non-traditional poetic forms and their rejection of conventional social values. MK Smith and Joe Kraynak point out that “[i]n the 1950s and 60s the beatniks and hippies rekindled interest in spoken-word poetry by reacting to the icy political restrictions of the Cold War era” (20). Baig’s experimental style, informality and her use of informal phrasing and diction, to capture spontaneity of emotion, seem quite reminiscent of this attitude direction.

Spoken Word Poems

In “Blossoming Words,” Baig points to the activist roots inherent in her poetic performances, stating her right to anger and drawing attention to the contiguous relationship between anger and love, blurring

binary opposition between these two emotions in a diasporic individual’s experience. She points out, “I am not in the business of selling love with my words. I merely pick the fruit of peace from this earth and raise it to your lips, praying that you accidentally swallow the seed so that it grows within you through the poison of belligerence.” Images of growth are central to this poem as Baig explores how experiences of rootedness and belonging are stunted, conveying in the process her own struggles, as a diasporic individual negotiating cultural identity, against the “belligerence” which is the main barrier that destabilizes her Muslim-Canadian identity. As she states here, her anger is deeply entwined with her urgent need for changing preconceptions regarding her diasporic community “can’t you see my hand pressed out begging for change.” The phrase “begging for change” is repeated several times throughout this poem, underlining the urgent need for transformation. She justifies her inability to speak sweet blossoming words which celebrate by pointing out, “[i]t’s hard to see flowers bloom in this concrete.” This image visually conveys the barriers which physically impede the blossoming and full fruition of her Muslim-Canadian experience. Stunted growth becomes the overwhelming image in this poem drawing attention to the various changes needed to encourage a growth that embraces the dynamics of the cultural negotiation of identities. Such growth imagery carries within it the dynamic analytical frameworks needed in discussions of Muslim-Canadian women and their experiences. Baig’s blossoming words are the fertile outcome of such novel attempts. Though these blossoms are tinged with the pain and suffering resulting from facing prevalent stereotypes on a daily basis, there is still hope in Baig’s recurrent call for change. In her poem “Daughter of the Sand,” Baig further undermines prevalent representations

by directly citing and mockingly challenging the stereotypes shaping her diasporic Muslim-Canadian identity position.

In this poem, Baig increases the tempo of her speech, further highlighting the urgency in her resistant poetic performance. The anger she experiences as a result of media representations of Muslims reaches a climax, “a seeker of pity that I am not, so I ask you politely, please stop misinforming humanity about who and what I am.” In this line, she breaks the silence and redeems the right to represent herself instead of being represented. Throughout this poem, in angry resilience, she questions many of the stereotypes ascribed to her. She cites each of them questioning the basis upon which they stand. In a ridiculing tone, she questions attempts at disputing Muslim women’s decision-making abilities, “left to my own devices I’ll marry an oppressive man.” Secular feminists often mistrust women’s decision-making processes, when they are framed within a faith-based paradigm, arguing that women’s logic and judgements are flawed by faith, because such decision-making processes still function within a patriarchal pattern. Baig seems to be taking a jab at such arguments, through her tone of voice which protests such objectification of women that denies them agency. She goes on to undermine images that stress her dependency, “they say my father never allowed me to be independent so I’ve got chains hanging from my feet and hands.” This oppression is embodied in stereotypical representations of the Muslim woman as leading “a life of servitude, a typical daughter of the sand.” She directly addresses the media several times stating at one point, “ignorance is the source of all this falsehood. You dictate my life as if you’re living it.” Once again, here, she reclaims the right to tell her own story. She defies prevalent representations of Muslim women who choose to wear the headscarf stating resiliently, “thinking I’m

illiterate because my hair is not visible.” She foregrounds her powerful agential position as a Muslim woman who refuses to be treated as a materialistic object arguing, “I am not a second-class citizen to men. I am and will not be the Barbie to your Ken.” She stresses her subject position, “I am neither a shadow nor an accessory.” Throughout this poem then, she subverts the oriental image of the “daughter of sand” challenging the feigned submissiveness which outlines it. She lists the spaces of agency that many Muslim-Canadian women live in both the private and public social spheres. In “My Weapon” she further elaborates upon this agency, though on the political level.

In her poem “My Weapon” Baig attempts to translate her and many other Muslim-Canadians’s experiences of the death and desolation in Palestine and how she positions herself in relation to it as part of the Muslim diaspora. Throughout this poem she returns to the question “What are we fighting for?” In an attempt to transfer to her listeners the daily humiliations and suffering that the Palestinian people face everyday, she attempts to give a face to a side of suffering that Canadians are very often not allowed to see. Here, ‘mouth’ throughout this poem is referred to as a weapon that will not cease fire, metaphorically underlining her insistence on narrating the story of suffering in Palestine. She discusses the struggle to tell this particular story of suffering pointing to the barriers that silence her, such as the fear of being dubbed a terrorist and the anxieties about surveillance that such expression could entail. Through the paradox that her mouth is her only weapon, she questions the criteria according to which she and members of her community are allowed to express their right to free speech and how the unstudied generalization of the term terrorist plays a role in such silencing. In a sense, she refers to the general climate of terror and fear that many Muslims in North America

experienced after the tragic events of 9/11. The security measures that followed that tragic day played an immense role in shaping how Muslim-Americans and Muslim-Canadians viewed themselves and their communities, instigating in many instances a self-censorship which Baig discusses in her poem. This self-censorship takes the shape of a fear of speaking out against clear injustices in places like Palestine, lest one's political stance be mistaken for terrorism. The recurring image of the mouth as the only weapon she possesses is an assurance, on her behalf, that what she really seeks is peaceful resistance. She encrypts this resistance on her performative body on the public stage as she faces her audiences wearing the headscarf.

Performance and the Headscarf

A central feature of Baig's performance that deserves consideration is the fact that she herself wears the headscarf. This aspect of her dress raises questions regarding the headscarf as a prop during the performance. What role does the headscarf play during the performance and how does it frame Baig's poetry? Her performance directly plays on the stereotype of the oppressed Muslim woman by resituating one of its central components which is the hijab/veil/headscarf. Her act willingly allows the discrepancies between her own representation of herself and the representations assigned to her by mainstream media discourses, inviting an experience of the uncanny within her audiences and listeners that can be considered a form of resistance. The familiar oppressed silent veiled woman stands before her audience and retaliates fluently against prevalent representations of herself. Though Freud argues that the experience of the uncanny leads to repulsion and rejection of the object, one can argue that such an experience of the uncanny can also lead to transformation. Within a performative

cultural context, the uncanny experience takes place when what I have familiarized myself with according to prevalent cultural representations as oppressed and silent, speaks, resists and retaliates before me. Arguably, this can incur a shift in how I come to frame future conceptualizations of members of that cultural group, in this case Muslim women. In a sense then, the activism of performances by artists like Baig is entwined with an attempt to instigate such an uncanny experience, through shifting representations of Muslim women from objectification to agency.

Performers, like Baig, initiate such a shift through their performances. Manipulation of the audiences's tendency for uncanny experiences can become a valuable tool in re-narrating Muslim-Canadian women's stories and representations. This re-narration challenges ethnocentric biases about either strictly Muslim or Canadian identities, dispersing fetishized representations of the oppressed Muslim woman, so popular in the media. The debates surrounding how to frame Aqsa Parvez's murder (2007) in Canadian media, which oscillated between terminologies of honour killing and domestic violence, epitomize the complexities shaping representations of Muslim-Canadian women's experiences. In this case an Ontario man was convicted of murdering his sixteen year old daughter in 2007. Statements at court revealed that Aqsa had been experiencing conflict at home because of her choice to wear Western style clothing. A need for reconfiguring the representational discourses shaping these women's experiences becomes evident. Such an approach to Muslim-Canadian women's negotiations of their identities, opens analysis of hotly disputed topics such as the headscarf in relation to a multitude of social and economic experiences, which surmount attempts of reducing the act of choosing to wear a headscarf to oppression and the

limitation of women's rights. Baig's performance undermines attempts at reducing the diversity and richness of being Muslim-Canadian to convenient racial stereotypes - wearing the headscarf is only one aspect of her Muslim-Canadian experience.

Discussions of Muslim women in general often tend to focus and revolve around veiling and unveiling, as if this were the only obstacle to Muslim women's liberation and the only means to improve their status. The recurrence of this topic is governed partially by the remnants of colonial modernity discourses, which claimed that women's freedom is dependent upon unveiling them. Within feminist discourse, it is related to an attempt on the behalf of many secular Western feminists to apply their historical and political paradigms upon other societies, without taking into consideration varied conceptions of time, space, privacy and historical and political specificity. We need to acknowledge that rejecting the universal, modern, secular discourses on women's rights is different from the reductive approach of merely accepting religious medieval constructions of law and interpretations of text as final and absolute.

Performing Cultural Identity

The prevalent discursive racialization that shapes how Muslim-Canadian women and their experiences are represented can be deterred through stressing the experience of *living* the borders of cultural identities and this is what Baig's performance does. Muslim-Canadian women's experiences need to be narrated with the hope of initiating mutual understanding and dialogue, rather than merely bridging gaps. Baig's poetic performances gesture in the direction of opening such spaces for dialogue. Such an approach questions the reductive simplification of these women's varied

experiences, with the hope of avoiding attempts at constructing absolute identities. Many discrepancies take place when "[p]eople become bearers of the differences that the rhetoric of absolute identity invents" (Gilroy 104). Arguably then, instead of highlighting absolute identities which further serve to obscure Muslim-Canadian women's experiences through polarization, the aim should be to encourage a translation of their experiences that traverses the boundaries of cultural identities. Arguably then, no one particular epithet can encapsulate the experiences of being Muslim-Canadian because such an experience is revealed to be contingent on positionality. The headscarf as a part of this experience is dependent upon such positionality, since this form of dress both stabilizes and destabilizes identity: "visible markers [like the headscarf] both stabilize their identity as Muslim while simultaneously destabilizing their identity by constantly calling into question the degree [of their affiliation]" (Abdurraqib 58). Accordingly, collective markers of identity cannot only be interpreted as reductive attempts to essentialize identity, since this choice of dress within the diasporic context, destabilizes these women's position within Canadian identity narrative(s). It becomes evident then that the headscarf cannot be interpreted according to binary modes which fix these women within the context of clashing Eastern and Western civilizations, predetermining their position as oppressed.

Performance, in Baig's context, does not function merely on metaphorical and ideological levels; but rather also, on the actual personal level as Muslim-Canadian women like Baig perform the limits and parameters of their identities, weaving those boundaries into an understanding of multiple affiliations. A study of Muslim-Canadian women's experience should hence involve an analysis of how these women re-narrate and renegotiate their affiliations in the diaspora

and how the hyphen in hyphenated identities becomes either a bridge or a gap or concurrently both in relation to particular historical and political contexts. Representation takes precedence, as Baig blurs the boundaries of what it is to be Muslim through resistance to the gendered stereotype of the submissive, oppressed Muslim woman. By calling attention to the strong relationship between dominant stereotypical representations of Muslims and Baig's resistant poetic representations, performance becomes a space for struggle over representation, which Muslim-Canadian women performers like Baig seek to expand beyond the mere limits of positive and negative images. Performance as a genre is particularly well suited to investigating the politics of Muslim-Canadian representation because performance art allows women "to insert their subjectivities into a representational apparatus" underlined by the idea that the body can be "a material and representational site at which ideology might be rewritten" (Dolan 3-4). Accordingly, performance becomes an ideal site to resist, rewrite and renegotiate the parameters and limits of Muslim-Canadian experiences.

Elizabeth Fine and Jean Haskell Speer discuss the power which performance incurs:

[T]he power of performance to create, store, and transmit identity and culture lies in its reflexive nature [...] performative reflexivity is a condition in which 'a sociocultural group, or its most perceptive members acting representatively, turn, bend, or reflect back upon themselves upon the relations, actions, symbols, meaning, codes, roles, statuses, social structures, ethical and legal rules, and other sociocultural components which make up their public selves'. (8)

In this argument, Fine and Speer encourage a conception of identity which does not revert to essentialist politics, but rather bases itself upon negotiation, transformation, performance and strategic positionality, suggesting a more dynamic framework which scholars can apply to the study of Muslim-Canadian women's experiences. It involves transformation of reductive representations, with the aim of changing prevalent perspectives created by mainstream media. Muslim-Canadian women's performance adopts and encourages a performative reflexivity, through which "sociocultural components" are reconsidered and rethought through the manipulation of experiences such as the uncanny within audiences and listeners.

Baig reflects upon her cultural identity through performing and constituting her identification processes and subversively remolding reductive essentialist representations of herself and her religion and its culture(s). Accordingly, what recurs in Baig's performances of identity is the embodied experience of Muslim-Canadian women's sense of belonging, as a result of the global politics shaping representations of Muslims around the world. These are all critical experiences which shape why and how these women seek to negotiate their cultural identities. Baig critiques stereotypes through performance. By resisting cultural productions of herself, she becomes a cultural producer, re-imagining herself and her culture through her poetic performances. In re-imagining herself through poetic performance, a mode of production, she gains agency and interferes in the construction of her representation and her culture's representation in the Canadian mosaic. She becomes a cultural producer not merely a passive consumer.

Muslim-Canadian Women in the Diaspora

Accordingly, figuring Muslim-Canadian women's diasporic positions takes place through analyzing the dynamics between structure and malleability. In the end then, Muslim-Canadian women performers, like Baig, are constantly performing the complexities of practicing life in the diaspora through negating attempts to fix and freeze their identity positions into convenient categories. As a Muslim-Canadian performer in the diaspora, Baig's work represents a particularly productive space for a study of the convergences and divergences of feminism(s) and racialized and Orientalist representations. Within her diasporic position, experiences as well as collective cultural identities are constantly redefined and narrated. Through an analysis which concentrates upon her position in the Muslim diaspora the contingencies shaping what it means to be Muslim-Canadian become all the more evident since "[b]y embracing diaspora, theories of identity turn instead toward contingency, indeterminacy, and conflict [...] [w]ith the idea of valuing diaspora more highly than the coercive unanimity of the nation" (Gilroy 128). Along these lines, an engagement with the artistic expressions of Muslim-Canadian women in the diaspora aids in achieving a better understanding of the complex set of correlatives through which cultural identities become raced within representation. This is why diaspora writers and performers inhabit a fertile space for forging intra-cultural understandings through their mediating roles between cultures. Moreover, the poetic performances of Baig take such cultural reformulations to a new level, by introducing an overtly racialized correlative, through which these performances undermine racial tensions and prejudices by enacting them and exaggerating them.

Baig's poetry functions through what Stuart Hall refers to as "articulation," as it actuates a point of separation, an instance of incomprehension, resulting from the application of arcane discursive paradigms used to describe Muslim-Canadian women's experiences. By pinpointing such a crisis of translation shaping the various aspects of her identity, Baig instigates the need for moving beyond the old paradigms and the necessity for change. Arguably then, her diasporic narrative functions through transformation. For Baig, the "monolithic Muslim woman" is the mythic "object of representation" that she seeks to dismantle by parsing the aggregation of images associated with her. She foregrounds the lived experience of being Muslim-Canadian, wearing the headscarf, and negotiating cultures and political affiliations. In her poetic performances, Baig fragments monolithic representations of Muslim women who choose to wear the headscarf, troubling attempts to read individual women as representative of all Muslim women. In this manner, she seeks to redefine the parameters of collective identity markers in diaspora, opening up collective identity to nuances of difference and arguing for the possibility of remaining individual within the collective.

Baig fragments the collective identity category, opening it up to the differences which ensue from positionality. As "a strange story," the headscarf/*hijab* in Baig's poems can serve as an experience which communicates collective identity narratives in the diaspora seeking to question the oppressive connotations appended to it by mainstream media. Concurrently, such narratives seek to undermine the reductive sediments shaping these racialized representations. In this sense, the experiences of Muslim-Canadian women in the diaspora constantly call attention to the imposed hierarchical categories which assign terms like freedom, choice and women's

independence to different cultures. It draws attention to the danger of formulating “first world,” grand emancipatory narratives, which seek to impose set notions of modernization upon the woman who wears a headscarf, drawing attention instead to the multiplicity of veiling practices. However, the question remains, to what extent can such an unconventional and as some would argue rather angry means of expression give birth to understanding? My answer is through

willed attempts on behalf of audiences and listeners, of this performative spoken art, to assume a position of empathy that attempts to seek the source of the pain woven in the lines and voice modulations of this poetry and understand its source such a mode of expression can open venues for discussion. Baig’s mode of spoken word art represents an intersectionality of positions that explore the boundaries of inclusivity in Feminist thought.

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