

*BOOK REVIEW*

Razack, Sherene. 2008. *Casting Out: The Eviction of Muslims from Western Law and Politics*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. ISBN 9780802094971. Paperback: 29.95 CAD. Pages: 250.

Reviewed by Sedef Arat-Koç  
Ryerson University

Even though the discourse of security in the 'war on terror' has come to naturalize otherwise unacceptable violations, for a segment of people, of even the most basic civil rights in law, policy and political practice, the speed and political ease with which liberal democracies have been able to introduce, accept and live with these violations should trouble anyone who would want to prevent future holocausts. Sherene Razack's *Casting Out: The Eviction of Muslims from Western Law and Politics* is a book on the treatment of Muslims in/by Western societies in the post-September 11, 2001 world.

Looking at how, not just 'terrorists' or armed opponents, but also civilians, immigrants and refugees are categorically treated differently on the basis of their Muslim identity, *Casting Out* interrogates the ways in which race thinking has played a central role in enabling and justifying the treatment Muslims as 'bare life' stripped of legal/political status, in law, policy and politics. Race thinking helps depict Muslims as a different type of humanity, deserving a different legal regime. Using Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben's work, Razack argues that post-9/11 the treatment of Muslims constitutes a case of the 'camp,' a state of exception whereby the law itself has (paradoxically) been used to suspend the rule of law, to place people in a state of indeterminacy regarding their protection under the law, and to cast certain bodies outside the rules of the political community.

Operating in anti-terrorism legislation, immigration law or in the conditions of detention and imprisonment of Muslims, the 'camp' is enabled by the racialization of Muslims, through 'culture talk' about Islam working as 'race talk.' Organized in two sections, *Casting Out* focuses on the gendered racialization of Muslim men and women in the figures of the 'dangerous Muslim men' and the 'imperilled Muslim women,' both juxtaposed against the implicit figure of the 'civilized European.'

The first chapter focuses on the cases of the five Muslim men charged under the security certificate program in Canada. Razack argues that rather than building solid evidence on the actions of the charged, the

cases have been based on drawing general parallels between the belief systems of the charged and the worldview of known terrorists in other cases. The chapter demonstrates how the characteristics of the security certificate program, such as the denial of due process, questionable standards of jurisprudence and indefinite detention, are naturalized when Muslim men are depicted as irredeemably irrational, fanatic and violent, representing a different kind of humanity altogether.

Chapter 2 discusses the case of sexualized torture of Iraqis by US Army personnel in the Abu Ghraib prison. Razack rejects some of the common interpretations of the case in the media and by some academics. Drawing parallels between the case of the 'Somalia affair' involving the torture and murder of Somalian civilians by Canadian soldiers working as 'peacekeepers' in the 1990s, which she analyzed in her previous book *Dark Threats and White Knights: The Somalia Affair, Peacekeeping and the New Imperialism* (University of Toronto Press, 2004), and the case in Abu-Ghraib, Razack argues that the abuse represents neither the moral corruption of a few 'bad apples' nor an outcome of stressful conditions for soldiers. Razack offers an interlocking approach which integrates analyses of race, gender and sexuality. Interrogating the complexity of the ways race thinking operates by looking into 'desire in fantasies of race, and of race in fantasies of desire' (Robert Young, cited in Razack, 73), this approach interrogates the deep psychic structures of violence.

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The second section of the book on 'imperilled' Muslim women analyzes the co-optation of feminist ideas and some feminists in the 'war on terror.' Chapter 3 analyzes three recent books by Oriana Fallaci, Phyllis Chesler and Irshad Manji. Razack shows how all three texts ascribe to the logic of culture clash in how they treat gender as a central site demonstrating cultural flaws of Islam and the superiority of the West. Drawing attention to how well all three books have sold and been positively reviewed, Razack interrogates 'the popularity of racist arguments that claim the ground of gender equality' (87). Even though many feminists have expressed their opposition to the 'war on terror' and these books may not be taken to represent opinions of most Western feminists, Razack's cautionary remarks about the significance of these texts are well placed. In addition to these and similar texts being widely read and receiving additional exposure in the media, what has been worrisome has been the inability of feminist opponents of the war to have their opinions heard in public space. With critical feminist voices silenced, marginalized, or even demonized, authors such as Fallaci, Chesler and

Manji have indeed come to represent the public face of feminism in the 'war on terror.'

The last two chapters highlight how culturalist approaches to Islam and Muslims may lead public discourses and policies in directions which may not necessarily benefit Muslim women. Chapter 4 on Norway shows how feminist organizations and academics have contributed to both the societal discourse and the policy and legal initiatives on forced marriages. Razack critiques the culturalism in the work of these scholars and activists who blame abstract, static and insular notions of 'Muslim culture' for social problems. For a better understanding and more effective strategies for activism and policy, Razack argues for historically specific and contextualized analyses, which would reveal the material structures shaping lives of immigrants both before they leave their homelands and after they arrive in Europe.

The final chapter in the book focuses on the 'Sharia debate' in Ontario. The debate took place in 2004 and 2005 when Canadian feminists from both Muslim and non-Muslim backgrounds expressed alarm and opposition to considerations by the government to extend the sections of the Arbitration Act of Ontario (which already allowed for private arbitration) to Muslims who would want to apply Sharia law to the settlement of family disputes. Razack's critical discussion focuses on the framing of the debate. Razack argues that through both the East/West binary it has evoked and the rather unquestioned faith expressed in secularism and the state, the debate has gone in the wrong direction. She argues that strategies need to reflect on the multiple forms and locations of patriarchy, and of the implications of different forms of governmentality both nationally and transnationally.

*Casting Out*  is passionate in its language, as it is rigorous in its theoretical engagement and analysis. It is a book written with a sense of urgency, but also with the patience involved in rigorous and detailed academic work. It is rich in theory as well as empirical detail. It is eloquently written. It reads easily, almost deceptively so, given the richness of its analysis.

*Casting Out*  convincingly demonstrates that race thinking, rather than being limited to racist bigots, is common in liberal and feminist circles and enjoys a hegemonic position in mainstream political and legal institutions. It is a good example of how academic work can be used to bear intellectual witness and provide a moral mirror to prevent the kind of slide in public discourse, law and politics that may lead to the wrong kind of policies or even future holocausts.