Emancipation in an Islamophobic age: Finding agency in “nonrecognition,” “refusal,” and “self-recognition”

Nadiya N. Ali

Department of Sociology, York University

Abstract: The existing Islamophobia literature has aptly illustrated how the tragedy of 9/11 and the discourses that followed have situated Muslims in a multifaceted system of reductive caricatures and security structures such that the Muslim subject “can at a moment’s notice be erected as [an] object of supervision and discipline” (Morey & Yaqin, 2011, p. 5-6). This essay builds off this structural analysis, but orients attention to the agents that sit at the receiving end of this architecture. Examining an annual multi-medium exhibit featuring the artistic works of Muslim women in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), I ask what (re)imaginings and possibilities of place, voice, and emancipation are available to those who experience Islamophobia in the contemporary moment. *(Mus)interpreted* — a reference to *Muslim misinterpreted* — is an exhibit oriented towards uncovering, dismantling, and rectifying the politics of living and finding “home” amidst an increasingly securitized and racialized field of operation that propagates the Muslim subject as a “haunting” presence (Tyrer & Sayyid, 2012). Engaging with the artistic statements of the nearly two dozen multi-medium curated pieces, I ask what possibilities of subaltern agency and emancipation emerge from a grounded theory engagement with *(Mus)interpreted*? Additionally, considering the exhibit locates its objectives in the language of recognition and misrecognition, this essay analyzes the politics of recognition as it relates to subaltern agency and emancipatory possibilities, or as the curators put it, the potentiality for locating “inclusive-future[s]”.

Key words: critical race, critical Muslim studies, gendered Islamophobia, emancipation

Introduction

In this paper, I critically engage with an annual multi-medium exhibit titled *(mus)interpreted*, featuring the artistic works of Muslim women in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). More specifically, leveraging a grounded theory approach (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001), the paper will closely explore and engage with the entire set of artistic statements displayed in the Fall 2016 opening. This exploration is done with the aim of arriving at a reading of the exhibit as a curated whole. Charmaz and Mitchell (2001) explain grounded theory to be a method of “mov[ing] the research and the researcher toward theory development” in a dynamic back-and-forth manner that aims to tease out operations and social processes (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001, p.160). Furthermore, the conceptual and political motivations that underpin this exploration are driven by an interest in the power, possibilities, and contours of the subalternized to reimagine themselves, and post 9/11 Muslim subjectivities more broadly, in the Euro-Atlantic context.

My introduction to *(mus)interpreted* sparked an exploration into Spivak’s (1988) oft-cited question “can the subaltern speak?” With all its implications for agentic possibilities, Spivak’s question stood in juxtaposition to the public speech act organized by, curated by, and featuring the work of Muslim women as part of *(mus)interpreted*. In the post 9/11 moment, Muslim women are situated as subalternized figures in a field of multiple jeopardy¹ through which their practices and bodies are regularly caricatured and picked-up as political tropes in the service of empire (Mamdani, 2005; Meer & Modood, 2010; Morey & Yaqin, 2011; Sayyid, 2010). Meanwhile, the everyday is shrouded in the violent realities of what Zine (2006) refers to as “gendered Islamophobia.” For Spivak, agentic voice is speech that does not simply “re-inscribe, co-opt, and rehearse neo-colonial [hegemonic] imperatives of domination [subjectification]” (Graves, 1998). As a public exhibit that was run, curated, and produced by Muslim women, *(mus)interpreted* therefore represents an act of projecting one’s agentic voice and *self*, despite ongoing experiences of subalternity, racialization, marginalization, and stigmatization in the post 9/11 moment. But, how exactly is this self/voice projected? Speaking as politicized, securitized, racialized, and scrutinized subjects, how do the Muslim women featured in *(mus)interpreted* highlight the contours, possibilities, and impossibilities of subaltern agency? With these overarching concerns in mind, I set out on a project to explore

¹ ‘Multiple jeopardy’ is a term that I borrow from Deborah K. King (1988): “The modifier ‘multiple’ refers not only to several, simultaneous oppressions but to the multiplicative relationships among them as well. In other words, the equivalent formulation is racism multiplied by sexism multiplied by classism” (p.7).

themes of subalternity, agency, and emancipation through a careful exploration of *(mus)interpreted*.

Throughout my analysis, I employ a grounded theory approach to methodologically enter into dialogue with *(mus)interpreted*, and use my overarching concerns as “gentle guidelines” (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001, p. 161). More specifically, my analysis predominately concentrates on the artistic statements displayed with each of the artistic pieces featured in the exhibit. Thereby, a thematic narrative analysis method is employed in a dialogical manner bringing the individual artistic statements into conversation with the curated aims of *(mus)interpreted* (Bauman, 1986; Bischooping & Gazso, 2016; Chase, 20000; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). Taking seriously this dialogical approach, I begin my exploratory work by focusing on the exhibition’s opening statement—which outlines the intentions and objectives of the curators—as a means of moving my overarching set of concerns into exact questions of operation. Furthermore, I also take the very title of the exhibit, *(mus)interpreted*, seriously because when it is read in conjunction with the opening statement, it underscores a central theme meant to orient the viewer’s attention towards a politics of recognition/misrecognition. More specifically, the opening statement centers an objective of uncovering, dismantling, and rectifying the manner in which Muslim womanhood is represented and consumed: “the artists document and reflect on their lived realities, interrogating the notions and spaces in which Muslim women are defined and redefined ... provid[ing] alternative perspectives through a collective envisioning...” (Truth and Dare Team, 2016). Based on these initial points of entry and following my aforementioned “gentle guidelines,” I thus developed the following set of research questions: 1) How is the issue of misinterpretation/misrecognition spoken to by the exhibit as a curated whole? 2) How does the corrective-rectifying frame come to be addressed? 3) How does the exhibit speak to the politics of recognition as relating to subaltern agentic and emancipatory possibilities? I contend that although *(mus)interpreted* does, in Spivak’s (1988) words, “re-inscribe and rehearse” (p. 274) dominant frames for the sake of outlining the contours of misrecognition, the exhibit taken as a whole more strongly highlights impulses of subversion, slippage, and “turning away”² as the height of agentic action and emancipatory (re)imagining. In other words, rather than centering a (re)inscribed corrective construction of self in order to satisfy the optics of power, *(mus)interpreted* makes a move into the uneven terrain of non-recognition, “refusal” (Simpson, 2014), and “self-recognition” (Coulthard, 2014) as sites of rectification and emancipatory possibilities.

² Coulthard (2014) and Simpson (2014) both speak of “turning away” as a politics stance that moves away from the “politics of recognition.” Simpson (2014) defines “turning away” as a strategic act involving a dual refusal: 1) to engage in the hegemonic recognition game of being situated and managed; and 2) to be politically subsumed/consumed by the overarching system.

The first section of the paper begins by outlining the socio-political climate and racializing logics that have given rise to the North-Atlantic Muslim art scene, followed by a discussion of the politics of recognition as relating to racialized subaltern subjects (Coulthard, 2014; Fanon, 1952, 1961; Taylor, 1994). Afterwards, I examine *(mus)interpreted's* artistic and opening statements using a thematic narrative analysis approach. The paper's analysis and discussion section are informed by a broad Fanonian frame that also deploys the recent and highly acclaimed works of Glen Coulthard (2014) and Audra Simpson (2014). More specifically, the politics of "refusal" (Simpson 2014) and the politics of "self-recognition" (Coulthard 2014) are leveraged as key conceptual tools by which I think through concerns of subaltern agency and the possibilities of emancipatory (re)imaginings as conveyed by the exhibit.

The Terrain: Framing the "Muslim Problem"

A cursory survey of the North-Atlantic Muslim landscape over the past two decades demonstrates a considerable growth in the Muslim art scene (Ahmed, 2010; Ahmed, 2011; Morey, & Yaqin, 2011). Surveying the North American Muslim art scene in the post 9/11 era, Morey and Yaqin (2011) identify a youthful artistic expansion within the Muslim public space that includes film, theater, music, fine art, fashion, comedy, creative writing and poetry; however, these artistic developments have largely remained unexplored in the academic sphere. In their respective studies of the North American Muslim landscape, Akbar Ahmed (2010) and Leila Ahmed (2011) explain that the post 9/11 generation seems to place an overwhelming emphasis on dialogue and engagement in response to increased Muslim scrutiny and securitization. Considering that, as Morey and Yaqin (2011) write, the contemporary moment marks "an atmosphere wherein Muslims can at a moment's notice be erected as objects of supervision and discipline," survival seems to depend on a proactive attempt at "engagement" (p. 5-6). Morey and Yaqin (2011) continue by arguing that popular misrepresentations of Muslims have to be understood as being situated within a layered system of regulative, legislative, and security-centered architectures. This allows Muslim bodies and practices to become everyday topics of public scrutiny, in addition to objects leveraged for nation/consensus-building needs (Mamdani, 2005; Morey & Yaqin, 2011; Razack, 2007). As Dalia Mogahed (2013) shows in her Gallup poll study of anti-Muslim trends in the United States, the rise in anti-Muslim rhetoric and hate crimes moves rather tightly with the ups-and-downs of election cycles and campaigning periods. Thus,

(mus)interpreted sits within a broader socio-political backdrop, a climate wherein representation, dialogue, and interchange have become politically laden endeavours, putting the very existence and livability of Muslim lives at stake.

The discourses that followed the tragedy of 9/11 not only rejuvenated longstanding orientalist and Eurocentric prejudices directed towards Muslim subjects, but also renewed some of these “old” prejudices through contemporary racial grammars and structures (Bayoumi 2006; Meer & Modood, 2010; Razack 2007; Tyrer & Sayyid, 2012). Razack (2007), speaking about the racialization of Muslims, explains that the Muslim question has fundamentally become a question of management through eviction, writing: “I wish to underline that the eviction of Muslims from political community is a racial *process* that begins with Muslims being marked as a different level of humanity” (p. 176). For Razack (2007), it is “race thinking...[that] render these evictions invisible or as instances of mere fidelity to the rule of law and [as] legitimate defence” (p. 176). Similarly, Goldberg (1993) argues that racial ordering naturalizes social hierarchies, such that racial inequalities appear “...given, fixed from on high, seemingly natural phenomena imposed[...]upon an innocent and so non-responsible social order” (p. 83). Consequently, Goldberg (1993) concludes that race “establishes and rationalizes the order of difference as law of nature” (p. 81). As other critical race scholars note, the naturalization of racial hierarchies can take hold irrespective of whether this order is thought of biologically or culturally, marked phenotypically or performatively (Omi & Winant, 1994). Continuing with this understanding of “race thinking” and the racialization process as that which seeks to order and manage, Tyrer and Sayyid (2012) argue that the Muslim is racialized as a haunting phantom-like figure, “a ghostly presence” simultaneously “unreal” and “jarringly hyperreal” to the logic and gaze of hegemony (p. 355). In other words, Tyrer and Sayyid (2012) hold that the racialization of Muslim identities and bodies is built according to a logic that simultaneously holds “Muslimhood” as a frozen artefactual subjectivity that is out-of-place and time, shifting and in excess, forever unknowable, and thus an “incompletely realizable” figure that slips all attempts at management (p. 354). Likewise, Bayoumi (2006) argues that in the wake of 9/11, a reformulation of crude early 20th century race logics came to develop “a typology of Muslim[hoods]” (p. 288) that, according to Mamdani (2005), reduces the Muslim subject to the “not-yet-modern” good Muslim versus “the anti-modern” bad Muslim (p. 28). Thus, it is important to keep in mind the moral and subjective meanings that underpin the racialization of Muslims given that they help manage practices and performances deemed disruptive to the modern/postmodern enterprise. Nevertheless, as Meer and Modood (2010) argue, the racing of Muslims also comes with a strong ocular and embodied dimension which allows for the possibility of speaking of a

“Muslim appearance.” Mamdani (2005) explains, the work of managing Muslim becomes the work of “identifying Muslim” or “spotting Muslim” in order to safeguard the ability to project pristine white futures (p. 19). Brought into the field of vision, the Muslim body is racialized and identified as an ‘anti-modern threat,’ seen as carrying “a profound ability for destruction” (Mamdani, 2005, p. 19).

As a consequence of “spotting Muslim,” brown bodies are often pigeon-holed as the likely site of Muslimness. As Sayyid (2010) asserts, “Muslimistan” has been located on the map by lumping a massively diverse range of peoples from Middle Asia, North Africa, and the Subcontinent into a bearded and veiled brown figure. The process of reading bodies as a signal for Muslimhood, however, is fraught with inconsistencies and illogic (Tyrer & Sayyid, 2010). The task of racialization, as a mechanism of fixing and drawing observable boundaries on the Other (Goldberg, 1993), is complicated and interrupted by the fact that Muslim subjectivities are found far past the narrowly marked geography of “Muslimistan.” As such, the link between the body and Muslimhood is tenuous at best, which leads Tyrer and Sayyid (2010) to argue that the Muslim figure comes to be marked as a “haunting presence” that cannot simply be fixed on the brown body. Thus, this interruption in the management of Muslimhood calls into play a range of exceptions in the “work” of spotting, identifying, and marking the Muslim (Tyrer & Sayyid, 2012; see also Bayoumi, 2006).

Building on this fraught link between the body and Muslim subjecthoods, critical scholars also suggest that the racing of Muslims has also been marked on the body in gendered terms—by which a specific form of scrutiny and management is reserved for Muslim women (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Jiwani, 2010; Razack, 2004; Taylor & Zine, 2014; Zine, 2006). In fact, the violence relegated to Muslim women, Zine (2006) argues, can best be understood as “gendered-Islamophobia.” The veiled Muslim woman, in particular, sits in the crosshairs of the Muslim management regime, wherein their bodies, religious practices, and cultural practices become intimately linked to imperialist foreign policy and Liberal feminist paternalisms (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Puar, 2007; Razack, 2004). In fact, very few topics in the public imagination ignite such strong sentiment and contestation across the Western political spectrum as does the image of the veiled Muslim woman (Bowen, 2007). From the vantage point of the liberal left which claims to speak for the “good” of liberal feminism, the Muslim woman has not only come to denote control, oppression, and digression, but also represents a symbol of either an internalized or coerced signifier of the lifeworld of patriarchy (Mohanty, 1988; Zine, 2006). And, from the standpoint of the conservative right and state-elites, the veiled Muslim woman signifies an adherence to a type of political Islam framed as antithetical to modernity and white Judaeo-Christian values (Esposito, 2000; Bowen, 2007).

The scrutiny of Muslim women has not only remained a hot topic on public trial cutting across academia, popular culture, and the media more broadly, but has also garnered significant state-level attention (Bowen, 2007). Legislative restrictions and outright bans on the dress of Muslim women are common in many parts of the West including France, Belgium, and the Netherlands (Bowen, 2007). Despite dominant and liberal discourses that position Canada as a tolerant and multicultural nation, Canadian politicians and lawmakers also sought to regulate the personal and religious practices of Muslim women. In one example, Prime Minister Stephen Harper's administration sparked public debate after proposing legislation that would ban public servants from wearing the Niqab. Some commentators understood the proposal as a strategic move, designed to fan racist flames during Harper's bid for re-election (Abedi, 2015). In another example, the Quebec "Charter of Rights" and "Religious Neutrality" legislation continues to put the dress of Muslim women up for debate, resulting in the construction of Bill 62 which calls for the removal of any face coverings "pertain[ing] to those giving or receiving public services" (Fitz-Morris, 2015; Shingler 2017; Taylor, 1994). Furthermore, the trope of "saving the oppressed Muslim woman" serves as an important rhetorical device meant to generate support for, and justify, the ongoing "War on Terror" (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Puar, 2007; Rygiel & Hunt, 2006). As Spivak argues, "white men saving brown women from brown men" is an old colonial tactic through which war and domination are rationalized (1988, p. 297).

Interestingly, it is precisely against the aforementioned backdrop that a creative rise has emerged in the Muslim Euro-Atlantic landscape despite Muslims being positioned as problematic figures in need of management and discipline (Ahmed, 2010, Taylor & Zine, 2014). Additionally, the fact that this Muslim creative rise has emerged amidst a politically and socially antagonistic and exclusionary climate points to the complex resources, tactics, and pathways available to subjects in the racialized margins to resist and negotiate their positionality. Furthermore, according to Taylor & Zine (2014), the post 9/11 Muslim generation in North America appears to place an overwhelming emphasis on destabilizing and re-conceptualizing the manner by which their bodies and practices are re/produced in the public imaginary. In the process, they participate in what many scholars term a "politics of recognition" (Ahmed, 2010, 2011; Morey & Yaqin, 2011; Taylor & Zine 2014).

The Politics of Recognition and Misrecognition

For many critical scholars, the politics of recognition is fundamentally about the making of liberal citizens out of subjects who exist in the margins (Coulthard, 2007, 2014; Simpson, 2014; Taylor, 1994; Williams, 2014). Arguably, this “making” speaks to a “redistributive mechanism” reallocating psychological and material wages to the subjects of misrecognition who are deemed “problematic,” “difficult,” or “perplexing” by the hegemonic order (Coulthard, 2007, 2014; Simpson, 2014). And from the standpoint of recognition it is vital for the Liberal political project to include these “perplexing” subjects existing outside of the hegemonic center through a deliberate and purposeful act of seeing, thereby intentionally shifting the optics of power (Simpson, 2014; Taylor, 1994). More specifically, Simpson (2014) explains that from a state-centered standpoint, recognition implies attaining official access to power through “rights that protect from harm...that provide access to resources...that protect certain resources” (p.23). In a similar vein, Markell (2003) explains that the politics of recognition is “conventionally approached” as a type of “distributive injustice” involving “the exten[sion] to people the respect or esteem they deserve” in virtue of their humanity (p. 18). Recognition, in other words, becomes a public “good” that makes possible an effectual capacity within the hegemonic regime (Markell, 2003).

If the politics of recognition is about an equitable distributive extension of rights and protections through a desirable or esteemed seeing of subaltern subjects, then misrecognition is the negation of this distributive “good” (Markell 2003; Taylor 1994). According to Taylor (1994), whether it is “out of ‘malice or ignorance...rights and protections’ are not what are extended to the misrecognized subject. Rather, harm and dispossession come to be disproportionally overextended (Coulthard, 2014; Markell, 2004; Taylor, 1994). Consequently, as Fanon (1954, 1961) vividly illustrates through his own encounters in Europe, misrecognition can leave the subaltern subject feeling thwarted, carrying substantive consequences for the agentic and emancipatory possibilities of the misrecognized. Thus, proponents of a politics of recognition seek recognition in order to ameliorate the thwarting effects that come with misrecognition. The politics of recognition is positioned as the mechanism by which mutual respect and acknowledgement can be redistributed (Fraser & Honneth, 2003; Taylor 1989, 1994; William, 2014). This redistribution or extension of “mutuality” will not only serve as the necessary fuel to run an inclusive and democratic society, but proponents argue that it will also aid in the process of producing emancipated subjectivities (Coulthard, 2014; Taylor, 1989, 1994; William, 2014).

In the last few decades, a politics of recognition has come to mean a field and language through which questions of marginalization, belonging, and difference have increasingly been understood (Markell 2003). However, recognition politics have also been subject to a diverse range of critiques in the same period of time, complicating and challenging the links made between recognition-redistribution-emancipation (Coulthard 2007, 2014; Fraser and Honneth, 2003; Markell, 2003; Simpson, 2014). Critics argue that a politics of recognition has largely failed to resolve redistributive issues at any substantive level, and thus caution against a wholehearted plunge into the “goods” of recognition (Coulthard, 2007, 2014; Fraser & Honneth, 2003; Simpson 2014). For Glen Coulthard (2014) and Audra Simpson (2014), the “redistributive failure” of recognition politics sits at both a material and subjective level. In fact, Coulthard (2014) borrows from Fanon to understand both the material and subjective dimensions of decoloniality and argues that recognition politics has carried very little consequence beyond the “gestural and symbolic.” Recognition politics has been unable to extend social-political grounds in addition to psychological wages that would open up the possibilities of subaltern subjective emancipation (Coulthard, 2014).

I find the critiques levied against recognition politics convincing. As a mechanism, a politics of recognition has been largely ineffective in its redistributive and emancipatory claims. However, as Markell (2003) and Taylor (1994) both effectively concur (albeit from different vantage points), there is no avoiding recognition. A politics of recognition represents a ubiquitous framework of contemporary political and discursive life and relates to questions of marginalization, emancipation, and injustice. Its ubiquity has not only meant that the state uses recognition as a means of ordering and making “citizens,” but subaltern groups also use recognition as a field through which political claims are made and identities are articulated (Coulthard, 2014; Markell, 2003; Taylor, 1989, 1994). In this vein, Taylor writes:

A number of strands in contemporary politics turn on the need ... the demand, for recognition ... The demand comes to the fore in a number of ways in today’s politics, on behalf of minority or “subaltern” groups, in some forms of feminism and in what is today called the politics of “multiculturalism.” The demand for recognition ... is given urgency by the supposed links between recognition and identity ... The thesis is that our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. (Taylor, 1994, p. 25)

My interest in recognition as a field by which to think through issues of marginalization and subalternity is primed by its ubiquity. The mere fact that the language of

recognition is picked-up by those on the margins experiencing the redistributive failures of recognition politics, locates “recognition” as a worthy field of exploration irrespective of its conceptual or political merit. Speaking on the production of agentic possibilities, Foucault (1992) explains that the ground of subjectification and ordering by which power disciplines its subjects also acts as the ground of resistance, asserting “as soon as there is power relation, there is the possibilities of resistance” (Foucault, 1996, p. 153). In other words, my interest in recognition is motivated by its social facticity as a field of operation within which subjects in the margins have increasingly exercised and leveraged their power.

In what follows, I shift my attention away from recognition as an abstract framework, and instead apply it to the case of *(mus)interpreted* in order to understand how recognition politics are lived and taken up by Muslim women—however fraught and limited those politics might be. *(Mus)interpreted* points to the ubiquity with which subaltern subjects take-up the recognition frame—which is, of course, unsurprising considering the “Muslim subject” in the Euro-Atlantic has been constructed as particularly irreconcilable within the Liberal order. The Muslim subject is thus a prime candidate for a politics of recognition that promises to bring, among other things, “purposeful seeing” (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Taylor, 1994; Zine, 2006). Moving forward, the rest of this paper focuses on how the demand for recognition has been addressed and approached by *(mus)interpreted* as a curated whole. But first, I outline my methodology. In total, my analysis engages with twenty-two artistic statements displayed with each multi-medium curated piece of the Fall 2016 opening, starting with the principle opening statement.

Methodology

Displayed as an annual visual arts curated exhibit, *(mus)interpreted* is organized by a Toronto-based grassroots organization called the “Truth & Dare Project” (T&D)—an organization run by Muslim women dedicated to amplifying the voices of Muslim Women via the arts. *(Mus)interpreted* ran for three consecutive years by 2016. Each year, the exhibit is developed through community workshops led by the T&D team, whereby participants are supported in the process of developing artistic pieces for the exhibit. This is followed with a broad community call out for submissions, which may or may not be led by an overarching theme. The open call submission process encourages Muslim identified women in the Greater Toronto Area to submit artistic works highlighting their perspectives and stories of misinterpretation and Muslim womanhood. From the pool of submissions, the curation team

arranges and organizes the artistic works in a matter that speaks to the overarching aim of *(mus)interpreted*. Following the reception, selection, and organization of the submissions, the 2016 Truth & Dare team launched their opening for a period of one month (October 13, 2016—November 13, 2016). The 2016 exhibit was housed at a relatively new, non-profit, cultural and artistic hub (Daniels Spectrum) that was developed as part of Toronto's Regent parks revitalization efforts. The opening day involved a launch event, including presentations from the curators, and an open-ended, self-directed walk through the exhibit. The exhibit remained open for self-directed tours extending for the rest of the month. In typical fashion, each artistic piece was accompanied with a brief statement, including the name of the artist, title of the piece, date of display, medium used to produce the work, and an account of what the art work is meant to convey or communicate to the audience. The statements concluded with a short profile of the artist including their background, passion, current professional and/or grassroots involvements, social media details, and pricing for the work on display.

In terms of my scholarly engagement with the exhibit, I chose to concentrate my analysis on these accompanying artistic statements rather than the artistic pieces on display. This methodological decision was prompted by two primary reasons. Firstly, my training is better suited for engagement with text than with aesthetic/expressive objects. This textual concentration, however, does not mean that the artistic objects on display did not come to inform my reading of the text. By design, the visual and textual are constructed to inform one another in the context of an exhibit. In fact, my methodological decision came to be tested as I moved my analytical lens to some of the more emancipatory pieces wherein a visual engagement was unavoidable given the affectively charged dimensions of the objects on display.³ Although the statements are the prime source of my data, I also incorporated, as Cole and McIntyre (2008) write in the *Handbook of the Arts*, “thick descriptions of these installations ... [as a means of] reflecting upon and theorizing” to further texturize and enrich my engagement with the artistic statements (p. 288). Secondly, as a researcher I was conscious about the projection of self in my analysis of *(mus)interpreted*. All forms of social research inevitably involve some projection of the researcher's self in one way or another, and does not necessarily amount to a methodological limitation in need of repair. However, when dealing with a sample population of Muslim women who are routinely spoken for, it was important to me that I open as much space as possible to allow the perspectives of the artists and curators to guide my analysis. As such, I oriented my concentration on the statements and largely relegated my engagement with the visual to what Barthes (1981, 1983) refers to as the “denotative.” Sandra Weber (2008) explains, using Barthes classification, that although the

³ See classifications three and four in Table 1: “Reclaiming/effect” and “Transcendental/Transient.”

boundaries between the “denotative” and “connotative” is not always easy to mark, there is a methodological utility in thinking in terms of the “denotative” and “connotative” in visual research. Weber (2008) continues with expressive objects that can be thought of as “hav[ing] two levels of meaning: the denotative meaning of an image refers to its literal, descriptive,” while the connotative “refers to ... the social conventions, codes and meanings” (p. 42). My engagement with the visual, therefore, favours the denotative as a means of centering the voices of the artists, while also working within my methodological comfort-zone. Having said this, I also share both the markers of “Muslim” and “woman” with the artists, and thus understood my standpoint as providing a level of “immediacy” (Prus, 1996) to the site of investigation. I hold this “immediacy” to be conducive to producing thick descriptions and nuanced engagements. In other words, I see my relative shared place as a Muslim woman to lend itself well to this project, arguably affording me relative intersubjective intimacy with the artistic works and aims of *(mus)interpreted* (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001; Denzin, 2003).

Moreover, the analysis that follows takes on a grounded theory approach. Borrowing from the work of Charmaz and Mitchell (2001), grounded theory involves the: 1) “simultaneous data-collection and analysis”; 2) “discovery of basic social processes within the data”; 3) “inductive construction of abstract [thematic] categories that explain and synthesize these processes”; and, 4) “integration of categories into a theoretical framework that specifies causes, conditions and consequences of the process(es)” (p. 160). The goal of the grounded theorist is to “fill-in,” “saturate,” “enrich,” and “stretch” theoretical constructs with contextual specificities and empirical weight (Charmaz & Mitchell 2001, p. 161). Furthermore, *(mus)interpreted* is taken-up as a purposefully organized speech act or active narrative-making act, working at multiple levels, which I have chosen to juxtapose with the meaning and possibilities of subalternized agency and voice. On the point of narrative making, Chase (2000) offers a useful review on the manner in which “narratives” have been taken up in the social sciences, arguing that narratives have been understood to essentially involve a doubleness of consciousness, a distancing of self from experience, followed with an active construction of a protagonist voice as “the self” as a means of articulation. Chase (2000) asserts, “narrative[s] [are] retrospective [acts of] meaning making—the shaping or ordering of past experiences,” continuing with “narrative[s] [are] a way of understanding one's own and other's actions ... into [a] meaningful whole” (p. 656). From this perspective, a narrative becomes a wilful means of articulation/engagement where an audience is always present. This can mean “audience” in the traditional sense, the self in the mirror, or even the audience built in one's own frame of thoughts (Bauman, 1986; Carlson, 1996; Chase, 2000; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). In the case of *(mus)interpreted*, then, there appears to be a “doubling” and

an intentional organization of the everyday lived experience of Muslim woman into a curated whole. Furthermore, with an exhibition the narrative making process works at multiple levels. At the micro level, there are distinct stories expressed from the individual artistic pieces on display; and at the macro level, the curators share a larger narrative in their selection and organization of the featured works. This larger macro story is the concentration of my analysis, however this exploration of the larger narrative of *(mus)interpreted* builds off the many micro stories shared by the individual artists.

My grounded theory approach also centers a narrative analysis method (Bishcoping & Amber, 2016; Chase, 2000), wherein a thematic classification method is employed in my investigation of the exhibit. Moreover, the thematic arrangements were organized with respect to how each artistic statement spoke or responded to the overarching concerns of *(mus)interpreted* as expressed through the opening statement. A thematic narrative analysis approach is well placed to engage with the divergent voices of the artists (micro-narratives) in a dialogical manner with the broader curated aims (opening statement). Through this dialogue, it is possible to arrive at the macro-narrative of *(mus)interpreted* as a curated whole.

Artistic Statements: Outlining Concerns and Analysis

The exhibit's curated showcase statement worked as my point of entry into the artistic pieces, and was displayed as an opening remark in the exhibit brochure, the actual exhibit floor, and social media pages. The curators describe *(mus)interpreted* as:

...a group exhibition showcasing works of emerging and established young Muslim women artists in the GTA. Using a variety of different mediums, the artists document and reflect on their lived realities, interrogating the notions and spaces in which Muslim women are defined and redefined. Representing a spectrum of identities and realities, the exhibition provides alternative perspectives through a collective envisioning of individual and communal narratives. It is an expression of hope for a self-determined, inclusive future.

A strong overarching corrective-rectifying impulse is evident, and directly linked to the work of uncovering and dismantling sites of misinterpretation. I therefore read the language of the showcase statement to align with the aforementioned work concerning the politics of recognition. Moving forward, I explore the artistic statements in accordance with the driving concerns outlined in the curated statement. The thematic organization of the artist statements that follow move in accordance with how the above outlined concerns of *(mus)interpreted* are taken-up. In other words, the thematic grouping works to tease out how the micro-narratives

of individual statements speak to the macro-story of *(mus)interpreted*. With this aim in mind, the twenty-two artistic statements reveal four thematic arrangements, which I name “layered reality,” “flat representations/effect,” “reclaiming,” and the “transcendental/transient.” Figure 1 displays the corresponding classifications for each of the twenty-two statements with brief notes on the defining rubric for the classification.

Title/Artist	Theme
HYPER(aware) series, Frizz Kid	Layered Reality
Untitled, Manaal Farooqi	Layered Reality
Appreciation, The Black Muslimah Series, Samira Warsame	Layered Reality
Reflection, Zahra Agjee	Layered Reality
Salam (Peace), Ala' Al-Thibeh	Layered Reality
Bab-elramel, Yara El Safi	Layered Reality
Can you find me? Iman Bhatti	Flat Presentation/effect
Hello, Can you hear me? Iman Bhatti	Flat Presentation/effect
Stain, Habiba El-Sayed	Flat Presentation/effect
Portrait Labels, The Truth & Dare Project	Flat Presentation/effect
Lazy Hamsa, Yara El Safi	Reclaiming
Brown Girl Positivity (Blue and Pink), Samaa Ahmed	Reclaiming
/ lo.kwi/ Raafia Jessa	Reclaiming
caraweelos of the future, farxiyo maxamad cabdullaahi jamaac	Reclaiming
Hadiqa, Samaa Ahmed	Reclaiming
Khamisa Fi Aynak (Five Fingers in Your Eye), Shatha Al-Hussein	Reclaiming
Azm Palace, Scent of Jasmine, Maha Munaf	Transcendental/transient
Untitled I & Untitled II, Sheer Devotion, Leila Fatemi	Transcendental/transient
Life, Ghada Habbal	Transcendental/transient
Huwa-Allah, Zahra Agjee	Transcendental/transient
Mother Earth and Child, Zahra Agjee	Transcendental/transient
Mother, Zahra Komeylian	Transcendental/transient

[1] Layered Reality: Showcasing the intersectionality of Muslim womanhood
 [2] Flat Presentations/effects: Showcasing the effects of reductive representations
 [3] Reclaiming: Concentrates on reclaiming voice and power
 [4] Transcendental/Transient: Strong emancipatory energy. Interplay between the transient moments and transcendental experiences.

Figure 1. *(mus)interpreted* statements and thematic breakdown. (Photo credit: Nadiya Ali)

As Figure 1 illustrates, I coded the first six statements as “layered reality.” In this set of statements, I identify a particular saliency of themes highlighting the intersectionality, multiplicity, and dynamism of Muslim womanhood in one way or another. Among the six that I mark as “layered reality,” three statements (i.e., HYPER(aware), Appreciation, and Bab-elramel) illustrate the concerns of this grouping most vividly. For instance, Kid (2016) centers her layered, and at times conflicted, experience of self in her piece titled “HYPER(aware),” writing: “Hyper-detailed, intense, humorous and frightening at times. Each piece is an extension of myself, a detailed and candid look into my insecurities, flaws, and my relationship with my appearance.” In “Appreciation,” on the other hand, the artist touches on the complexities of the social dimension of Muslim womanhood, writing:

The Black Muslimah is a complex being; fitting neither the Black nor Muslim “normative standard.” The Black Muslimah's identity makes people uncomfortable.

They don't understand her. The Black Muslimah's existence is resistance. She is constantly searching for her "self." (Warsame, 2016)

This theme of the layered unknowable self, escaping simple recitations of experience and selfhood—even to the self—is evident in both Kid (2016) and Warsame's (2016) narratives. In the case of "Bab-elramel," the artist's conversation on multiplicity and layeredness moves into the sociohistorical and civilizational realm. El Safi (2016) describes her piece as:

A crossroads between the cultures of the East and West. El Safi's work focuses on conflicting unfixed identities of East and West and reconciling these identities by creating a dialog of reclamation and resistance. El Safi draws from the symbolic and narrated imagery of the Merchant...to convey the unfixed nature of intersectional identities. (El Safi, 2016)

In Bab-elramel, El Safi brings the often-opposed spaces of the "East" and the "West" as sites meeting in the subjectivity of the traveling merchant. The merchant, whose lived experience of a conjoined existence between East and West, speaks to the possibility of intimate proximity of the seemingly irreconcilable. Although the space for "dialogue" and "encounter" appears to be valued in centering the symbolism of "the merchant" in El Safi's statement, there is also a particular currency placed on difference, as simply different. This space for dialogue is not necessarily positioned as a resolution or reconciliation of difference. Even in the intimate proximity of the seemingly dissimilar historical arrangements of the traveling merchant's identity, the boundaries of "East" and "West" are nonetheless maintained, neither one subsuming the other. In both Kid's (2016) and Warsame's (2016) statements we also see this positioning of the "oppositional" as simply co-existing, without any substantive work done by the artist to sort-out and/or order for the audience. In "HYPER(aware)," both fear and humour exist in the same moment and in the same subject. And for Warsame, the point of oppositionality and irreconcilability lies in the manner through which the Black Muslim identity slips readability. According to Warsame's statement, the Black Muslimah's identity is read as utterly unknowable, confounding, perplexing, and complicating dominant frames and imaginaries of blackness and Muslimhood. The statements coded as "layered-reality," therefore, highlight the exhibit's concern of misinterpretation/misrecognition as an unreconciled presentation of the complex and multi-layered arrangements that produce the identities and realities of Muslim women. It is useful to keep in mind, as I moved into the other three classifications, that according to some advocates of recognition politics (Taylor, 1994; William, 2014), explicating the meanings, arrangements, and contours of one's subaltern existence serves to ameliorate the issues of misrecognition/misinterpretation. In

contrast, instead of presenting a reconciled frame of an “accurate” or “corrective” reading, a particular agentic potential is placed on a subject’s ability to garner perplexity and ‘slip’ readability. Warsame (2016), in fact, asserts that which is confounding and unreadable as opening the grounds for resistance and self-actualization: “They don't understand her. The Black Muslimah's existence is resistance. She is constantly searching for her ‘self.’”

The second classification speaks most clearly to the issue of misrecognition, which I label “flat presentations/effect.” Four statements came under this second categorization, comprising the least amount of statements. In these instances, the artists direct the audience’s attention towards the flat/reductive framing of Muslim women in popular culture by re-presenting these flat frameworks and directly contesting their meanings. Considering the prominence of the hijab or veil in popular representations of Muslim womanhood, the veil carried the most salient presence in this classification. Iman Bhatti’s (2016) installations capture the impetus of this grouping particularly well by vividly showcasing the popular reduction of Muslim womanhood to the veil. With two featured pieces in the exhibit, Bhatti effectively associates the hypervisibility of the veil with a homogenising process, flattening complexities, and thus erasing subjectivities to a faceless veiled figure. The first piece is entitled “Can you find me?” and Bhatti writes: “Portrayed as veiled and oppressed stereotypes ... media depictions strip away Muslim women's individuality, instead categorizing them as homogeneous ... the artwork explores the aftermath of ... representation of a religion through a garment” (Bhatti, 2016a).

In a second piece titled, “Hello, Can you hear me?” Bhatti continues to examine the politics of erasure, however the emphasis shifts from an illustration of the reductive representations to drawing our attention to the experiential and embodied dimensions of Muslim women existence. Bhatti writes:

Stereotypes, enforced regularly through media sources, gain power as truthful portrayals of a culture. Drawing upon representations of the burqa in both pop culture and fashion, the artwork explores the feelings associated with embodying the burqa in today's media centered society. (Bhatti, 2016b)

The statements and imagery of the objects in this grouping vividly illustrate a sense of entrapment and limited mobility, which was repeatedly and creatively tied to presentations of popular caricatures. The issue of misinterpretation/misrecognition is addressed in this grouping through illustrating the violent and thwarting consequences of misrecognition. In this way, Frantz Fanon (1961)—a giant in outlining the violent consequences of misrecognition—is well placed to provide further delineation. Fanon explains, key to the social and subjective consequence of misrecognition is an experience of being “penned in,”

where the subject is invisibilized through a hyper/contorted visibility (Fanon, 1961, p. 15). Still leveraging Fanon, if we read the stories of “layered-reality” in conjunction with “flat presentations,” I would argue that another one of Fanon’s often-cited statements rings true, which is that the subaltern subject holds “muscular ambitions” of movement, slippage, and unfixity (Fanon 1961). He continues with, the subaltern subject is a subject “dominated but not domesticated” (Fanon 1961, p. 16). With the aim of teasing out the curated macro-narrative in mind of *(mus)interpreted*, I would argue that “flat presentation,” as a thematic category, speaks to the “dominated” social-political reality of Muslim womanhood. “Layered-reality,” on the other hand, draws attention to Fanon’s point on the “muscular” agentic ambitions of the subalternized. Building further on this Fanonian point of “dominated but not domesticated,” the third and fourth thematic arrangements move past an enumeration of the contours and consequence of domination to more directly exploring the meaning and possibilities of subaltern agency and emancipation.

The statements in grouping three and four shift away from the “uncovering-dismantling” objective of the exhibit and instead draw attention to the “corrective-rectifying” impetus of the opening statement. As Figure 1 illustrates, I label the third classification as “reclaiming acts,” and in this set of statements the thematic field revolved around asserting voice, reclaiming objects of power, and re-centering one’s sense of self. A strong agentic creative impulse ran through these statements. Furthermore, these reclaiming acts tended to be presented as making possible the grounds for resistance/subversion and emancipation. For instance, Ahmed’s (2016) statement captures this linking between “reclaiming” and emancipation quite well, writing: “Hadiqa is the artist’s vision of a Brown Girl Paradise ... a fantastical Garden of Eden. This piece presents a body positive image of beauty that subverts a colonial gaze” (Ahmed 2016). In her re-claiming of a “fantastical” space of emancipation, Ahmed creates a paradise made for and reserved for the beauty and body of the “brown girl.” This is a paradise that centers the brown girl and “subverts the colonial gaze.” In other words, Ahmed formulates an emancipatory space that subverts and obfuscates the gaze of power, limiting the accessibility of hegemony.

“/Lo.kwi:/” is another installation that falls under grouping three, where the artist also participates in the act of reclamation. Merging Urdu, Arabic, Latin, and Farsi, Jessa (2016) produces a script that only she can read.⁴ Jessa (2016) explains her project as “built on the

⁴ Even if audiences are familiar with the scripts Jessa builds upon, /Lo.kwi:/ still precludes readability. The audiences access to the meaning of the script is only made possible via a handbook made available by the artists functioning as a translation tool. Jessa describes the formation of /Lo.kwi:/ on her website as “fictitious alphabet [...] made by combining Urdu, Persian, Arabic, and Latin characters based on their sound” (Jessa, 2016).

idea [that] we are all entitled to our own form of communication: it is the right of every individual to be able to express themselves without being judged for the way their language sounds.” Featured in the centre of Jessa’s beautifully arranged alphabet installation is the question, “can you hear me?” written in a script that, by design, precludes anyone from hearing her proclamation. Despite its similarities with Bhatti’s aforementioned “Hello, can you hear me?,” Jessa’s question resonates differently. At issue in Bhatti’s installation are problems associated with finding a voice in a culture that silences or speaks on behalf of Muslim women. In such contexts, the question “hello, can you hear me?” stands as a cry of exhaustion or a plea for empathy. Jessa’s assertion, on the other hand, is purposely designed to be read and heard by an audience of one—herself. Not unlike Ahmed’s “brown girl paradise,” Jessa makes space for the subaltern to step out of her subalternity and centers her story, her history, her body, and her beauty by scripting her proclamation in a language that only she can access without translation. In contrast to Bhatti’s declaration, Jessa’s “can you hear me?” functions as a rhetorical declaration working to draw boundaries of belonging and dis-belonging. As relating to Jessa’s and Ahmed’s response to the curated concern of misinterpretation/misrecognition, in both statements the space of nonrecognition and unintelligibility of the hegemonic gaze is brought to the fore as a mechanism through which the self could be reclaimed and re-centered. Audra Simpson defines nonrecognition as “to be free from recognition ... operating as a free-floating signifier” (Simpson, 2014, p. 23). Simpson (2014) continues by explaining that recognition means an inclusion within the logics and optics of power, whereas nonrecognition leaves subjects unintelligible to that same optics. Thus, recognition understood as “desirable gazing” (Simpson 2016) seems to be largely bypassed as the ground of rectification, and nonrecognition appears to be situated instead. On this point, I was reminded of Coulthard’s (2014) reading of Sartre in conversation with Fanon: “At the heart of Sartre’s theory of inter-subjectivity ... is the notion that recognition is forever mired in a power struggle, ‘a constant unending conflict between subjects who seek to make each other objects of the gaze’” (p. 134). From a Sartreian reading then, recognition understood as a “positive-desirable seeing” would still in fact always be mired as an act of misrecognition.

This wariness with the gaze even when deemed “positive” comes through most sharply in a portrait series developed by Zahra Agjee. The piece is comprised of a series of headshots drowning in labels, representing one of the most emotionally charged installations in the exhibit. For this piece, I incorporate a more active “denotative reading” (Weber 2008) of the installation into my engagement with the statement, as Agjee’s (2016) piece is one of a few installations that uses text as “art,” explaining:

The creation of the portrait is the final stage of facilitated activities and discussions on issues of judgment, perception, and preconceived notions. During the workshops, participants reflect on their lived experiences, share stories, and actively label their own faces with words that have been placed on them by others. (Agjee, 2016)

What I found particularly interesting about the portrait series is that there was no expectation that participants concentrate their efforts on the “negative” labels they have been ascribed by. Rather, the instruction was to include any labels that others have used to cast “judgment, perception, and preconceived notions” upon them. Consequently, some of the text that the headshots were engrossed in stood as descriptors like “daughter” or “friend,” while others appeared positive, or what some might consider desirable such as “beautiful,” “confident,” and “trustworthy.” Nevertheless, all the labels equally left the portraits concealed and suffocated. Whatever the connotation of the text, it still worked the same—overshadowing, burdening, and concealing the faces of the women on display. Bringing back the Sartrean insight discussed above, the work of the gaze is the work of objectification; the moment of seeing the Other is the moment falsification. As such, recognition as “desirable gazing” is at the end of the day still a fixing act. Even a positive fixing is still a fixing, and thus holds a falsifying effect.

The last thematic classification, which I group as “transcendental/transient,” further explores the tenuous link between recognition and emancipation; however, the emphasis shifts from the reclaiming act (i.e., a *doing* that subverts the hegemonic gaze and centers the self as the site of emancipation), to emancipation being located in the intimate psychic and spiritual moments of subjective (re)making. Prominent in this grouping is the interplay between the imagery and language of transient moments and transcendental experiences. I am using “transcendental” in this case to imply that which is experienced as awe-inspiring, carrying a transformative energy often imprinted in experiential memory. Consequently, the metaphysical, spiritual, and meditative dimensions of human experience emerge as a prime focus for the six statements that fell under “transcendental/transient.” For instance, in Munaf’s (2016) installation, titled “Azm Palace,” it is possible to see this interplay between the passing moment and that which is experienced as lasting:

Photography is an art of storytelling, one that speaks to the heart. I use my camera as a tool to capture moments and bring life into them; an object through texture, a person through gesture or a place through light...I am inspired by the moments we lose to memory. (Munaf, 2016)

For Munaf, the transient, the fleeting, and the passing moment is the raw energy by which experiences of the meaningful and the lasting is made. In fact, the work of making-objects and

freezing moments in “Azm Palace” is associated with “bring[ing] life” (Munaf, 2016). It is worth noting here that in this last grouping, “fixity” and “object-making” takes a rather agentic liberatory turn. The object-making act, through photography, is not concerned with what is false or true; rather the concern is exploring the transformative potential of object-making in a self-directed, creative agentic manner. In contrast to an “Other-directed” fixing, a “self-directed” concretization of the fleeting moment means one is the author and protagonist of the story in question. This is in contrast to the manner “fixity” was positioned in the “reclaiming act” and “layered realities,” wherein it was associated with the gaze of power and resisting any externally-directed simple recitation of Muslim womanhood. Bringing classification four into conversation with the pervious groupings suggests that subverting fixity was not necessarily about resisting the inevitable objectizing consequence of constructing a narrative, but about agency and voice. Munaf illustrates how the work of amalgamating passing gestures and capturing fractured light comes to produce a sense of personhood and place that is experienced as enabling and “bring[ing] life.” Glen Coulthard’s notion of self-recognition is a productive insertion here. In *Red Skin White Masks* (2014), he introduces self-recognition as an alternative to recognition politics (Coulthard, 2014). Coulthard’s self-recognition stands as follows: a self-directed “strategic fixing” that aims to re-position, re-arrange, and re-cast available practices, discourses, and artifacts rooted in a given sociohistorical field in a manner that would serve the most “enabling” potential for the subjects in question. Self-recognition was arguably a consistent starting point for the exploration of transformative and emancipatory possibilities in the fourth grouping.

Fatemi’s (2016) piece entitled “Sheer Devotion” is another installation that concentrates attention on experience and the subjective-work. Fatemi writes:

[My] main purpose was to create a meditative, calm and serene space for the viewer. It further sought to explore the dynamic of light...The ethereal photographs printed on sheer silk are affected directly by the time of day and light that goes through them[...]In this space viewers are invited to interact with both pieces...bringing focus to the movement and imagery of each piece. (Fatemi, 2016)

Fatemi’s piece is another installation in which a more active “denotative reading” (Weber 2008) of the visual was necessary to my exploration of the artistic statement. The piece displayed a lightly sketched mirroring depiction of a woman in meditative supplication. Considering fabric was the material utilized in the installation, it easily moved as viewers and light passed. From the audience’s vantagepoint, the stillness of the figure, hands raised in a devotional meditative act, is experienced in motion. The “calm and serene” experience Fatemi offers her audience is not one that allows the viewer to escape the disorder of the world. In

other words, Fatemi does not produce a devotional figure made still and removed from the chaos of the everyday or the unpredictability of the surrounding environment. On the contrary, “Sheer Devotion” is hung from the ceiling allowing flux to be that through which the transformative possibility of meditative calm can be experienced. The “meditative calm” comes to the fore in the play of the transient, the play of the silk with the light, and the play of the devotee with her surrounding.

This last thematic arrangement most forcibly spoke to the third curated objective of *(mus)Interpreted as* outlined in the opening statement: 3) “providing alternative perspectives” (Truth and Dare Team, 2016). And the provision of this alternative in the work of uncovering, dismantling, and rectifying the sites of misinterpretation/misrecognition turned to the experiential and the subjective dimension. The “alternative perspective” offered in this grouping is an alternative that locates emancipation from the plight of misrecognition in a “productive” agentic labour—labouring in both object-making and subject-making acts. This aligns rather well with a Fanonian understanding of emancipation, which fundamentally centers labour. From a Fanonian standpoint, emancipation cannot be granted externally, but is arrived to through an exertion by the subaltern that toils to remake the world both at the material and subjective level (Coulthard, 2014; Fanon, 1961). This Fanonian point on self-directed labour as relating to subaltern emancipation is the field Coulthard (2014) leverages to develop his concept of “self-recognition.” Therefore, the work of self-recognition in grouping four seeks out the subjective and experiential as the sites of meaning-making which enable experiences of wholeness, personhood, and meditative elevation.

Concluding Remarks: “Refusal” and “Self-Recognition”

To my reading, *(mus)interpreted* moved with an impetus encapsulated in Minh-ha’s (1987) assertion that “the humiliation of having to falsify your own reality, your voice” (p. 6) for the sake of another, for the sake of mobility carries profound consequences. Minh-ha continues, this humiliation cannot be fully articulated, however “[...] you try to keep on trying [...] for if you don’t, they will not fail to fill in the blanks on your behalf, and you will be said” (Minh-ha, 1987, p. 6). Through *(mus)interpreted*, artists and viewers participated in a project of ameliorating/rectifying the humiliation of not only being said for, but being said for in reductive and veiled caricatures. In the case of *(mus)interpreted*, however, artists did not participate in the typical politics of recognition that, some argue, rectifies the violent and thwarting consequences of misrecognition. Rather, the hypervisible existence of Muslim

womanhood seems to orient *(mus)interpreted's* artists towards an aversion to the gaze itself. Thus, my analysis reveals that *(mus)interpreted* stages Muslim womanhood in a manner that worked to subvert any coherent external recitations, thereby blurring the optics of power, playing with the field of nonrecognition, and arguably turning away from a clear politics of recognition. In other words, *(mus)interpreted* complicates the ground of Muslim representation by proliferating the meanings of Muslim womanhood, followed with an internal self-directed subjective turn of reclaiming and remaking—or what Coulthard (2014) calls “self-recognition.” Furthermore, an ethos of “turning away” and “refusal” appears central to the exhibit. In fact, the site of emancipation is located rather far from the work of making the self intelligible to the dialectic of power, and is instead located in the “politics of refusal” (Simpson 2014) and “self-recognition” (Coulthard 2014).

However, “refusal” and “turning away” is not meant to imply any sort of “escape” from tension, flux, or oppositionality especially considering the sustained presentation of that which is deemed binary and oppositional as cohabiting within the same subject, same history, same moment across the categorizations. Instead my use of “turning away” borrows from the conceptual work of two Indigenous thinkers, Glen Coulthard (2014) and Audra Simpson (2014). Simpson outlines that “turning away” is a strategic act involving a dual refusal: 1) to engage in the hegemonic recognition game of being situated and managed; and 2) to be politically subsumed/consumed by the overarching system (Simpson 2014). The tactic of turning away, therefore, is available to subjects in the margins and is a refusal to capitulate to the optics of the hegemonic gaze by “not let[ing] go of themselves or their tradition,” and making visible “...colonialism’s ongoing life and simultaneous failure” (Simpson, 2014, p. 33). The turning away made manifest in *(mus)interpreted* is, in other words, a *refusal* that labours to center one’s own sense of self, voice, and history (i.e., self-recognition) while also positioning the psychic and spiritual dimension as the seat of agency and undercurrent of revolutionary possibilities. In response to Spivak’s (1988) question “can the subaltern speak?,” it therefore appears that the artists featured in *(mus)interpreted* would answer with a resounding “yes.” However, this “speaking” is not something that can necessarily be heard by all—and that is the point.

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