

# Healing the Wounds of Imperialism

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I made myself the poet of the world. The white man had found a poetry in which there was nothing poetic. The soul of the white man was corrupted, and, as I was told by a friend who was teaching in the U.S., "the presence of the Negroes beside the whites is in a way an insurance policy on humanness. When the whites feel that they have become too mechanized, they turn to the men of color and ask them for a little human sustenance." At last I had been recognized, I was no longer a zero. (Fanon 129)

## Introduction

The publicity about the use of torture in the global "war on terror" has brought with it a new consciousness about the limits of acceptable violence and arbitrary exercises of power for the sake of national security. Although the U.S. has employed torture in its multiple efforts to secure global domination throughout its history, the recent revelations about the centrality of torture to its policies, and the centrality of torture to imperial policies in general, has raised new questions and challenges that spark both opposition to, and defense of, imperial policies. The "coloniality of power" that infuses contemporary globalization, as Anibal Quijano (533) explains, finds its latest expression in the "war on terror" with its attendant biopolitical techniques of governance that include rendition and the use of torture.<sup>1</sup>

Even as we are in a global age of war and imperialism, we are also poised to move out of this age and into an emergent and yet to be revealed era of international politics. In this volatile moment of global proportions, it becomes apparent that we are reaching the limits of the viability of prevailing paradigms that have governed planetary existence in the past centuries. The years 1492 and the discovery of the "New World," 1500 and circumnavigation, and 1648 and the Treaty of Westphalia are markers and expressions of the paradigm of the planetary consciousness that is at stake in this moment, and all related systems and structures are hotly contested by the circumstances of the day. The shift can be likened to geological movements, where an age is thought to be at its end when half of all prevailing species and formations have become extinct. In social and political matters, we might say that the paradigm has shifted when

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half of all prevailing truths are no longer taken for granted and no longer appear as the natural ways of doing things.

In the recent war on terror era, several torture victims have become known to us through the circulation of photographs from the Abu Ghraib detention center; the testimonies and stories of people like Abou Elkassim Britel, Abousfian Abdelrazik, or Maher Arar; and the publicity about Guantanamo and “black sites” throughout the world. We have heard descriptions of rendition and terror, of secret flights to secret places, of dank cells and bloody walls and abusive treatment; and we have heard official denials that torture is part of U.S. and allied foreign policy in the war against terror.

Throughout these revelations, opportunities are presented for the viewing and hearing public to connect to the victims of torture and to be moved by their stories of suffering, suffering that is inflicted, ostensibly, for the defense of the states of our residence and citizenship. The victims of the violence of the war on terror are victims of the violence of imperialism, and through their public suffering, we are offered the opportunity to revisit, see anew, and challenge imperial politics. If there is an answer to the question of the purpose of suffering, it does, in part, offer the opportunity to open a new consciousness of our interconnectedness to each other, to cultivate compassion for others, and to forge relationships with others founded in emotionality, love and justice. However, this is not an obvious response for a number of reasons. One reason is that in the fields of international relations and global politics, and in politics in general, emotions are marginalized and excluded from the public sphere, along with related values associated with femininity and the Sacred.<sup>2</sup> Another reason is that the coloniality of power shapes and conditions contemporary global politics in ways that have us seeing each other through racial hierarchies and exclusive nationalisms that limit who we think belongs to us. Finally, the discussion about torture, as Derek Jeffreys points out, has not attended to the fact that torture is an assault on our inner and spiritual core, and as such, requires a spiritual healing for remedy and recovery. As he states: “We cannot adequately comprehend the immorality of torture without considering our inner life” (Jeffreys 5).

The story of the rendition of Maher Arar and his subsequent incarceration in a Syrian prison is a portal to expanding prevailing ideas about who belongs to us, whose suffering matters, and the ways that we are connected to each other. This paper presents Maher Arar’s story as an incidence of racial wounding in imperialist politics and an expression of the coloniality of power. Arar, a victim of rendition and torture, and Arar’s wife Monia Mazigh, who is differently victimized by rendition policies, are significant examples of embodying the pain of imperialism while also healing from its wounds. I investigate the nature of racialized pain in global politics, with particular emphasis on war and the use of torture. I consider Arar and Mazigh through the lens of transnational feminism and the promise of spiritualized feminisms for healing the wounds of imperialism by decolonizing our subjectivities. Spirituality, or the Sacred, matters to our ability to connect with people who are not like ourselves, who are not yet in our imagined community of belonging, because they

draw us to “the living matter that links us,” that is, “the pulse and energy of all of creation” (Alexander 326). My claim is that healing the wounds of imperialism is a material, emotional, political, economic and spiritual project, and that decolonizing political subjectivity holds the promise for healing the collective body in pain, a body that suffers from the pain of imperialism.

The next section outlines the story of Arar’s rendition. I then discuss the coloniality of power and imperialism in relation to pain and torture. The following section outlines Arar’s emotional responses to his experiences. I conclude with a discussion of the promise of spiritualized feminisms for ushering in a new emergent paradigm of global relations based on compassion, love and justice.

### Rendition

In the Fall of 2002, Maher Arar was traveling back to Canada from a holiday spent in Tunisia with his wife, Monia Mazigh, and their two children, Houd and Barâa. Monia and children remained in Tunisia for another month of vacation; Arar returned early to meet his work obligations. He stopped in New York to transit to his next flight to Montréal and was stopped by INS officials for questioning. Detained at JFK airport for two weeks, he was interrogated for his suspected connection to terrorists and in particular, al-Qaeda. Later, he learned that he was on a list of persons of interest supplied by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and supported by the U.S. security watch list. Without a lawyer or formal charges pressed against him, Arar was informed that he would be deported to Syria, his birthplace, despite his Canadian citizenship and passport and the fact that he was not involved with any terrorist activity. Knowing that if sent to Syria he would likely be tortured, Arar protested and pleaded to be sent to Canada. In what Arar describes as a chilling moment, the INS official read “a paragraph I still remember until today, so awful and shocking, that the INS is not the body or the agency that signed the Geneva Convention against torture” (*Democracy Now!*).

The Canadian government knew several days after his arrest that Arar would be tortured in Syria, and in what is known as extraordinary rendition, the security institutions of the U.S., Canada and Syria agreed to deport, incarcerate, interrogate and torture him. He was kept in a Syrian prison for longer than ten months, during which time he was not charged or convicted of any crimes, nor apprised of any rights he might have to challenge his imprisonment. He was beaten and threatened and tormented, kept in isolation in a cell he describes as a grave, and generally disappeared from the realm of the living to become a “ghost detainee” (Parry 516). His wife, Monia Mazigh, led an active campaign while still in Tunisia and later in Canada to find and return Arar to Canada. Her efforts caught the attention of several elected officials, including leaders of the official opposition in the Canadian Parliament. Protests, vigils, marches, press conferences, public statements and continuous human rights investigations kept the pressure on to liberate Arar, and eventually the Canadian government was forced to take decisive action to return Arar to Canada.

Shortly thereafter, the *Canadian Commission of Inquiry into the Actions of Canadian Officials in Relation to Maher Arar* was convened to investigate the case and to determine responsibility for the illegitimate rendition of Arar. The Commission eventually ruled that there was no evidence to support the idea that Arar should be extradited or deported or tortured, and that the RCMP, the Canadian Security and Intelligence Services (CSIS), and the Canadian Security and Border Services (CSBS) had been involved. The Commission awarded Arar \$12.5 million CDN, the Prime Minister issued a formal apology to him and his family, and Arar was plunged into the spotlight as a survivor and human rights defender. Monia Mazigh became very well known for her remarkable efforts to seek the release of her husband and eventually ran for a political seat in her riding.<sup>3</sup>

### Imperialism and the Coloniality of Emotion

A number of scholars have written about the contemporary war on terror as an instance of U.S. and allies' imperialism,<sup>4</sup> about the use of torture as a technique of racialized and racializing imperial governance,<sup>5</sup> and about the targeting of Muslims and people assumed to be Muslims as a revival of Orientalism coupled with contemporary forms of biopolitical governance.<sup>6</sup> The rendition and torture of Maher Arar fits within the framework of these analyses.

The concepts of Empire, imperialism and the relationship to colonialism are matters of extensive debate.<sup>7</sup> This paper delineates some factors of imperialism that are relevant to a discussion of emotions in global politics. I draw on a large framework of analysis from Anibal Quijano and his concept of the "coloniality of power," (533) defined by the racial axis of globalization, and "an energy and a machinery to transform differences into values" (Mignolo 13). As Quijano describes:

What is termed globalization is the culmination of a process that began with the constitution of America and colonial/modern Eurocentered capitalism as a new global power. One of the fundamental axes of this model of power is the social classification of the world's population around the idea of race, a mental construction that expresses the basic experience of colonial domination and pervades the more important dimensions of global power, including its specific rationality: Eurocentrism. The racial axis has a colonial origin and character, but it has proven to be more durable and stable than the colonialism in whose matrix it was established. Therefore, the model of power that is globally hegemonic today presupposes an element of coloniality. (533)

Walter Mignolo identifies the "crucial historical intersection where the coloniality of power in the Americas can be located and unraveled" as the "extended moment of conflict between people whose brain and skin have been formed by different memories, sensibilities, and belief between 1492 and today. . ." (17). Included in the package of different memories, sensibilities and belief are emotions,

that is, the emotions that are forged through racial hierarchies and exclusions, and the emotions of racism itself. Racism or the racial axis is at the heart of the Euro-colonial system and American imperialism; contemporary power that dominates global politics is colonial in its inception and in its deployment.

Imperial emotions, and more precisely, imperial pain, is pain inflicted in the service of empire. Pain inflicted in the service of empire manifests itself in specific ways because, as Sara Ahmed tells us, “[p]ain is not simply a function of the amount of bodily damage alone” (23). Rather, the use of torture and the practice of extraordinary rendition in this latest imperial war gains meaning and depth through the palimpsest of imperialism in which it is embedded.

The palimpsest of imperialism, as Jacqui Alexander describes, captures a sense of imperialism that has both a present and a long history to uncover. “Palimpsest,” in its Greek roots meaning “again-scraped,” refers to the practice of scraping text from parchment to overwrite it with new text. Done to parchments that had faded or contained text that was considered to no longer be useful, it was common for the underwriting to still be visible through the new text, and old parchments are legible with the use of ultraviolet lights. A palimpsest is a multiversal and simultaneous text requiring extraordinary measures to discern its depth, history and embedded memory.

Imperialism is a palimpsest in the sense that the hegemonic practices of a hyper-militarized U.S. state are engaged in conflict with those whose histories are shaped by Euro-colonization and its modern racisms. The U.S. has been involved in at least fifty separate bombing campaigns since WWII against mainly postcolonial countries, also known as the “Third World.” The previously colonized peoples of the world under European/British and, later, U.S. rule, are still those most subject to the worst vagaries of neoliberalism and economic globalization. Alexander suggests that the U.S. is a neo-imperial state, promoting “a form of globalization whose internal character reproduces a set of colonial relations with regard to indigenous peoples, immigrant peoples, people of color, and working class white communities within the geographic borders of the U.S.” (233), alongside its external colonial relationships with Puerto Rico, Hawaii, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Guam. These are both historic and contemporary relationships that overlap and converge to create a peculiar configuration of imperialism that is parallel to and intertwined with neoliberalism, that is, “hyperconcentrated capital that is diffused in local/globalized economies with unequal gendered and class consequences” (234).

Ahmed continues: “. . . the amount and quality of pain we feel is also determined by our previous experiences and how well we remember them, by our ability to understand the cause of the pain and to grasp its consequences” (23). In this description, pain becomes sensation through the interpretive process that makes meaning of it. Hence, Arar’s pain is more than just bodily sensations that are inflicted deliberately through coercive interrogation practices. Pain is also experienced in his exile from the Canadian nation, his disillusionment at the arbitrary exercise of power against his person, and

the fact that not his citizenship nor education nor innocence could protect him from the whims of imperialism.

Further, torture inflicts suffering that is greater than physical pain, as Jeffreys tells us, because it is an assault against a person's spiritual nature. "Torture dissolves the unities of our world, mocking attempts to remain psychically and physically whole" (Jeffreys 54). It is mental and physical suffering that is deliberately inflicted with the intent to destroy the personality and to break the will of the person. Torture reduces a person to his or her most basic survivalist impulses and primal bodily existence. Torture assaults a person's spiritual transcendence, undermining his or her capacity to be open to the universe and to transcend biological and cultural limitations. Torture "ruptures self-possession by creating deep internal conflicts" (Jeffreys 62) and disorients a person internally. Torture that takes the form of "stress and duress" positions, for instance, leaves victims with the sense that their own bodies have turned against them as their muscles and ligaments separate from skeletal structures through the sheer force of gravity. Psychological torture mechanisms cause deep internal alienation and leave victims with a core sense of mistrust, even of their own senses. ". . . [T]orture targets a person's delicate and precarious self-possession. . . he cannot control pain and what others do to him," and a person is reduced to infantile states (Jeffreys 62). Taken together, the effects of torture render a person unable to communicate and connect with others, and unable to feel or know himself or herself as part of a larger whole, a greater community or a transcendent purpose.

The palimpsest of imperialism produces pain that is palimpsestic, that is, imperial pain that is part of the coloniality of power, the multiverse of pain borne of centuries of separation, fragmentation, racism and exclusion from Humanity. Alexander suggests that the last 500 years, "at least in this hemisphere," have been predicated on "the division of things that belong together" (283), on alterity and difference and fragmentation and comparison; on lack and scarcity and competition and exploitation; on concepts of humanness that disconnect from Spirit, not only excising certain populations from the category of humanity, but alienating all from *being* persons. With an emptied out and cheapened concept of humanness, meaning is ascribed to commodities and exchange but not to engagement and mutual care. As she states: "We simply cannot continue to substitute owning for being, privacy for intimacy, or substitute monogamies of the mind for the expansiveness of the Soul" (112).

Fragmentation is an element of the embodied pain that is part of a collective consciousness formed by the realities of racism, slavery, and colonialism. It is the palimpsest of imperialism lived at the cellular, emotional, and spiritual level. The anguish Monia Mazigh endures while wondering about her husband while he is in an ex-colony with militarized governance, fractionalized populations and authoritarian structures, is entirely connected to the painful ordeal that Arar is living and the coloniality of power. Imperial pain and racialized pain are structural, as structural as class or gender or race; but it is the structure of the essence of humanity as it has been shaped through the coloniality of power. The use of torture today is

only one latest layer of the palimpsest of imperial torture; the war on terror is only the latest manifestation of colonial wars.

### Maher Arar

They took me down a staircase. The stench of urine, mould, and filth turned my stomach. When my eyes got used to the darkness I saw I was in a kind of cave. I would live there for ten months before they transferred me to Sednaya Prison. My cell was around two metres long, one metre wide, and two metres high. It was very dark, with no light except a little coming through a small hole in the ceiling with iron bars. The door was metal. It had a tiny opening where they gave me my food. There was a dirty sheet, two plastic bottles, and two plates on the floor. I often had to pee into one of those bottles. (Mazigh 218)

For Arar, or anyone who has been kidnapped by the state and tortured, the experience resounds with ongoing psychological problems, night terrors, day terrors, physical infirmities, emotional collapse and recurring feelings of helplessness and anxiety. At the Dorval airport in Montréal, upon Arar's return to Canada, he leaned over and whispered to his wife as she greeted him for the first time in almost a year: "I'm really scared. Are you sure it's all over and they won't put me in prison?" (Mazigh 211). As Arar described in 2006, four years after his ordeal: "Since my release, I have been suffering from anxiety, constant fear, and depression. My life will never be the same again" (Arar, Acceptance Speech, Letellier-Moffit Award).

That he is not the same man he was before being tortured is an observation that bespeaks of the intention behind the use of torture; that is, the use of torture is meant to forcibly deprive a person of all sense of agency and personhood in ways that have lasting effects. Contrary to the popular notion that torture is used to elicit information and confessions, it is more likely to render the victims silent, ashamed, isolated, humiliated and broken. As Arar tells us:

Every time I told the truth they would beat me. . . George, the officer in charge of my file, kept calling me a liar. He'd say, "You'll see what we'll do to you, you . . ." and he'd slap me across the face. He had a sort of electric cable that he'd wave at me threateningly, and I don't know how, I'd feel the cable hitting my hands, it was like being cut by a razor. One day the session lasted for several hours, I was terrified, George threatened to send me to the torture chamber; I urinated in my clothes. (Mazigh 219)

Further, the use of torture is not only to injure the primary victims, but to injure the group in question by alienating the individual from his or her community, and by attacking "the collective dimension of the individual . . . the attachment to a group that the aggressor has designated as a target" (Sironi and Branche 540). Arar was identi-

fied, arrested, deported and incarcerated because of his ethnicity, his birthplace, and an exceedingly flimsy social connection with a “person of interest” in Canada; he was profiled as a member of the worldwide Muslim population and therefore, a potential terrorist. Although the Canadian Commission of Inquiry final report does not unequivocally state that Maher Arar was a victim of racial profiling, it offers two recommendations to address and remedy racial profiling by officers of security and intelligence, policing and border patrol agencies. They are as follows:

**Recommendation 19**

Canadian agencies conducting national security investigations, including CSIS (Canadian Security and Intelligence Services), the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police), and the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA), should have clear written policies stating that such investigations must not be based on racial, religious or ethnic profiling.

**Recommendation 20**

Canadian agencies involved in anti-terrorism investigations, particularly the RCMP, CSIS, and the CBSA should continue and expand on the training given to members and staff on issues of racial, religious and ethnic profiling and on interaction with Canada’s Muslim and Arab communities. (*Canadian Commission of Inquiry* 369)

In Enlightenment traditions, the use of torture came to be associated with premodern and barbarous methods of treating suspects and criminals, and European states sought to minimize the infliction of physical suffering and rely more on incarceration to punish criminals. Nonetheless, as Talal Asad argues, torture was given the special role of incorporating subject peoples and non-citizens into civilization and humanity: “Pain endured in the movement toward becoming ‘fully human’ . . . was seen as necessary because social and moral reasons justified why it may be suffered” (295). The prison system was born at the same time that torture was pushed to the margins of public conversation, “hidden in plain sight,” as John Parry remarks (521), as expressions of the coloniality of power and the pursuit of imperial policies.

Not only was torture part of the coloniality of power but, in fact, the entire regime of international law and its distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate violence was forged through the colonial interests of expanding European powers. Following from his assertion that European public law is reflective of an emergent planetary consciousness that was made possible, initially, by circumnavigation, Carl Schmitt dates the inception of international law to 1492 and the “discovery of the new world.” Schmitt’s concept of the *nomos* of the earth refers to the community of political entities united by common rules, and the order of the earth itself, as established through international law. As a spatial, political and juridical concept, the *nomos* distinguished between European territory that was to be protected and united and non-European territory that existed for the explo-



ration and discovery by Europe itself. The ideas of civilization and humanity were considered in exclusively European terms, as reflective of European habits and traditions and ways of being that were considered to be the spiritual and political telos of everyone who ultimately fit the category of human. As Schmitt states:

From the 16th to the 20th century, European international law considered Christian nations to be the creators and representatives of an order applicable to the whole earth. The term "European" meant the normal status that set the standard for the non-European part of the earth. Civilization was synonymous with European civilization. In this sense, Europe was still the center of the earth. (86)

A planetary consciousness simultaneously brought with it the problem of creating order; hence international law, derived from European interests and traditions, was developed as the set of ordering principles for the globe. The core of international lawmaking from its inception was to establish the right of land appropriation, either through the legal categories of conquest, war, colonialism, or discovery, and to resolve arising disputes between European nations and their imperial and territorial interests.

From its origins, then, the making of international law is a colonial enterprise, and colonialism, as Brett Bowden and others argue, is a thoroughly juridical enterprise. The conventional international relations story locates the origins of international law in 1648 with the Treaty of Westphalia, suggesting that the primary characteristic of international law was about increasing inclusion and equality within Europe. However, if we accept Schmitt's story of the origins of international law as that which comes into being with the "discovery of the New World," then the development of international law is "a story of the violent exclusion of others outside of Europe, first on the basis of religious, then cultural, difference" (Ruskola 863).

Anthony Anghie's analysis of the development of sovereign statehood tells a parallel story about international law. Non-European peoples (either colonized or yet to be colonized) were not accorded sovereignty, and as Anghie demonstrates, the entire concept of sovereignty itself depended upon the exclusion of non-Europeans from self-determination and the inclusion of them as subject peoples. Anghie shows that two types of sovereignty were created: one is the sovereignty inherent to European powers that was thought to reflect their essential civilized nature; and the other is a second-tier and contingent sovereignty granted to non-European states after decolonization and the decline of the European imperial order. Second-tier sovereignty required that newly decolonized states retain or adopt idealized European "standards of civilization" to prove themselves worthy of a truncated version of self-rule. In contemporary global politics, standards of civilization are at work when states are characterized as failed, despotic, rogue, rights-violating, quasi, criminal or corrupt, suggesting that their sovereignty is contingent and not inherent to their character or essential nature as it is assumed to be in European culture. Anghie calls international law "the grand project

that has justified colonialism as a means of redeeming the backward, aberrant, violent, oppressed, undeveloped people of the non-European world by incorporating them into the universal civilization of Europe" (3). In these ways, international law and the use of torture are the alibi of each other that share a set of colonial purposes: to incorporate those who are characterized as less-than-human into an order that keeps them properly governed, managed, and contained.<sup>8</sup>

An integral aspect of torture is the process of decerebralization through physical and psychological practices that turn subjects into objects. Psychological and mental cruelty, humiliation, shaming, religious and cultural defilement, sexualized violence and attacks on masculinity and femininity are ways of dehumanizing the victim and stripping him or her of human personality. In combination with extraordinary rendition that strips the person of any sense of agency by sending him or her somewhere unknown and threatening, by incarcerating him or her without due process or any semblance of legality and limits on authority, and by offering no sense of when the ordeal will end or what it is even about, the practice of extraordinary rendition for the purpose of torturing individuals renders a person a ghost, stripped of self, "separate from one's body, not to mention from one's family, community, and other support networks. . . . The ghost . . . is by definition hidden, exceptional and dominated" (Parry 533); the ghost is what remains after (social and political) death. As Arar describes:

You know, for ten months I lived in a grave, an underground cell. It was dark, narrow and damp. . . After every interrogation session, they'd take me back to my cell. . . I was always thinking about you and the children. I was buried in my misery, but the thought of you helped me forget. At the start, I didn't know where you were, I was afraid maybe they'd thrown you in prison in Tunisia; I was so worried about you. When I was still in the United States, I begged the FBI agents to let me call you, but they refused. They kept telling me I would soon be on the plane for Montréal and my family. The first day I thought I would go mad; I walked up and down in my cell, I couldn't even think about sitting down on the metal bench. I kept telling the American agents, "Let me take a plane to Canada, I want to go home," but they wouldn't answer me. Every instant I dreamed I'd be set free, that it was only a nightmare, but things got more and more complicated. When they woke me up early in the morning in the New York jail and put me on a plane, I realized I'd never see you again. You know that little suitcase of mine, the American Tourister with my shoes, a light jacket, and the tea glasses we bought together? They took them away from me; I never saw them again. (Mazigh 217)

. . . being locked up in this cell in itself is a type of torture, but also, being incommunicado, you don't know what's happening to your family, to your kids, you start thinking all kind of things, are they also doing well, have they been kidnapped like you, what are my kids doing, how

are they doing, are they eating well, what is my wife doing, that alone . . . that alone is mentally demanding. That's why I call this time a slow death process, basically, you're basically dying . . . if they kept me more in that cell, I'd be dead by now. (Arar, *Fresh Air*)

The use of torture in the contemporary war on terror is directly connected to the coloniality of power, from the creation of international legal systems that privilege Euro-descended populations and exclude others as subject peoples; to the conventions of sovereignty and the contingent rights to self-determination that newly decolonized states are afforded; to the place of torture in imperial policies that are designed to incorporate, assimilate and eliminate peoples designated as racial Others. Arar's experience of pain is the pain of imperialism itself. He describes the physical pain as powerful enough to erase his earliest memories: "The pain that results out of these beatings is beyond imagination, to the point that you will forget the milk that you have been fed by the mother" (Arar, *Fresh Air*). Yet, his anguish is not limited to physical sensations of pain. Rather, his pain is also of a person turned from subject into object, of one who is deprived of personal and legal agency, of due process and representation, of accountability and of justice, and of community, family, nation and transcendence. The war on terror, as the most recent expression of the palimpsest of imperialism, justifies these deprivations against persons designated torturable, and it is through the palimpsest of imperialism that Arar's pain becomes legible and meaningful.

Arar's pain breaks him, as noted by his wife: "How was I to live with a broken man, how could I live with a personality that had been transformed. . ." (Mazigh 224). "Both of us had known suffering, but differently. Maher had undergone the horrors of mental and physical pain. He'd lost his faith in humankind; he'd lost confidence in himself" (238). "He was no longer the natural, spontaneous person I'd known for all the years we'd lived together. He'd become suspicious, touchy, and would worry constantly that we were being followed. At first I thought those were reflexes he'd picked up in prison. . . but every passing day drove home to me that this year of suffering would haunt us for many years to come" (221-2). An inability to find employment, his name on a security watch list and barred from entering the U.S. to this day, media leaks and public conversations questioning his innocence, ongoing suspicions about his terrorist links, sleeplessness, depression, anxiety, exhaustion and fear are part of Arar's post-rendition existence. As he states: "I wish I could buy my life back" (Arar, *Harper's Apology*).

Turned from subject to object, Arar is returned to Canada. And yet, at the same time, Arar recovers his subjectivity and his humanity. As Mazigh notes, "suddenly he'd been delivered: the shock of the outside world, people around him, the smell of freedom, children running around in the house, interviews, and, above all, this new feelings of his own humanity that he'd lost in the underground prison in Damascus, that abruptly he was rediscovering" (238-9).

Rather than remaining a broken man, he is instead, "broken open"

(Lesser) by his suffering in a way that allows him to touch the suffering of others. He says: "My life will never be the same again. But, I promised myself one thing: that I will continue my quest for justice, as long as I have a breath. What keeps me going is my faith, Americans like yourselves, and the hope that one day our planet earth will be free of tyranny, torture and injustice." (Arar, Acceptance Speech) "This struggle has taught me how important it is to stand up for human rights. . . I feel proud as a Canadian and I feel proud of what we've been able to achieve" (Arar, *Harper's Apology*). "As we celebrate Canada's birthday, we must remember how fragile our democracy is, and how important it is to stand up for our democratic rights, so that every Canadian, regardless of his or her religion or ethnicity, can live with honor and dignity" (Arar, *My Canada*).

Mazigh offers a similar assessment of the legacy of Arar's rendition, suggesting that theirs is the beginning of a struggle for justice for themselves and for others. As she states, "I could see that our life was moving in a new direction. We were no longer focused solely on our own misfortune; we had begun to understand that we must act on behalf of others, those who are afraid to speak or cannot speak for themselves" (Mazigh 240).

Through their own suffering, Mazigh and Arar remain awake and alert to their pain and their anguish, and in doing so, they are able to reach out to touch the pain of others, "[h]ealing wounds by touch, where touching is part of the work of decolonization" (Alexander 277). Arar is broken open, torn apart, dismantled from the inside-out, forever changed, never again to be the same man, and in the breaking open, he becomes receptive to the pain and suffering of others. He describes his desire to shut out the pain of others during the time he was detained: "After each interrogation session, they'd throw me into a room where I could hear the screams of other inmates, their moaning and weeping. I couldn't see a thing, but I was terrified. I wanted to rip my ears off, their screams were so piercing . . ." (Mazigh 219). However, once out of prison and home again, he became available to the screams of others. Broken open, his capacity for compassion is released, and for both Arar and Mazigh, their ordeal offers them the opportunity to work for justice and on behalf of all those who suffer, to touch the other in ways that brings to them a sense of wholeness and healing.

### Recovering the Sacred, Decolonizing the World

The palimpsest of imperialism alerts us to the "process of fragmentation we gave the name colonization" (Alexander 281), that engendered "divisions among mind, body, spirit; between sacred and secular, male and female, heterosexual and homosexual; in class divisions; and in divisions between the erotic and the Divine" (Alexander 281). Leela Fernandes offers a similar analysis by suggesting that the work of capitalism, neoliberalism, colonialism and patriarchy has been to tear apart those things that belong together, to split peoples along lines of gender, race, nation and sexuality, and to exile most people from accessing justice and dignity. Fernandes points to a "divinized understanding of the self" (37) – that is, an understand-

ing of one's self as spirit, matter and mind that allows for the emergence of a self that transcends division and difference. Alexander states that we need to make conscious the desire to be well, to be healed, and to envision a "revolution capable of healing our wounds" (277). Spiritualized feminisms, through the work of Alexander and Fernandes, suggest a route to healing the fragmented and making whole again what has been torn apart through the coloniality of power and the palimpsest of imperialism. For both authors, spirituality and a recovery of a relationship with the Sacred is not an escape from the agony of the material world. Rather, it is an opening to a spiritual understanding of the world that allows us to see deeper meaning about each other, to generate a new consciousness of solidarity, and to enact new ways of being and acting.

What would global politics look like if we all saw each other as emanations of the Divine living in Sacred concert with each other and the planet? "We are all inhabitants of this world" (Alexander 107), and as such, we all have a stake in the project of making the world intelligible to ourselves and to others. As Alexander says, "there is no other work but the work of creating and recreating ourselves within the context of community. Simply put, there is no other work . . . it need not take another five hundred years to move ourselves out of this existential impasse. Spirit work does not conform to the dictates of human time, but it needs our courage, revolutionary patience, and intentional shifts in consciousness. . ." (283). Sometimes these shifts in consciousness are generated by tremendous amounts of pain, as is the case for Arar and Mazigh. However, we need not each go through a horrific and terrifying ordeal for our own consciousness to shift. Arar, like so many victims of violence, appears as a guide who highlights the urgent need to rethink the ways that we inhabit the planet with other people, "rewiring the senses" (Alexander 328), so that rendition, torture and other imperial policies are made obsolete. He stands as one example amongst many that invites us to genuinely feel the heartbreak of "war on terror" practices in this contemporary imperial moment and be moved to do the work of acknowledging the Sacred in each other. In doing so, we embark on a new planetary consciousness of our global interconnection that is founded in love and compassion and justice.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See eds. Dauphinee and Masters, *The Logics of Biopower and the War on Terror: Living, Dying, Surviving*, Palgrave MacMillan 2007, for excellent analyses of contemporary biopolitical governance.

<sup>2</sup> See my article, "The Politics of Pain and the End of Empire," *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 9(1), March, for a longer discussion of the role of emotions in global politics.

<sup>3</sup> See Maher Arar's website, [maherarar.ca](http://maherarar.ca), for a full description of the Arar story, statements by Arar, links to the Canadian Commission of Inquiry, and an archive of media coverage. See also the Center for Constitutional Rights, [ccrjustice.org](http://ccrjustice.org), for extensive documentation from the Arar case. The Center is advocating on behalf of Arar to sue the U.S. government for its role in Arar's arbitrary arrest, detention and torture.

<sup>4</sup> Walzer, Michael. 2003. "Is there an American Empire?" *Dissent*: 27-31; Razack, Sherene.  *Casting Out: The Eviction of Muslims from Western Law and Politics*. University of Toronto Press, 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Richter-Montpetit, Melanie. "Empire, Desire and Violence: A Queer Transnational Feminist Reading of the Prisoner 'Abuse' in Abu Ghraib and the Question of Gender Equality" in *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 9:1 (2007): 38-59; Philipose, Liz. "The Politics of Pain and the Uses of Torture." *Signs*, 22:4 (Summer 2007): 1047-1071; Puar, Jasbir. "On Torture: Abu Ghraib." *Radical History Review* 93 (Fall 2005): 13-38.

<sup>6</sup> See Puar, Jasbir. *Terrorist Assemblages*. Duke University Press, 2007; Roberts, Dorothy. "Torture and the Biopolitics of Race," *University of Miami Law Review*. 62:229, 2007-08.

<sup>7</sup> See Alejandro Colas, *Empire*, Polity Press 2007, for an extensive review of interdisciplinary debates about empire, imperialism and colonial history.

<sup>8</sup> See my chapters "Feminism, International Law and the Spectacular Violence of the 'Other': Decolonizing the Laws of War," in eds. Heberle and Grace, *Theorizing Sexual Violence*, Routledge, 2009; and "Decolonizing the Racial Grammar of the Laws of War," in eds. Mohanty, Riley and Pratt, *Feminism and War: Confronting U.S. Imperialism*, Zed Press, 2008, for further discussion of these issues.

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