Article

Surveillant staring:

Race and the everyday surveillance of South Asian women after 9/11

Rachel L. Finn

Trilateral Research and Consulting LLP, UK. rachel.finn@trilateralresearch.com

Abstract

This article explores young South Asian women's accounts of being subject to surveillance within a post-September 11th United States political framework, using a combination of surveillance studies and a postcolonial studies attention to practices of racialization and belonging. It looks at non-technological practices of person-to-person surveillance of South Asian women by non-authoritative white Americans. The article discusses young women's accounts of feeling 'stared at' by other Americans in public space, and examines how the effects of this surveillance relates to young women's identities as South Asians in America. The article argues that citizen surveillance practices have racialized outcomes for young women of South Asian descent that sometimes consolidates a South Asian racial subjectivity within the US. The fieldwork also uncovers an extension of arguments about racialized surveillance to consider cultural bodily practices and clothing artifacts alongside racial identity.

'Here, I kind of notice people looking sometimes...' (Mira, Muslim woman of Pakistani descent)

Living in a post-September 11th environment has resulted in significant changes in the public lives of 'brown' people in the USA. For young college women of South Asian descent¹ who are living through this political epoch, the events of September 11, 2001 have impacted upon their experience of 'race' and 'racism' in the United States. Specifically, the association of 'brown' bodies with terrorism has occasioned a particular experience of Othering for Americans of South Asian descent. One way in which this discrimination is experienced is through various acts of surveillance of South Asians in public places. People with 'brown' skin are often subject to disproportionate levels of authoritative surveillance and suspicion in airports, online, in immigration centres and on public transportation. However, of interest here are the acts of surveillance carried out by 'ordinary' Americans (i.e. those who are outside official structures of authority) in everyday situations. Within these paradigms, people racialized as 'South Asian' discuss being stared at or a feeling of being watched by white Americans.

1 In this piece, the term 'South Asian' is used to refer to those in America who can trace their ancestry to Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan or Sri Lanka. Although this definition disguises important differences between these populations and refuses important similarities between these groups and others not included in this definition, this use of the term South Asian does reference a particularly racialized group within American discourse. For more on this see Prashad (2000) and Maira (2002). Furthermore, this piece discusses respondents as being of 'South Asian descent' in order to disrupt the foregrounding of young women's and their family's history of immigration and locate their physical origins in the United States as all respondents were born in the US or spent most of their lives there.

This article explores South Asian college women's accounts of being subject to surveillance within an American political framework that encourages a consistent awareness of terrorism. In doing so, it links Surveillance Studies with a postcolonial studies discussion of racialized belonging. These young women are subject to and subjects of a particular type of surveillance that racializes them in two ways. Firstly, it excludes them from belonging in the USA by reinforcing a construction of them as a 'potential terrorist' and dangerous Other that is constructed in opposition to 'white' and 'American' subjectivity. Secondly, this practice of surveillance also serves to create and inscribe the borders of a 'South Asian' racial subjectivity in the USA, where the heterogeneity contained within the category is sometimes subordinated to a shared experience of surveillance. The experience of surveillance also implicates other bodily features in addition to race, such as beards, and cultural artifacts like the *hijab*. Because these cultural markers engender a suspicion that the person is separating themselves from 'American', they act as an additional layer through which the Other is signified, and concurrently interact with race to invoke surveillance. Thus, this article considers the social effects of these practices of everyday surveillance for individuals' experience of identity, where surveillance emerges as a practice of racialization that reiteratively enacts the social exclusion of those racialized outside of whiteness.

Surveillance

The intersections of surveillance, security and terrorism have been well documented within academic literature. Surveillance at airports, in particular, has been bolstered by increased budgets for video equipment, biometrics, passenger manifestos and 'random' stop and search powers (van der Ploeg 2006). Here, discussions about 'security' are reliant upon an assumption that increased surveillance leads to greater security (Monahan 2006). Yet, passenger screening practices often disproportionately impact upon Middle Eastern, South Asian or other non-white travellers.²

Coleman and McCahill (2011) note that one of the primary social impacts of surveillance is demarcating and reinforcing social 'borders'. Racial categories often manifest as one of the borders policed by surveillance, where practices of surveillance disproportionately target persons racialized as non-white. For example, in the USA and UK, surveillance practices focused on crime have been shown to disproportionately target young black men specifically (Fiske 1998; Norris and Armstrong 1999; Goold 2004). Additionally, some countries have introduced national Identity Cards with biometric and personal information to identify citizens, and provide 'border' security in relation to terrorism and illegal immigration (Lyon 2003a). The linkages between prevention of terrorism and prevention of illegal immigration are framed by particular understandings of racial and cultural 'borders' or identities that are politicized in specific ways across time and space. Therefore, in the USA, while black men experience disproportionate levels of surveillance in relation to the politics of crime, in relation to citizenship, Spanish speaking peoples of Mexican, Central or South American origin or descent are often constructed as potentially illegal immigrants and subject to heightened border or employment surveillance. In contrast, those of South Asian or Middle Eastern origin or descent are constructed as potential 'terrorists' and experience disproportionate surveillance on transport and at borders. This surveillance racializes these groups, in that they experience a differential structural positioning vis-à-vis other groups within the United States that impacts upon their life chances (Omi and Winant 1994).³ Specifically, these racialized groups may have reduced access to mobility both within and between nations, and may experience reduced access to public space and/or employment opportunities. In these examples, racial and cultural Others are set in

² While not officially legal, racial profiling is tolerated in relation to issues of National Security in the USA. For more on this see Amnesty International (2004).

³ This piece uses Michael Omi and Howard Winant's conception of 'race', where it refers to a structural positioning in American discourse, including a specific labour market position, set of rights and power relationship vis-a-vis other groups (1994: 187). 'Racialization' or being 'racialized' refers to the process or outcome of this relative structural positioning. For more on these definitions see also David Theo Goldberg (2002) and for more on relative positioning and social power see Floya Anthias (2006).

opposition to normative definitions of (American) citizenship, which privileges whiteness and enables the erosion of the civil rights of various racialized groups in the United States.

Recent studies of surveillance often focus on the ‘new’ technological means of monitoring specific populations rather than traditional forms of person-to-person surveillance. Research has explored the proliferation of CCTV in the UK (Norris and Armstrong 1999; McCahill 2002), drug testing of workers and computerized data files on welfare recipients (Gilliom 1994; 2001) and changes in technological surveillance after September 11, 2001 (Lyon 2003b). These examples question the relationship between citizens and state authorities via changes in technology, and they often illustrate a distinct ‘legislated’ power arrangement between governmental and citizen subjects.

Although the US government is certainly employing ‘new technology’ to survey those who are considered a terrorist threat, national and local government bodies are also encouraging ordinary⁴, non-authoritative citizens to carry out direct surveillance. Specifically, these acts of surveillance are part of the counter-terrorism measures within the Homeland Security framework. At the national level, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) website (DHS 2007) asserts that ‘all Americans should continue to be vigilant, take notice of their surroundings and report suspicious items or activities to local authorities immediately’. Furthermore, the US government also attempted to introduce a programme called the Terrorism Information and Prevention System (TIPS) that encouraged ordinary Americans like utility workers and delivery persons to survey people’s private homes and report evidence of terrorism (ACLU 2002). Although this program was killed by Congress because of widespread public opposition, it is important to note that direct surveillance is part of the national government’s initiative in relation to counter-terrorism strategies. At the local or regional level, all of the Northeast’s major transport hubs run campaigns encouraging passengers and travellers to look for and report ‘suspicious’ persons, packages or activities. For example the Metropolitan Transportation Authority of New York City has been running the ‘If You See Something, Say Something’ campaign since 2002. These campaigns illustrate that the encouragement of direct, visual surveillance by ordinary people is a significant facet of the counter-terrorist strategy in the USA.

Therefore, perhaps not surprisingly, none of the respondents in this study discussed technological surveillance through databases, computer monitoring or identity documents in relation to identity and belonging in a post-9/11 US context. Instead, they talked about being ‘stared at’ by other ordinary, primarily white citizens.⁵ In consequence, this piece looks at citizen-to-citizen surveillance encounters that are neither carried out by authoritative subjects nor technologically mediated. It questions the ways in which these encounters impact on identity and belonging for a particular group of Americans.

Finally, David Lyon (2003b) notes that social science knows relatively little about those who are constant subjects of surveillance. While the young women discussed here are not subjects of ‘constant’ surveillance, their accounts illustrate that they are targets of certain surveillance practices. This article examines these surveillance encounters. It resurrects a focus on direct, person-to-person surveillance within a field focused on developments in surveillance technologies, and explores the racialized effects of these surveillance encounters within a specific case study.

⁴ Here, I use ‘ordinary’ to distinguish the citizen surveyors discussed by respondents in this paper from surveillance by officially authoritative subjects such as police officers, soldiers or government agents.

⁵ In fact, while the young women in this piece discuss being stared at by white Americans, the NYC ‘If You See Something, Say Something’ campaign includes a poster that encourages Americans of all different racial, age and gender categories to ‘look out’ for ‘suspicious’ persons. Further research could explore which categories of persons are more likely to take up this call to surveillance.

'Strangers' and Surveillance Encounters

One piece of research that links direct surveillance with racialized borders is Sara Ahmed's (2000) cultural analysis of 'Neighborhood Watch' programmes. Ahmed uses postcolonial theory to argue that racialized 'strangers' do important work in constituting the dominant community, and are often subject to everyday surveillance because of their positioning 'outside' the community. Using this Neighborhood Watch paradigm, Ahmed precedes Coleman and McCahill to argue that practices of direct surveillance define the border between the community and 'stranger' Others. According to Ahmed, it is the surveillant gaze that does the work of constructing community boundaries.

The 'good citizen' is the one who watches (out for) suspicious persons and strangers, and who in that very act, becomes aligned, not only with the police (and hence the Law) but with the imagined community itself whose boundaries are protected *in the very labour of his look*. (*ibid.* 30, emphasis in original)

Thus, the watchful eye of the 'good citizen' does the work of maintaining the boundaries of the community, where the very action of surveilling enacts a performative membership in the community and those who are 'being watched' are reiteratively racialized as Other.⁶ Ahmed's argument relates to the construction of white national identities in relation to postcolonial Others, where Neighborhood Watch acts as a model for western national identities. There is significant debate about whether the use of postcolonial theories to describe the differential social consequences for those racialized outside of whiteness in 'settler' colonies such as the USA, Canada and Australia is appropriate. However, it is primarily through the construction of whiteness as normative and white citizens' attendant 'belonging' in these nations in relation to Other racial identities that is of interest here. This construction is related to the 'encounters' with Others during colonial times which shaped European constructions of whiteness in contrast to other racial identities, as well as the different social, political and economic positioning within the global power structure that accompanied and were occasioned by these encounters (McClintock 1995; Lewis and Mills 2003; Behdad 2005). Thus, Behdad argues that postcolonial theory is applicable to the United States, since racialized immigrants are often situated outside of American belonging, and the US has taken over from Europe as hegemonic within global power structures. In this postcolonial, western national context, the main point of differentiation that is utilized to recognize 'strangers' is racial identity (Ahmed 2000: 45). Thus, Ahmed accounts for the constancy of the racialized body as Other. However, her work also argues that racialization is not enough to categorize strangers in the current, multicultural political climate. Instead, citizens must look for some clues as to the 'stranger's' political commitment to the nation in order to evaluate whether they are a threat. Here, Ahmed alludes to the fact that other signifiers, in addition to racial identity, may work concurrently to signify dangerous others.

Different configurations of racial, classed and cultural identities circulate as dangerous Others depending on the socio-political context in which surveillance is deployed. The working classes in Victorian England were often subject to surveillance measures designed to identify and correct criminal proclivities within this population (Coleman and McCahill 2011). As mentioned above, Fiske (1998) notes that in the 1990s in the US, the 'black man' gained purchase within a socio-political context of 'crime prevention' as a principal figure of racial anxiety and thus, deserving of surveillance. In a post-9/11 American national context, another figure of the dangerous Other, the Muslim terrorist, has emerged as deserving of surveillance (Puar and Rai 2004; Gopinath 2005; Puar 2005). However, these constructions are

⁶ The use of performative here references Judith Butler's work on the performativity of gender, where discourse 'produces the effect that it names' (1993: 2). This paper utilizes a broad view of performance that includes everyday practice of specific social positionings.

concurrent, dynamic and intersecting with one another as the representation of dangerous Others evolve.⁷ Nevertheless, the US government encouragement to survey ‘suspicious’ persons or activities is similar to Neighborhood Watch surveillance, which Ahmed describes as reinscribing the boundaries of ‘us’ and reiteratively marking ‘stranger’ Others. This article extends Ahmed’s argument about community formation to questions of belonging for those who are under surveillance, rather than those watching. Through surveillance practices, the ‘Muslim terrorist’ is being reiteratively recognized as ‘stranger’ in relation to ‘America’, and ‘white’ America in particular. Whether through technological or quotidian practices, the surveillance of ‘brown’ bodies enact a consolidation of ‘brown’/‘Muslim’/‘terrorist’ that is actively experienced by the young women in this study who are under the watchful gaze. As will be discussed below, young women identified other bodily cultural practices, like the presence of facial hair, and specific clothing garments associated with Muslim identity, that serve to question the political commitment of these South Asian women and their peers to the nation, which augments the intensity of surveillance that people of South Asian descent encounter.

South Asians in America

Much recent work has focused on the racialized Othering of South Asian people in the United States, so it is therefore not surprising that surveillance practices reflect and reinforce this structural positioning, particularly after September 2001. Belonging in the US is filtered through postcolonial notions of race and culture that privilege whiteness, which has led Omi and Winant to argue that ‘Race will *always* be at the center of the American experience’ (1994: 5). The historical construction of South Asians as Other is a result of postcolonial notions of India and Hinduism inherited from the British occupation of the subcontinent, which have permeated and underpinned an understanding of South Asian-Americans as ‘different’ from other Americans (Prashad 2000; Maira 2002). However, utilizing the category of ‘South Asian’ to demarcate a specific population whose ancestry is from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and/or Nepal has provoked significant tensions. Some theorists have recognized that ‘South Asian’ does not adequately address the significant distinctions contained within it, particularly the religious distinctions between Hindu, Muslim and other religious groups (Brah 1996; Prashad 2000; Maira 2002). Others have argued that ‘South Asian’ as a category does make sense in an American context, where it references a racialized, classed and generational identification (Mani 2003). Studies on South Asian-Americans after September 11, 2001 have examined the ways in which ‘South Asian’ functions for those with different national and religious heritages. Prema Kurien (2003) finds that Indian-American groups that organize around ‘South Asian’ are largely secular, focus on South Asia as a regional ‘brown-skinned’ identification and usually address post-9/11 US politics. Other groups organize in relation to an Indic religious identity that actively excludes Islamic identities and influences (*ibid.*). This piece finds that the visibility of racial and cultural identity makes the heterogeneity of South Asian identities less salient when confronted with a white American gaze, despite some attempts to claim differentiation from ‘Muslim’.

Studies have also reported the differential impacts Americans of South Asian descent have experienced since September 2001. Although the linking of some South Asians with ‘terrorist’ identities through racialization was certainly occurring before 9/11, current practices have invoked more immediate consequences that require urgent attention. In Sunil Bhatia’s (2008) study of Hindu and Sikh Indian-Americans, he reports various situations in which Indian-Americans have felt nervous, excluded or threatened immediately after September 2001 and have experienced a ‘heightened racialization’. Similarly, the misrecognition of Sikhs as Muslims in racially motivated attacks occurs primarily through the linkages between turbans, South Asia and Muslim, all of which are constructed as Other in relation to a normative (white) identity in the US (Puar 2005). The Pew Research Center’s (2007) study of Muslim

⁷ I thank one of the reviewers for reminding me of relatively recent linkages between the ‘black man’ and the ‘Muslim terrorist’, for example, conservative attempts to link President Barak Obama with the terrorist threat and the Nigerian ‘underwear bomber’ from the failed attack on 25 December 2009.

Americans (not all of whom are of South Asian descent) also found that worries about being viewed as a 'terrorist' was among the chief concerns of Muslim Americans, overshadowing reported worries about money or employment. Finally, Huq and Miller (2008) argue that the 'war on terror' has had particular 'race making' consequences for South Asian Americans, similar to the race making consequences for African Americans in the 'war on crime'. All of this work lends weight to the idea that the practice of being 'raced' as South Asian in the US often tempers religious differences within the group.

Sirin and Fine's (2008) work on young Muslim Americans does find that young Muslim Americans experience discrimination and surveillance, and that this affects young people's development. Many become more engaged with religious identities and either disengage with discrimination and surveillance or actively resist it by seeking to educate other Americans about Islam. Sirin and Fine argue that many young people are responding to a shared experience of surveillance by identifying with a multi-racial, multi-ethnic 'Muslim' identity. However, as their work focuses on disparate Muslim identities, their research methodology does not take in to account the experiences of those whose identities are linked with 'Muslim' through similar racial positioning. This piece utilizes the centrality of race in the US (as discussed by Omi and Winant) to explore a different shared experience of discrimination and surveillance.

Although these studies record the differential outcomes that Americans of South Asian descent have experienced after September 11, 2001, they do not explore long term practices of 'race making' via the accounts of those subject to these practices. Young women's discussion of identity and belonging in post-9/11 America consistently brought up the subject of surveillance by other, white Americans. Although respondents of Indian, Hindu heritage did sometimes attempt to differentiate themselves from South Asian Muslims (as described by Kurien), ultimately this was not an effective strategy for resisting surveillance encounters. Face-to-face surveillance is a socially embedded practice that is saturated by discursive⁸ understandings of race located within the US that subjects almost all South Asians to the same everyday scrutiny. This piece illustrates that surveillance encounters are one of the ways through which South Asian racial identities are lived by those who inhabit that racial positioning.

Methodology

This discussion is borne out of a qualitative research project on young women's accounts of South Asian identity in the United States. The 2005-2006 field work in the Northeast of the United States⁹ consisted of semi-structured interviews with young women of South Asian descent whose parents immigrated to the US immediately after the changes to immigration laws in 1965.¹⁰ The research specifically intended to investigate the tension experienced by women in being recognized as 'American', despite respondents having been born in the US or spending most of their lives there. It was also an attempt to examine the complexity of identity in a situation where 'South Asian' is often understood as a totalizing descriptor. Thus, the research explored race, class, gender, sexuality, culture and religion all within a context of young women of South Asian descent.

The interviews consisted of 1-1.5 hour in-depth conversations with 33 women. Because I was interested in college students, initially I contacted university cultural organizations, such as the South Asian Students' Association(s), Muslim Sisters Group(s) or Bengalis Unite!, to find interview participants. From there, I

⁸ This piece follows Judith Butler's (1993) and Stuart Hall (1996) discussion of discourse as providing linkages between language, representation and differential power relations. Discourses are layered, shifting, contradictory and unstable; however they enable people to locate themselves and others within the social structure.

⁹ Fieldwork was conducted in Massachusetts, New York and New Jersey. However, respondents originated from all over the eastern half of the United States, including for example Alabama, Connecticut, New York and Michigan.

¹⁰ In 1965 the US government changed the immigration laws from a system of quotas by sending nations to a system that was based on the individual immigrant's educational or professional qualifications. This change was intended to dismantle a system of racial preference that distributed low quotas for sending countries in Asia and Africa.

used a snowball sampling method to find participants who were not members of cultural organizations. Furthermore, I asked other contacts and networks to disseminate information about the study and recruit volunteers. Using a semi-structured interview schedule, I asked respondents to voice their opinion on specific media representations of South Asian women, and then asked participants to expand upon or clarify various points or statements that occurred within the conversations that followed.

Respondents ranged in age from 18-27 and could trace their ancestry to various countries in South Asia: India (22 – with one via Guyana and one via Nigeria), Bangladesh (6) and Pakistan (5). They also varied in reference to religion: the majority of participants were Hindu, approximately one third identified as Muslim and a handful of participants described themselves as Christian, Jain or atheist. Finally, with regard to socio-economic position, the majority of young women located their upbringing in a mostly white, suburban, above-average income framework, while the remaining respondents were raised in more diverse urban locations with modest household incomes. Although this study is exploratory in nature and not intended to be representative, the demographic information reported by participants is generally reflective of South Asian demographics in the United States (US Census 2000).

The focus of this discussion on South Asian women does not address the perhaps most significantly impacted social group subject to counter-terrorist surveillance – men of South Asian or Middle Eastern descent (and increasingly black men). In some of the literature discussed above, it was men who principally reported feeling the effects of post-9/11 racialization, including experiencing or worrying about violence and surveillance in semi-public spaces (Dhingra 2003; Puar and Rai 2004; Puar 2005; Bhatia 2008; Sirin and Fine 2008). While the experiences of men are certainly salient in this political climate, this paper seeks to highlight the effects of these discourses on women for two reasons. Firstly, women's experiences of discrimination and surveillance often differ from men's (hooks 2000; Koskela 2000). Secondly, this discussion serves to pre-empt the potential for women's voices to become marginalized as men's experiences post-9/11 come to over-determine understandings of the racialized effects of 9/11.

Effecting 'South Asian' women?

Signifying 'Terrorist' Identity

As Ahmed describes, racial identity functions as a primary identifier of the stranger within western nations. When the events of September 11, 2001 were discussed in the research interviews, a significant theme that emerged from a majority of women was feeling watched or experiencing 'staring' by ordinary (non-authoritative), white¹¹ Americans. Young women's accounts describe how the experience of surveillant staring marks them as 'potential terrorists' through a racial identity that sets them apart from white Americans. They also demonstrates how this surveillance uses race to define the borders of 'South Asian' as a category that undermines religious differences within the group.

In the following accounts, respondents describe how race acts as a signifier for potential terrorist, which is experienced by young women through surveillance. Naheed¹² and Amina, 19 year old women whose parents emigrated from Bangladesh and Pakistan respectively, describe how they experience a racialized Muslim identity that is set in contrast to 'white' and 'American' through surveillant staring.

Naheed: ...especially when I walk in the supermarket or anywhere like no, I'm used to the stares now, you know what I mean? And, but, the thing is that there's different stares

¹¹ None of the young women interviewed described being stared at by non-white Americans; however racial identities of those who were 'staring' was not specifically probed within the interviews as they were focused on women's experiences. Further research should explore the practice of surveillant staring and the ways in which this surveillance practice is also racialized.

¹² Names have been changed to ensure respondents' anonymity.

after 9/11 because it's like I'm Muslim so even if I'm not Muslim they look at the darker skin tone and they're like 'Oh'. Even like it's not only men who did the bombing, they hear about suicide bombings and a woman doing that, so it's like man or woman if they're dark skinned they might be potential terrorists.

Amina: [After 9/11] people were staring and it wasn't because I was Muslim, they couldn't tell that. It was because I looked a certain way and you know, luckily it didn't go further because they didn't know, but there was that sort of staring and that was based on the image of South Asian. [...] Like at that point I felt like I was being told that I wasn't American at all.

Naheed makes an explicit link between her racial identity as 'darker' and her community members' construction of her as a 'potential terrorist', while Amina makes a similar point in relation to the 'image' of South Asian.¹³ According to both these women, white community members are not reacting to their identities as Muslim. Instead, both seem to believe that white Americans would be staring at them whether they knew the women were Muslim or not. Furthermore, gender identity does not exempt these young women from surveillance, nor does a non-Islamic religious identity, as Chitra, a 25 year old Hindu woman of Indian descent, illustrates:

And post-9/11, riding the [New York City] subway, you get dirty looks from people um, sort of the, sort of mistaken identity racism. I've had that happen to me, certainly.

Here, Chitra directly links the 'dirty looks' she receives from other subway passengers as an experience of 'racism', where she is differently structurally positioned than white residents of the US. While both Naheed and Chitra allude to a separation from 'white' Americans, Amina makes the exclusion from 'American', which is accomplished through the experience of being 'stared at', explicit by stating 'I felt like I was being told that I wasn't American at all'. For all of these respondents, surveillant staring reiteratively positions them as 'different' from white Americans through a discursive linkage of 'the image' of 'dark skin' with 'potential terrorist'. As Foucault's (1977) work argues, those who look are invested with power, while those who are subject to the gaze enjoy less relative power. Thus, surveillance emerges as a practice of racialization where those positioned as the dominant majority are able to exercise power over other Americans. All three of these women also specifically relate this practice of racial positioning to a post-9/11 historical context, where the surveillant gaze indicates an assumption that racial identity signifies a terrorist proximity. Women of South Asian descent are being marked as 'stranger' Others thorough these 'looks', where this surveillance based on perceived racial identity separates the women from the white, American majority and consolidates them into a South Asian category that is equated with terrorism.

Other respondents' narratives demonstrate that this Othering through surveillance has specific consequences for the construction of South Asian as a racialized category of identification in the USA. In the section of the interview where we discussed the ramifications of September 11, 2001, Pallavi, a Hindu of Indian descent, stated:

Pallavi: I feel like when people say South Asian they don't differentiate between, like they just say all South Asian people, like after September 11th they're all terrorists.

Therefore, because white American 'people' do not differentiate between different types of South Asian, the heterogeneity of people of South Asian descent becomes less salient when confronted with a white

¹³ Naheed admits that there were some stares before 9/11 – recognizing that the characterization of South Asians as Other preceded September 2001.

gaze. The diversity of South Asia is disregarded by ‘people’ who assume that all South Asian people are potential terrorists. Here, racial identity as ‘South Asian’ comes to over-determine these respondents’ post-9/11 experiences despite a religious difference from ‘Muslim’.

For some young women, this racialized association with ‘terrorist’ has led them to actively associate with the more inclusive category of ‘South Asian’. As Amina says:

I don’t think I would have felt like as much of a South Asian if 9/11 hadn’t happened. Because it was so much about the image, what you look like.

According to Amina, it is precisely the image of the South Asian, via perceived racial identity, that associates all of them with the figure of the Muslim terrorist. For women such as Amina, this signification of (potential) Muslim identity through appearance, and the boundary defining stares that are associated with that signification, contributes to the creation of a South Asian subjectivity. Rather than distancing herself from different religious or national origin identified groups of South Asians in the United States, Amina’s comments suggest that after September 11, 2001, people of South Asian descent in America might sometimes experience a more unified identity because of a similar racialized structural positioning that is accomplished via the experience of surveillance. Furthermore, despite the specificity and contextualization of this experience in the US, the effect of this racialized construction is a separation of South Asians from ‘American’.

However, this consolidation was resisted by a subset of the respondents. Specifically, for some non-Muslim women their link with ‘Muslim’ through racialization produced anxiety. Harshini is a 21 year old Hindu woman of Indian descent. In relation to the aftermath of September 11, 2001, she states:

Harshini: I think especially post-9/11, people don’t understand the difference between a Hindu and a Muslim and they assume that everyone who is brown is a Muslim and that we all attacked the twin towers and all of us are bad and, so it’s awful. [...] I did always get comments and it’s like, ‘*I’m not Muslim. I’m from India*’. It’s not, you know, and people don’t understand that...(emphasis Harshini’s)

For Harshini, the ways in which perceived ‘race’ functions as a signifier for the figure of the Muslim terrorist makes Harshini quite anxious. In consequence, she tries to disrupt this link between herself and Muslims by claiming Indian ancestry as a differentiation from Muslim identity (as described by Prashad and Kurien).¹⁴ However, the primacy of perceived ‘race’ as a signifier is illustrated through her assertion that ‘people don’t understand that’. By subjecting all South Asians to surveillance, the white American gaze serves to create and affirm a South Asian subjectivity that transcends the boundaries of national and religious divisions for these women—*whether they supported that consolidation or not*. Thus, although participants like Harshini attempt to resist this racialized positioning by identifying as Indian, this did not alter the experience of surveillant staring. This is illustrated by the strength of this theme of ‘looking’ or ‘staring’ that runs through women’s narratives regardless of their national heritage or religious identities. Therefore, the practice of ‘staring’ as a form of everyday surveillance consolidates a racialized location for South Asians in America.

Other Identifiers

However, some Muslim young women and their peers were identifiable as Muslim because of bodily cultural practices, like growing facial hair, or clothing items, like headscarves. For these respondents, these other signifiers act as further layers through which the Muslim ‘terrorist’ figure is constructed. Thus, for these respondents, ‘race’ is not the only facet of appearance through which they, and/or their peers,

¹⁴ Of course, Harshini’s comments also disavow the large Muslim population within India itself.

were identified as Others or potential ‘terrorists’. Nasrin, a Muslim student, discusses how skin and facial hair interact for men to signify ‘Muslim’ and potential terrorist identity.

Nasrin: I’ve just felt really lucky that I’m not, um, a male who looks very Arab looking. Sometimes I’m worried for my brothers a little bit because sometimes they’re a little bit scruffy [unshaven].

Here, Nasrin combines being ‘Arab looking’ and the presence of facial hair to further signify ‘terrorist’. These two signifiers are a citation of the popular representation of Muslim identity in American discourse, where ‘Arabs’ and ‘Muslims’ are linked with each other and with facial hair in this historical moment. In addition to facial hair, men’s clothing can also act as an indicator of the Muslim terrorist figure. Qumar, a Muslim of Pakistani descent says:

Even the male guys, if they have like a beard or if they wear the little, it’s like a pseudo yarmulke – it’s called a *kufi*. So if they’re wearing that, then it’s not so much the gender it’s the way they appear, so that’s the difference.

Qumar’s friends signify Muslim identity through visible cultural artifacts like beards or *kufis*. It is not only their skin that acts as a vehicle through which their identity is perceived; these other signifiers have an impact on the ways in which her friends are visibly identified as Muslim and thus, potential terrorist. Therefore, in addition to race, cultural practices such as facial hair, hair style and/or clothing items can act as further signifiers of dangerous Other identities.

Similarly, women who wear the *hijab* or ‘cover’ reported that after the events of September 11, 2001 they felt subject to more surveillance and discrimination.¹⁵ Mira is a 20 year old Muslim of Pakistani descent who covers. She states:

Here, I kind of notice people looking sometimes, you know? And it’s like, you know when you go to an area that isn’t as diverse, I guess they don’t really understand ... After 9/11, I know people who had trouble and stuff and people who got harassed and this [and] that but like I didn’t which was good and stuff.

Although Mira states that she has not had ‘trouble’ or been ‘harassed’, she has felt the effects of 9/11 as a woman who covers, since she perceives an increase in surveillance characterized by people looking at her. This is particularly the case since she moved from an area of the US with a comparatively large Muslim community, Ann Arbor Michigan, to an area of New Jersey where Muslims are much less visible. Furthermore, she constructs the discrimination and harassment felt by others as related to the surveillant ‘looking’ through her juxtaposition of the two issues in her narrative, and her recognition that other community members did experience harassment.

Furthermore, these effects extend to friends and peers. Qumar says she can sometimes blend in on public transportation, because she is ‘light skinned’, where she recognizes that the ambiguity of her racial identity excuses her from the Othering experienced by her peers. However, some of her more religious friends have had problems because their headscarves easily identify them as Muslim.

¹⁵ Both of the young women discussed here who wear the *hijab* referred to the practice as ‘covering’. One of the political decisions that I made in writing the results of the study was to utilize women’s self-descriptors whenever possible, therefore I refer to wearing the *hijab* as ‘covering’ to reflect these respondents’ terminology. For an in-depth discussion on the postcolonial construction of the *hijab* see Yeğenoğlu 2003.

Qumar: If I'm going on the subway myself, I kind of blend in. [...] But, if I go out with one of my friends who like covers their head like they don't pick up on it because they've been doing this for so many years that they just kind of tune out whatever is going on around them. But I see the way everybody changes, you know? And I see the stares that they get and I see the body language how it gets all tense and everything. And that really bugs me. [...] You can't blame them, especially because it wasn't just a one-time thing, it continues to happen and you don't know when it's going to happen again, but you can't help being saddened by it too.

Qumar's commentary reinforces the ways in which headscarves constitute a marker of Muslim and thus potential terrorist identity, and as a result, she perceives that surveillance of her friends is increased. Qumar attempts to understand this surveillance by suggesting that 'it [terrorist attacks] continues to happen'. Aligning herself with national discourses of counter-terrorism, she appears to sympathize with the need to maintain vigilance and surveillance. Yet, she complicates this by engaging in a counter-surveillance of 'staring' subway passengers—she 'notices the stares' in a way her friends do not. Thus, both Qumar and her friends are participating in a complex and contradictory resistance to the surveillant staring by either 'seeing' the stares or 'tuning it out'.

Therefore, race alone does not account for all of the ways in which the figure of the Muslim terrorist is signified by people of South Asian descent. In addition to perceived racial identity, other signifiers such as facial hair and clothing are significant in representing the threat of the terrorist Other. Yet, these other signifiers serve another purpose in figuring the Muslim terrorist. The vigilant, 'good citizen' must look for clues as to a 'stranger's' political commitment to the nation (Ahmed 2000). Therefore, a visible identification with the category 'Muslim' implies a potential rejection of the category 'American'. Muslim-identified clothing engenders a suspicion that the wearer is actively separating him/herself from the nation. Those who signify Muslim identity through these other additional signifiers, like facial hair and clothing, are engender a discursive suspicion that they reject the principles of the nation, and consequently they require increased monitoring by those who 'belong', i.e. white Americans, and are subject to more explicit and stringent practices of surveillance.

Terrorists, South Asians, Americans

This piece demonstrates the ways in which surveillance functions as a race making practice for South Asian-Americans. Sirin and Fine (2008) found that young Muslim Americans organize around and relate to a shared religious identity despite racial or ethnic differences. However, these women's accounts illustrate that shared racial identity is also significant in respect of identity formation for South Asians in the USA. Although the category 'South Asian' is fractured by significant religious, cultural and national distinctions, the experience of 'staring' reinforces a racialized location in a post-9/11 political environment, which is shared by both Muslim and non-Muslim participants. Counter-terrorist discourses and strategies are intended to protect the nation from an external threat, yet they also succeed in creating an experience of subjectivity and discrimination for South Asian-Americans that is accomplished via quotidian surveillance practices. Furthermore, another effect of this 'staring' is to construct the subjects of surveillance as Other in relation to normative American. Thus, while Ahmed (2000) argues that surveillant 'looking out' performatively reinscribes the boundaries of the dominant community, being 'looked at' also (re)positions the subjects of the gaze as separate from the dominant community and Other. One potential outcome of this racialized framework of shared surveillance is the creation of a more unified South Asian subjectivity in the USA for some young women. While this has implications for a strategy of resistance by a more unified South Asian population in the US, it also carries the potential for large-scale structural and subjective outcomes for Americans of South Asian descent (Kurien 2003; Puar and Rai 2004; Puar 2005; Bhatia 2008; Huq and Miller 2008). Therefore, in relation to South Asians, shared racial positioning cannot be ignored in favour of religious distinctions.

However, in addition to racialization, other cultural artifacts like facial hair and cultural/religious clothing shore-up the Othering of Muslim South Asians in the United States. In a multicultural US that is supposedly tolerant of racial differences, these cultural or religious artifacts that symbolize identity outside of normative American further separate bearers from ‘American’. This piece extends Ahmed’s argument about race as a primary marker of ‘stranger’ Others to consider the effects that cultural/religious clothing and body practices that mark one as Muslim have in relation to surveillance. These signifiers of Muslim identity rely on the postcolonial discourse that contrasts Muslim with American, where obvious identification with Muslim identity suggests a lack of political commitment to America. Men who wear distinct symbols of Muslim identity like *kufis* or who grow beards and women who cover or wear the *hijab* often encounter a surveillant reaction from other Americans that reiteratively marks them as Other. This aligns with Norris and Armstrong’s (1999) finding that subcultural attire or bodily practices for black British men also invoked a surveillant reaction from CCTV operators. Therefore, while race is a primary indicator of the consolidation of ‘South Asian’ as a racialized category, other cultural symbols of Muslim identity work to supplement those linkages and lead to further instances or intensity of discriminatory surveillance. As such, cultural artifacts must be considered alongside racial positioning in relation to the lived experience of surveillant discrimination.

This work also demonstrates that the practice of surveillance is not only reflective of social divisions, it also actively reproduces and reinforces them. Surveillance often correlates with marginalization (Monahan 2006), thus surveillance is an exercise of social power (Foucault 1977). The surveillance of South Asians as potential ‘Muslim terrorists’ places them in a position of marginalization vis-à-vis white Americans, who are exercising power over ‘brown’ bodies and marking them as Other. Surveillance acts as a practice of racialization that re-affirms the normativity of whiteness and ‘maintain[s] the normal by disciplining what has been abnormalized’ (Fiske 1998: 72). In this context, discipline could refer to accepting an exclusion from public space, accepting the increases in surveillance or attempting to mitigate the experience of surveillance by adopting western clothing or other signifiers of ‘American’ or non-Muslim. Although the notion of discipline was not specifically explored in this study, further research should consider the behavioural effects of surveillance for those subject to this ‘staring’. Nevertheless, this piece demonstrates the ways in which surveillance is an *active social process* that reinforces the differential structural positioning of its targets.

Furthermore, respondents did not produce an account of actively resisting surveillance. The only discourse that was available to them with respect to resistance seemed to be to claim an Indic religious identity that highlighted the ‘misidentification’ of non-Muslim women as Muslim. However, this did not seem to impact women’s experience of ‘staring’, nor did it challenge the racialized surveillance of South Asians who *were* Muslim. Perhaps the heterogeneity of ‘South Asian’ could be mobilized to resist the homogenization of the category, as well as the association between people of South Asian descent and the figure of the Muslim terrorist, by highlighting the complexity contained within ‘South Asian’. Another avenue for resisting this categorization might be to claim an American identity that does not subordinate women’s additional racial, religious and cultural identities. What is sorely needed is for the practice of Othering to be dismantled rather than simply shifted to other hyperbolic figures.

Surveillance as a practice of racialization is particularly important in respect of non-technological forms of surveillance. Whilst technological surveillance, such as CCTV, airport screening and computerized databases, does disproportionately affect South Asians and other non-white persons, often these forms of surveillance are occasional encounters, or they are invisible to the person concerned. For example, in relation to airports, most people’s experience of air travel is occasional and, although intrusive, their experience of surveillance in that space is exceptional. Furthermore, the person may be unaware that their flight record was flagged on a database and subject to more intense scrutiny. However, person-to-person surveillance is a more democratic practice that is experienced more often and is more visible to the person being surveilled. This piece illustrates that it is the surveillance ‘encounter’ that is significant in bringing

about the racialized effects of this surveillance. In his conclusion to a study on the police use of CCTV in the UK, Goold (2004) wondered whether the disproportionate targeting of black and working class young men ‘matters’ if no further police action is taken and no ‘encounter’ occurs. Similarly, Yar argues that the disciplinary effects of surveillance only manifest if there is a ‘conscious registration of being observed’ (2003: 261). The focus within Surveillance Studies literature on new technologies of surveillance certainly works to explore emerging trends within the field and new developments. However, it does not always enable and exploration of the ‘conscious registration of being observed’ precisely because these ‘encounters’ are technologically mediated. These direct surveillance encounters are an everyday practice of marginalizing and discriminatory racialization that both affects and effects South Asian Americans profoundly.

Conclusion

The discussions presented by these South Asian women illustrate some of the individual consequences of counter-terrorist policies and initiatives in a post-9/11 political context. This article traces the ways in which counter-terrorist surveillance practices affect processes of identity and identification for South Asian-Americans as well as the exercise of power and discrimination by ordinary (non-authoritative) Americans over Americans of South Asian descent. Practices of surveillance, some of which are encouraged by the government, are intended to prevent terrorism, yet impact upon the experience and construction of a particularly racialized group in the US. These effects are complex and contradictory, where being racialized as South Asian or displaying cultural artifacts that mark one as Muslim occasions a discriminatory, disciplinary and disproportionate level of surveillance in public places. However, these practices also potentially engender a South Asian subjectivity in America. A shared experience of surveillance and exclusion from ‘American’ could encourage a strategic unification among disparate religious, national and ethnic/regional groups within the category ‘South Asian’. Despite these potentially positive outcomes, the exercise of power by non-authoritative, white Americans over ‘brown’ bodies occurs in the everyday with the tacit approval at best, and encouragement at worst, of national and local governments. Thus, they are state-sanctioned, but also difficult to dismantle precisely because they occur on a discursive rather than ‘legal’ level. The specific consequences and implications of these practices for ‘South Asians’ in America are troubling and immediate, and certainly carry the potential for violence as well as other forms of social exclusion.

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank Bridget Byrne, James Rhodes, Michael McCahill, the two anonymous reviewers and the participants in the Muslim Geographies Conference at the University of Liverpool (4-5 April 2008) for their comments, all of which significantly improved this piece.

References

- Ahmed, S. 2000. *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*. London and New York: Routledge.
- American Civil Liberties Union. 2002. *Civil Liberties after 9/11: The ACLU Defends Freedom*. New York: American Civil Liberties Union.
- Amnesty International. 2004. *Threat and Humiliation: Racial Profiling, Domestic Security and Human Rights in the United States*. New York: Amnesty International Publications.
- Anthias, F. 2006. Belongings in a Globalising and Unequal World: Rethinking Translocations. In *The Situated Politics of Belonging*, eds N. Yuval-Davis et al. London and New York: Sage.
- Behdad, A. 2005. *A Forgetful Nation: On Immigration and Cultural Identity in the United States*. Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press.
- Bhatia, S. 2008. 9/11 and the Indian Diaspora: Narratives of Race, Place and Immigrant Identity. *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 29(1): 21-39.
- Brah, A. 1996. *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Butler, J. 1993. *Bodies that Matter*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Coleman, R. and M. McCahill. 2011. *Surveillance and Crime*. London: Sage.
- Department of Homeland Security. 2007. *Homeland Security Advisory System*.
www.dhs.gov/xinfolshare/programs/Copy_of_press_release_0046.shtm [accessed 1 October 2007].

- Dhingra, P.H. 2003. Being American Between Black and White: Second-Generation Asian American Professionals' Racial Identities. *Journal of Asian American Studies* 6(2): 117-147.
- Fiske, J. 1998. Surveilling the City: Whiteness, the Black Man and Democratic Totalitarianism. *Theory, Culture and Society* 19(2): 67-88.
- Foucault, M. 1977. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Gilliom, J. 1994. *Surveillance, Privacy and the Law: Employee Drug Testing and the Politics of Social Control*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Gilliom, J. 2001. *Overseers of the Poor: Surveillance and the Limits of Privacy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Goldberg, D.T. 2002. *The Racial State*. Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Goold, B. 2004. *CCTV and Policing: Public Area Surveillance and Police Practices in Britain*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
- Gopinath, G. 2005. Bollywood Spectacles: Queer Diasporic Critique in the Aftermath of 9/11. *Social Text* 23(3-4): 157-169.
- Hall, S. 1996. Introduction: Who Needs 'Identity'? In *Questions of Cultural Identity*, eds S. Hall and P. du Gay. London and Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- hooks, b. 2000. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press.
- Huq, A.Z. and C. Muller. 2008. The War on Crime as Precursor to the War on Terror. *International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice* 36: 215-229.
- Koskela, H. 2000. "The gaze without eyes": video-surveillance and the changing nature of urban space. *Progress in Human Geography* 24(2): 243-265.
- Kurien, P. 2003. To Be or Not To Be South Asian: Contemporary Indian American Politics. *Journal of Asian American Studies* 6(3): 261-288.
- Lewis, R. and S. Mills (eds). 2003. *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Lyon, D. 2003a. Surveillance as Social Sorting: Computer Codes and Mobile Bodies. In *Surveillance as Social Sorting: Privacy, Risk and Discrimination*, ed. D. Lyon. London and New York: Routledge.
- Lyon, D. 2003b. *Surveillance after September 11*. Cambridge and Malden MA: Polity Press.
- McCahill, M. 2002. *The Surveillance Web: The Rise of Visual Surveillance in an English City*. Devon: Willan.
- McClintock, A. 1995. *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Maira, S. 2002. *Desis in the House: Indian-American Youth Culture in New York City*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Mani, B. 2003. Undressing the Diaspora. In *South Asian Women in the Diaspora*, eds Nirmal Puwar and Parvati Raghuram. Oxford and New York: Berg Publishers.
- Monahan, T. 2006. Questioning Surveillance and Security. In *Surveillance and Security: Technological Politics and Power in Everyday Life*, ed. T. Monahan. London and New York: Routledge.
- Norris, C. and G. Armstrong. 1999. *The Maximum Surveillance Society: The Rise of Closed Circuit Television*. Oxford: Berg Publishers.
- Omi, M. and H. Winant. 1994. *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Pew Research Center. 2007. *Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream*. Washington DC: Pew Research Center.
- Prashad, V. 2000. *The Karma of Brown Folk*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Puar, J. and A. Rai. 2004. The Remaking of a Model Minority: Perverse Projectiles under the Specter of (Counter)Terrorism. *Social Text* 22(3):75-104.
- Puar, J. 2005. Queer Times, Queer Assemblages. *Social Text* 23(3-4): 121-139.
- Sirin, S.R. and M. Fine. 2008 *Muslim American Youth: Understanding Hyphenated Identities through Multiple Methods*. New York and London: NYU Press.
- van der Ploeg, I. 2006. Borderline Identities: The Enrollment of Bodies in the Technological Reconstruction of Borders. In *Surveillance and Security: Technological Politics and Power in Everyday Life*, ed. T. Monahan. London and New York: Routledge.
- US Bureau of the Census. 2000. *American Fact Finder*. www.factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?_lang=en [accessed 4 April 2007].
- Yar, M. 2003. Panoptic Power and the Pathologisation of Vision: Critical Reflections on the Foucauldian Thesis. *Surveillance & Society* 1(3): 254-271.
- Yeğenoğlu, M. 2003. Veiled Fantasies: Cultural and Sexual Difference in the Discourse of Orientalism. In *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, eds R. Lewis and S. Mills. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.