

Shifting Positionalities:
The Local and International Geo-Politics
of Surveillance and Policing

Edited by

María Amelia Viteri and Aaron Tobler

**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**

P U B L I S H I N G

Shifting Positionalities: The Local and International Geo-Politics of Surveillance and Policing,
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This book is dedicated to those who suffer at the hands
of surveillance and policing.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements ix

Introduction 1

Part I:

Bio-Politics: (Re)Viewing the Body

Building Oppositional Praxis and Breaking Down the Gender
Responsive Prison 12
Kolleen Duley

Surveillance and Policing in U.S. Bioscience: Producing Transnational
Others 38
Gwen D’Arcangelis

Secret Law and the Surveillance of Americans Abroad 49
Samuel Goodstein and Eric Pelofsky

The Risk of “Terrorism” and the Washington Metro 83
Jacob Stump

Part II:

Displacement: Deterritorialization and Reterritorialization

Arab/Muslim Americans After the 9/11 Attacks 100
Mysara Abu-Hashem

Ordinary Exceptions: The Violence of Threat Governmentality 124
Ben Chappell

From Provincial Paranoia to National Neurosis: The Development
of Internal Security in Northern Ireland & the United Kingdom:
1920 to the Present 137
Mark Theodorson

Islamophilia: Race, Class, and Representations of the ‘Good’ American Muslim.....	152
Nazia Kazi	
Forced Migrations and National Security	171
Fredy Rivera	
Part III:	
Flipping the Camera: Surveillance as a Mechanism of Resistance	
“It is Allah’s Will That I Am Here”: State Surveillance and Pakistani Muslim Immigrant Experience in Texas Following 9/11	184
Ahmed Afzal	
“Girls to Men”: Black Women’s Same-Sex Desire and Resisting Surveillance	204
Michelle Carnes	
Contributors.....	222
Index.....	225

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INTRODUCTION

MARÍA AMELIA VITERI AND AARON TOBLER

One might read state discourses regarding surveillance and policing practices through the myriad of ways such practices are unveiled, be they municipal automobile speed cameras passively taking pictures of speeders, or through the former-Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge asking the public to take an active role in monitoring others by reporting suspicious activity to the police. These practices are further complicated with the increased use of technology (i.e., bio-metric scans, proposed national-identification cards) as a means to police individuals and to disseminate and craft a particular knowledge about those individuals.

However, state agencies do not initiate all surveillance and policing practices. Individuals experience forms of surveillance by “private” individuals and organizations, as a way to intimidate or censor others or select activities. The authors experienced such surveillance on October 27, 2006, from the Executive Director of Accuracy in Academia (AIA), Malcolm Kline. This surveillance was in response to a workshop discussion we participated in October 2006 at American University’s Department of Anthropology “Public Anthropology” workshop. Kline’s online report on this workshop, and the topics we discussed in our presentations, illustrates his (and what would evidently be his audiences’) concern with the extensive scope of anthropology as a discipline within the academy.

In the workshop, we discussed how anthropologists explore categories like race, gender and cultural citizenship and their intersection with sexuality. Such efforts to unpack issues of current anthropological interest appear to go against the mission of his non-profit organization located in Washington, D.C., which works to have “schools... return to their traditional mission—the quest for truth.”¹ Its monthly newsletter, *Campus Report*, purports to report on “the use of classroom and/or university resources to indoctrinate students; discrimination against students, faculty or administrators based on political or academic beliefs; and campus

¹ Accuracy in Academic, “What is Accuracy in Academia.”

violations of free speech.”² In addition to the article cited here, Campus Report features articles titled “Girls Gone Wild Again,”³ a play off the popular videos by Mantra Films, Inc., in which young women take off clothing for the camera. Kline asserts, “The federal government’s Title IX regulations have led colleges to eliminate popular men’s sports teams and add moribund women’s athletic franchises in order to prove gender neutrality in athletics.”⁴ Furthermore, he cites Jessica Gavora, “who has monitored the impact of the federal rules for a good part of her career” in saying “Title IX feminist penis envy.”⁵ In another article, “Sex-Ed Favors Gays,” Don Irvine, chairperson of Accuracy in Media and Accuracy in Academia, argues

This class (through the University of Utah) is a perfect set up for the gay community which spends a lot of effort with children and youth getting them to question their sexuality and to draw them to its side. While many students may be comfortable being heterosexual, college is often a time of great experimentation and courses like this will only serve to expand such experimentation and lead to more confusion for those taking the class.⁶

An overview of the other current and archived articles in Campus Report reveals their conservative moral and political views in their effort to “document and publicize political bias in education.”⁷ In responding to our participation and the workshop, Kline wrote

American University may find a link between anthropology and various state gay marriage bans that you probably never knew existed. Tomorrow (at the workshop), Master’s and Ph.D. candidates will strut their stuff at AU’s Public Anthropology Workshop.

“Graduate students and faculty from the Department of Anthropology tackle these intriguing questions by examining how the discipline engages sexualities at the intersection of race, gender, policy making, and cultural citizenship,” the program promises. If you haven’t already, you can get a clarified idea of what direction this inquiry is going in by a look at the panelists’ vita.⁸

² Ibid.

³ “Kline, Girls Gone Wild Again,” 1.

⁴ Ibid, 1.

⁵ Ibid, 1.

⁶ Irvine, “Sex-Ed Favors Gays.”

⁷ Campus Report, “About CRO.”

⁸ Kline, “AU Anthropologically.”

Of particular importance to this project is the observation that Kline's report on the conference, the workshop and our participation, goes beyond simply a method of surveillance of us and our colleagues. The above quotation and Irvine's (2007) article both equate homosexuality with an active deviance (i.e., "strut" in Kline and "experimentation" and "confusion" in Irvine). It invokes insidious policing of our bodies as background information of each of us as panelists. As for Tobler and Viteri, Kline writes:

Aaron Tobler: "His current research primarily focuses on homophobia and the police, with supplemental interests in state agency and mass news media," and

María Amelia Viteri-Burbano "a PhD candidate at AU who holds an M.A. in Social Studies with a Concentration on Gender Studies from FLACSO, in Ecuador."

This last young lady's "research interests include finding new ways to create and practice theory as a way to unmask how sexuality, race, ethnicity and gender have been constructed to perpetuate regimes of racism, sexism, homophobia and ethnocentrism," according to her official profile. "Her dissertation examines how meanings around queer and Latino are evoked, acted, recycled and constantly re-signified and how 'race' and 'sexuality' are translated in the Latino [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered] LGBT Diaspora in the District of Columbia."⁹

For instance, Kline's reference to Viteri as "this young lady," followed by her gender and research interests, while informing the reader of her non-U.S. nationality, goes to discredit her position as an academic and researcher. Gender (i.e., "this young lady") is a feminine domain that—paired with the sexual deviance reported in the workshop—"goes wild" if usurped by feminists. Not qualifying Tobler's perceived gender, nationality or race assumes that he is not an "other"; like Kline and his assumed audience, Tobler's gender, citizenship or racial background are of no particular importance.

AIA is an illustrative example of what we hope to bring forward in this collection: the unexpected ways in which surveillance and policing converge into the diversity of particular bodies as marked by gender, race, class, ethnicity, age and legal status. The regulation of people encompasses the inter-relations between government policies, developers and varied understandings of space/place (as further documented by Lyon

⁹ Ibid.

2006; Kline 2002; Schneider 1995). As discussed, these inter-relations produce particular shifting positionalities such as that of the “migrant,” “refugee,” “homeless,” “displaced,” “terrorist” or “alien.” The original research brought forward by the scholars in this book invite the reader to analyze not only the techniques, but also the usually contradictory effects of surveillance and policing practices as facilitated by modern technology. This collection also addresses questions surrounding the definition of “public space” considering that the way in which social scientists have traditionally conceptualized space has dramatically changed in the past few decades. The technological revolution triggered the changes that accompany the current socio-economic global system. Some of the effects range from increased inequality to the way we experience time and space (Harvey 1990).

As current work on surveillance (i.e., Etzioni 1999; Lyon 2001 and 2003; Staples 2000; Webb 2007) tends to overlook the possibilities of using mechanisms of surveillance as possible practices of resistance, the chapters in this book look at the effects that these mechanisms have beyond discussions around “privacy” and “individual rights.” By doing this, we are moving beyond the technologies used for surveillance (Parenti 2004; Greg 2004; Monahan 2006) and towards the multiple intersections manifested in its production and the responses conveyed.

Shifting Positionalities: The Local and International Geo-Politics of Surveillance and Policing represents an effort to encompass surveillance and policing as discussed throughout the two-day international, inter- and multidisciplinary conference the authors organized from March 23 to 24, 2007, “Interrogating Diversity: Understanding Issues of Contemporary Surveillance and Policing.” The Department of Anthropology at American University, Washington, D.C., hosted this conference with the financial support by campus departments and a non-university affiliated organization. “Interrogating Diversity” problematized surveillance and policing as they intersect with race, ethnicity, class, sex and gender, within the understanding that tracking movements across geographic, linguistic and imaginary locations might provide additional lenses to question the multiple ways in which surveillance and policing practices become normalized.

Within a post-September 11, 2001, framework, the current conjunction between sexual, racial and ethnic identities and surveillance practices calls for a thorough examination of the multiple and usually unexpected meaning-making practices adapted by individuals. The latter—far from being predictable—speaks to the possibility of actively resisting, as opposed to passively embracing, techniques where people’s daily lives are

policed. The chapters in this collection address surveillance and policing as a practice and a site that speaks to the multiple possibilities of re-signifying this regime. Some of the questions we aim to address include:

- How are forms of surveillance practiced by various agents? Why is surveillance conducted, as in publically stated versus actually practiced (and unknown reasons)? Who benefits and what are the costs?
- How do people, who state agencies police, interpret the very agencies that police them? How do state agents interpret their own positions as state agents? What is the aim or objective of policing?
- What are the intersections of personal liberty with the security of the state? How do discourses of security in the United States compare or contrast with other nation-states?
- How does sexuality amalgamate with notions of race, ethnicity, class and gender to normalize individuals? How does public policing frame and shape notions of gender?
- How do agents use knowledge to mark difference? How do discourses of national security police "difference"? How do public officials or government statements share and present this knowledge?
- How do discourses of surveillance, policing and security currently create and reinforce otherness?
- Is there a need for scholars to debate issues of surveillance and policing, when there is a real and present need for action now? If there is a need, then why is there such a need? What can the academy bring to a discussion at the grassroots level?
- How and why certain agents define security vis-à-vis public spaces (i.e., airports, subways, etc.) and private spaces (i.e., private-owned businesses, private universities)?

Shifting Positionalities has three main sections that problematize the various ways bio-power, displacement and resistance converge to constitute particular subjectivities as entangled in a framework of surveillance and policing. These sections encompass common themes discussed thoroughly by the diverse set of scholars who expose their groundbreaking research and knowledge to this book.

1) Bio-Politics: (Re)Viewing the Body

The concept of bio-politics, or bio-power, is particularly useful in analyzing the production of bodies. This concept understands surveillance

as a series of mechanisms of power that regulate people's lives. In addition, these technologies inform how people police themselves, and others. In this section, the chapter authors will engage the concept in an effort to analyze the construction of particular subjectivities in women, surveillance of United States citizens abroad and the politics around the use of the Washington, D.C., Metropolitan Transit Authority's subway system.

Using bioscience to analyze the gendered and racialized dimensions of biological security, Gwen D'Arcangelis illustrates how discourses of security reify groups as embodying risks, whether in the form of terrorists or diseased bodies. Related to these discourses of security is the analysis brought forward by Samuel Goldstein and Eric Pelosfsky as they examine—from a unique “insider” perspective—the rules governing the surveillance of U.S. citizens abroad by the United States government. State discourses translate these rules into specific policies that the administration of President George W. Bush promotes as necessary in this time. The concept of “terrorism” becomes a transcendental signifier when mobilized through “security” measures, as those implemented in the Washington, D.C., Metropolitan Transit Authority's subway system as illustrated by Jacob Stump.

2) Displacement: Deterritorialization and Reterritorialization

Different mechanisms of surveillance account for today's common practices of policing that normalize discourses and practices around displacement. Nevertheless, displacement implies a continuous conversation—a dialectic around a territory. Whether it is material or symbolic (or both), it becomes imperative to analyze the relationships within and between different discursive sites, various disciplines and spaces of knowledge production. This section analyzes the regulation of minority female populations in U.S. prisons and Arab/Muslim Americans, the various discourses around security in Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom, representations around Islam in U.S. discourses and the confluences of forced migration and national security discourses in Ecuador and Colombia.

These sites account for particular forms of deterritorialization and reterritorialization as subjects negotiate their subject positions and identities within a particular territory. Kolleen Duley offers a substantial critique of gender-responsive prisons and their implication in furthering segregation as these prisons become complicit in reifying poverty and

discrimination based on gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexuality and legal status among the most transcendental. Nazia Kazi's analysis of Muslim Americans shifts our attention to the production of Islamophobic knowledge about Muslims, where an idealized representation of a "good" Muslim inherently excludes subaltern Muslims. Efforts to exclude Arab/Muslim Americans is explored in Mysara Abu-Hashem's chapter, where he discusses the contribution of U.S. foreign and domestic policies in homogenizing "others"; "others" in this case being Arab/Muslim Americans. As such, he positions racism as a means to uncover the meanings of "the nation." Reminding us to research local-level spaces, Ben Chappell uses his ethnography in East Austin, Texas, on Mexican Americans to problematize the situation the United States is in at this time. By positioning actions and policies in an exceptional manner, the United States government can shift responsibility from itself to others. Mark Theodorson argues that "fear" is a cornerstone in the development of "otherness"; such fear led to the establishment and perpetuation of specific laws in the United Kingdom who stated aim was to maintain security in Northern Ireland. Finally, Fredy Rivera calls attention to the economic and natural factors that lead to migration—with special attention on Colombia and Ecuador—where warfare is a cause for concern and its affect on migrants.

3) Flipping the Camera: Surveillance as a Mechanism of Resistance

Within the understanding that various agencies enable particular practices of surveillance, this section analyzes the in-between spaces that turn surveillance into mechanisms of resistance for Pakistani Muslim immigrants living in the U.S. and Black lesbian strip events in the Washington, D.C. area.

Ahmed Afzal further exemplifies the creative ways in which communities negotiate their targeted identities by drawing on transnational resources. The author draws in ethnographic fieldwork among Pakistani Muslim immigrants in Houston, Texas, to challenge the public rhetoric associating Muslim ethno-religious environments in the U.S. with Islamic militancy, terrorism and anti-Americanism. Michelle Carnes' research on Black same-sex desiring women's erotic parties focuses on the often neglected or excluded in the dominant public sphere the media accounts of such parties, particularly insofar as participants seek to create spaces of same-sex sexual desire and expression. Agents in these spaces seek to

counteract surveillance by both non-Black persons (most often white persons) and other Black persons.

Afzal and Carnes' chapters map the various strategies of resistance employed by marginalized and alienated communities. Those that, according to Bhabha, have to live under the surveillance of a sign of identity and fantasy that denies their difference.¹⁰

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¹⁰ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 90.

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