

Special issue on *Neglected encounters: Militarism, race and the politics of coloniality*

Racial militarism and civilizational anxiety at the imperial encounter: From metropole to the postcolonial state

Security Dialogue
2021, Vol. 52(6) 546–566
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DOI: 10.1177/09670106211054901
journals.sagepub.com/home/sdi



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Abstract

In this article, I ask three key questions: First, what is the relationship between militarism and race? Second, how does colonialism shape that relationship to produce racial militarism on both sides of the imperial encounter? And, third, what is the function of racial militarism? I build on Fanon's psychoanalytic work on the production of racial hierarchies and internalization of stigma to argue that militarism became a means through which the European imperial nation-state sought to mitigate its civilizational anxiety and assert itself at the top of a constructed hierarchy. In particular, I argue that European militarism is constituted by its colonization and historical constructions of the so-called Muslim Orient, stigmatized as a rival, a threat and an inferior neighbour. However, this racial militarism and civilizational anxiety is not only a feature of the colonial metropole, but also transferred onto colonized and postcolonial states. Drawing on examples of racial militarism practised by the Syrian regime, I argue Europe's racial-militarist stigmas are also internalized and instrumentalized by postcolonial states via *fleeing* and *transferral*. Throughout the article, I demonstrate that racial militarism has three main functions in both metropole and postcolony: the performance of racial chauvinism and superiority; demarcation of boundaries of exclusion; and dehumanization of racialized dissent in order to legitimate violence.

Keywords

Civilizationism, Fanon, militarism, racial militarism, racialized religion, Syria

Introduction

What is the relationship between militarism and race? How do colonialism and war shape racial militarism on both sides of the imperial encounter? And what are the functions of racial militarism for the nation-state? These queries are prompted by a conspicuous lack of deeper theorizing in international relations on the nexus between racism and militarism, at least in its European context.

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And yet, despite the lacuna, it is clear from even a cursory comparison of definitions of racism and militarism that both share principles of supremacism and domination.

Thus, racism is ‘the belief, practice, and policy of domination based on the specious concept of race’ (Henderson, 2014: 20), and is often supported by state power. Meanwhile, militarism ‘justifies military priorities and military influences in cultural, economic, and political affairs’ (Enloe, 2007: 11), and includes an ‘ideological legitimation of violence’ (Eastwood, 2018: 48). This legitimized violence is, like racism, always for the purpose of domination. Moreover, given its monopoly over violence, the state (as is the case with racism) is the most effective agent of militarism.

Given their similar functions, one can already see how morbidly useful racism and militarism are to each other, and how the state operates as a conduit for both. However, in this article, I use the term ‘racial militarism’ not only to denote these overlapping functions of domination and legitimation of violence, but also to highlight the constitutive role of race in European militarism produced via colonization. By this, I mean that race was present at the inception of European militarism and is still perpetuated through its continued performance vis-a-vis racialized communities. I define racial militarism as an ideology, meaning it operates both as a *theory* of civilizational supremacy and as a *practice/policy* of chauvinism, exclusion and dehumanization for the purpose of enacting violence.

Though this relationship between militarism and race has received scant attention in international relations, the relationship between militarism and *gender* has fared much better, thanks largely to the work of feminist scholars (Goldstein, 2003; Howell, 2018; Hutchings, 2008; Parashar, 2018; Rossdale, 2019: 65; Segal, 2008; Sharoni et al., 2016; Young, 2003; Yuval-Davis, 1997). This body of work helpfully complicates militarism, arguing that it is co-constituted with gender (Eichler, 2019: 161), identifying it not merely as a war strategy but as an ideology that permeates masculinist nation-states.

While I am indebted to this scholarship for laying the groundwork for key ideas in this article, I also acknowledge that the need to address the *constitutive role of race* in militarism is long overdue. Feminist scholars are increasingly incorporating it into their analyses of militarism (for good examples, see Basham, 2016; Millar, 2021). But, for a long time, race was incorporated within an expanded gender framework, where the conceptual heavy lifting was carried out through a gender analysis, while race was slotted in alongside. While I recognize race can simply overlay what we already know about gendered militarism, this does not tell us the full extent of its constitutive contribution to militarism.¹

Contra international relations, sociologists have given more consideration to racial militarism, specifically in the United States. American sociologists and activists have made racial militarism central to their analysis of state formation: W.E.B. Du Bois (1978: 65) argued that US militarist imperialism abroad was supplied by racism at home; Dunbar-Ortiz (2015) has explored the inherent connection between settler militarization, subsequent gun laws, and the constructed threat of indigenous and enslaved people; while Martin Luther King Jr (1967) connected the ‘triple evils’ of racism, poverty and militarism.

However, studies of *European* militarism and *postcolonial* militarism have not typically produced similar connections. To address this, I build on enquiries seeking to locate ‘what militarism is and does in communities marked by “imperial encounters”’ (Chisholm and Ketola, 2020: 271), and respond to Barkawi’s invitation to place ‘force and war at the centre of the encounter between the West and the non-European world’ (Barkawi, 2016: 204). Thus, centring the impact of colonial war and expansion, I argue that all militarism in Europe is *racial* militarism, not only operating symbiotically with race but also co-constituted by it – a nexus that is reproduced via the construction of racial hierarchies and an imperialist civilizational schema.² In particular, I want to point out that Europe’s relationality via proximity to and colonial warfare with the ‘Muslim Orient’ on its

doorstep, along with the civilizational anxiety this produced, shaped and still constitutes its racial militarism. I then turn to the postcolony, focusing on the Syrian militarist state as an example, to argue that Syria's apparatus of power was built, in part, on a need to demonstrate civilizational superiority against enemies at home and abroad. Both the colonial metropole and the postcolonial state, therefore, have internalized and instrumentalized the notion of the barbaric 'Other' via militarist ideology and practice. In both contexts, this racial militarism is expressed through chauvinism, the construction of exclusionary national identities and the racialization of dissent.

To elucidate these claims, I begin by thinking through the ideas of Frantz Fanon, whose work unsettles any possibility of either colonial or postcolonial self-righteousness and complacency. In particular, his work on the 'white superiority complex' and the psychological internalization of colonial stigma provides a conceptual grammar to my arguments. This Fanonian framework points to the hierarchical relationality that is manipulated into being through the imperial encounter, one that then neatly conforms to a racial schema and concocts civilizational anxieties. I go on to categorize the manifestation of internalized stigma in two ways: first, via a *fleeing* from those racial stigmas and, second, through their *transferral* onto a new, constructed 'Other'.

Racial hierarchies, civilizational anxiety and Fanonian internalization

Central to understanding how race and militarism are co-constituted is the construction of a civilizational schema based on racial hierarchies. Fanon's work sheds light on the psychological processes behind the construction of these racial hierarchies and explores how they are reproduced even among the colonized. Starting with the imperial metropole, Fanon asserts unequivocally in *Black Skin, White Masks* that the colonizer is the progenitor of racial hierarchies:

The feeling of inferiority of the colonized is the correlative to the European's feeling of superiority. Let us have the courage to say it outright: *it is the racist who creates his inferior*. (Fanon, 2008: 69, emphasis in original)

Fanon's identification of 'white superiority' – that is, the psychological need for the colonizers to feel dominant and the need to impose that superiority complex on those they subjugate – is not merely psychoanalytical speculation. Rather, it describes the active intellectual efforts by Europeans to construct a hierarchical, civilizational schema since the 17th century. This schema that categorized the globe's population into 'civilized', 'barbarians' and 'savages' was socialized via Western (especially Enlightenment) knowledge production, packaged in the language of science and then used to justify colonial expansion (Neilson, 1999). Thus, this racist classification is outlined in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's (1973) 'Discourse on inequality'; it appears in Kant's (1991) 'Idea for a universal history with a cosmopolitan purpose'; and is utilized by Hume (1983) for his six-volume *History of England (1752–64)* as he traces England's own supposed transition from barbarism to civilization. Such European texts not only were deemed authoritative historical narratives of human epochs and progress, but also became indispensable guides for future racial classifications of people.

By the late 19th century, this civilizational schema had become a naturalized part of academic enquiry, boosted by the apparent validation offered by European and settler-colonial success. A particularly instructive exposition on racial hierarchies was offered by J. W. Powell, the director of the US Bureau of Anthropology, in his annual address in 1886. Drawing a connection between 'lower races' and animal life, he stated:

The human race has been segregated from the tribes of beasts by the gradual acquisition of these humanities, namely: by the invention of arts; by the establishment of institutions; by the growth of languages; by the formation of opinions and by the evolution of reason. If this be true – and this is demonstrated by the science of anthropology – then the road by which man has traveled away from purely animal life must be very long; but this long way has its land-marks, so that it can be divided into parts. There are stages of human culture. The three grand stages have been denominated Savagery, Barbarism, and Civilization. (Powell, 1888: 98)

Powell went on to give a detailed characterization of the different races, identifying what separated them and how they moved from lower to higher stages of development, focusing on capacities of industry and specifically warfare. Powell justified European colonization and the necessity of imperial war by suggesting proximity to white people facilitates progress among ‘lower races’, stating that ‘when savage or barbaric peoples associate with civilized peoples they learn the civilized language and often abandon their own’ (Powell, 1888: 101). Native abandonment of local cultures and practices, and emulation of European ones, was thus a sign of human development.

For Fanon, this ‘transition’ was *not* development, but rather a sign that colonization had extended from physical to mental oppression. He reserved his most searing criticism in *Black Skin, White Masks* not for the colonizers but for the ‘natives’ who internalized imperialist ideology. For the purpose of my argument, I wish to emphasize the notion that internalization occurs *after* encountering imperialist ideology, an ideology that, like a disease, depends on proximity in order to spread. The enforced encounters (via war) and shared space (via colonization) enable the colonizer to foist a relational identity on the racialized subject. The significance of the imperial encounter in this process is highlighted here by Fanon:

For not only must the black man be black; he must be black *in relation* to the white man. . . . The black man *among his own* in the twentieth century does not know the moment his inferiority comes into being through the other. (Fanon, 2008: 82–83, emphasis added)

Relationality therefore plagues the colonized by forcing interaction and comparisons that they never sought. Having assuaged their own civilizational anxieties via the racial schema, imperialists then carried it with them to the colonies as a tool of psychological domination. They understood that if they could expose the colonized to the ‘white superiority complex’, and thereby manipulate the encounter into a relational one to sow the seeds of an *inferiority* complex, the greater part of the battle would be won. As I elaborate in the rest of this article, both feelings of superiority and inferiority are products of civilizational anxiety – that is, an insecurity about a community’s position within the civilizational schema.

Here I wish to deepen the discussion of internalization to better understand how this civilizational anxiety manifests in postcolonial contexts. Fanon in fact delineates three types of responses to colonization: The first is that of the colonized whose internalization is expressed through acceptance of the colonizer’s hierarchy as the natural order of humanity. Through that acceptance, they become dependent on the colonizers and pose no threat to their superiority. The second category is that of the colonized who internalize colonial stigmas but also seek to resist them. The third category is that of the colonized who emancipate themselves from any hierarchy or stigma through complete indifference to how they are perceived by the colonizer, thus manifesting true autonomy through mental detachment.

I focus on the second category of the three, for here Fanon challenges us with an apparent contradiction: resistance to colonial stigmas may nevertheless be (though it is not always) an expression of internalized colonialism. This category must be of concern to the postcolonial state that has

built its identity and legacy on resistance to colonization – such as the Syrian regime. The danger with this category is that, rather than freeing themselves from the imposed inferiority complex, attempts to refute it tie the colonized ever closer to the colonizer. Extrapolating from Fanon's work and the examples I use in this article, I split this category of internalization into two further manifestations: *fleeing* and *transferral*.

Fleeing can be identified, in its mildest form, through a refutation of the colonizer's charges of inferiority, but in more extreme forms it is found in mimicry and a desire for proximity to the 'civilized'. Thus, Fanon describes the Antillian who, on returning from France, seeks to flee from the inferiority imposed on him by shunning his native Creole and inflecting his discourse with French words, accents and mannerisms (Fanon, 2008: 9–27). In the process of fleeing from internalized stigmas, and to shed their barbarism, the colonized person works extra hard to be identified with civilizational traits. The example that Fanon provides is one of complete mimicry, but I argue that this form of fleeing might come in more mixed forms. Thus, some native traits can still be retained and celebrated with anticolonial pride, while others – especially those traits *most* associated with inferiority, such as religiosity in the Orient – are discarded and denied.³

As for *transferral*, I define this as a strategy that gets deployed when it is insufficient to resist internalized stigmas by fleeing alone. It then becomes necessary to also extend the imperialist, civilizational hierarchy downwards, *within* the colonized communities, so that the one who is resisting their internalized inferiority is no longer at the bottom of the hierarchy. They can then enjoy an imagined proximity to the colonizer by transferring the stigmas they are fleeing from onto a barbarized category of their own people, whom they can similarly despise for possessing all the inferior traits they have discarded. Thus, Fanon describes the annoyance a Black man from the Antilles feels if he is suspected of being of African descent, because he has internalized a colonial hierarchy that distinguishes even between Black people, though the difference cannot be detected in the colour of their skin (a crucial point I will return to later in this article). In Fanon's (2008: 15) words:

the Antilles Negro is more 'civilized' [on account of his French education] than the African, that is, he is closer to the white man.

Thus, the colonized, having been burdened with an inferiority complex through colonial relationality, then search for their own 'Other' onto whom they transfer their internalized stigmas. In this way, the main function of imperialist ideology and racism – namely, to create hierarchies in order for one community to feel and behave as though it were superior to another – is reproduced. This means that any society can produce such dynamics if it is able to construct a racialized Other. Fanon provides both colonial and postcolonial societies, and all those who self-identify as anti-imperialist, with a conceptual grammar for self-accountability, to confront our own racisms and to not look away. Fanon's work also invites us to recognize the fluidity of racist ideas beyond East–West/North–South/colonizer–colonized binaries. It is both necessary and possible to be alert to the porosity of these binaries without reducing the responsibility of the original, or dominant, purveyors of those ideas in the imperial West.

European racial militarism and stigmatizing the Orient

In this section, I demonstrate how the civilizational schema I outlined above, and the European need to position themselves at the top of it, was and is especially expressed via militarism. Advancement in military technology was considered necessary to facilitate transition from one epoch of human development to the next. For example, Francis Bacon argued in 'Of the true

greatness of the kingdom of Britain' that to be 'skilled in warfare and prepared to exercise martial valor' was more important than wealth in facilitating the advancement of a population (see Zeitlin, 2021: 210–211). Friedrich Engels delineated the weapons that supposedly allowed each racial group to graduate, stating in 1894: 'The bow and arrow was for savagery what the iron sword was for barbarism and firearms for civilisation, namely, the decisive weapon [that enabled progress]' (Engels, 2004: 40). And Powell (1888: 103) identified military strength, organization and capacity for greater destruction as traits of an advanced, civilized community. Hence, rising European militarism in the 18th and 19th centuries played a central role in embedding racial hierarchies in the European imagination; that imagination was then enacted materially through imperial administration in the colonies (Delatolla and Yao, 2019: 644; Mills, 1997; Persaud, 2019).

However, the timing of rising European militarism tells us more. It was not a consequence of feeling superior, but rather of feeling *insecure* regarding Europe's position on the civilizational hierarchy, especially due to an ascendant Muslim Orient in the 15th and 16th centuries. This created an imperative to (re)assert a hierarchy through military expansion and derogatory stigmas about their rivals' military capacity. Exacerbating this insecurity was the placement of 'Oriental' people relatively higher up on the spectrum of human progress in imperialist ideology, above 'savage' African⁴ and indigenous peoples, but just below Europeans. Militarism was a response to the threat and civilizational crisis of being usurped by Europe's nearest rivals.

Indeed, for some time after the Crusades, and especially with the rise of the Ottoman Empire after 1453, Europeans associated the Orient with military prowess in contrast to its later derogatory depictions. Epitomizing this trend, the Kurdish general Salah al-Din Ayyubi was often recognized in European literature for his chivalry and honesty in comparison to 'unscrupulous' Crusader generals (Irwin, 1997: 139; Ten Hoor, 1952); the Scottish Enlightenment historian William Robertson (1838: 10–12) even speculated whether Europe learned its civilizational traits from interaction with 'barbarians' in the Crusades.⁵ Moreover, Oriental military strength as a masculine trait was closely associated with other masculine traits, such as intellectual prowess. Thus, on a more prosaic level, the rapid spread and popularity of coffee houses in European capitals during the 17th century – notably coinciding with the military rise of the Ottomans in the same period – was described by chroniclers as an emulation of 'Mohammedans', whose 'sobriety', 'genius' and 'alacrity' were associated with their consumption of 'the black drink' (Mirkoivic, 2005: 88–89; Walsh, 1894: 9). Early Modern European histories before the codification of racial hierarchies, and before military expansion in the Orient, were replete with contradictions regarding the Muslim Other and the European Self, reflecting a mixture of admiration and resentment towards the former, and reproach of the latter. A perfect example of this was Richard Knolles's *History of the Turks*, first published in 1603, for many years treated as an authoritative account of not just the Ottoman empire, but the Muslim Orient as a whole. He wrote:

So that at this present if you consider the beginning, progress, and perpetual felicity of this the *Othoman* Empire, there is in this World nothing more admirable and strange; if the greatness and lustre thereof, nothing more magnificent and glorious; if the Power and Strength thereof, nothing more Dreadful or Dangerous: Which wondering at nothing but at the Beauty of itself, and drunk with the pleasant Wine of perpetual felicity, holdeth all the rest of the World in Scorn, thundering out nothing still but Bloud and War, with a full persuasion in time to Rule over all, prefixing unto itself no other limits than the uttermost bounds of the Earth, from the rising of the Sun unto the going down of the same. (Knolles, 1687: 'Author to the Reader')

Elsewhere in his account, the Turks are described as 'fierce and courageous', qualities contrasted with the 'discord' and 'carelessness' of the Christian princes. The founder of the Ottoman dynasty

is described as a ‘man of great spirit and valour’ who distinguished himself above ‘effeminate Christians’. Knolles goes on to admire the Ottomans’ strength, their ‘antient military discipline’, their vigilance, their frugality and their unity, much of which he attributes to ‘the manner of their religion . . . as that thereof they call themselves “Islami”’ (Knolles, 1687: 5–8).

However, such grudgingly generous accounts of the Orient began to shift to wholly negative depictions with the rise of imperialist expansion, the consolidation of a civilizational schema, and *especially* with the promotion of militarism both home and abroad. Militarism became the conduit through which that transition from racial insecurity to racial chauvinism could occur. Thus, by the 19th century, in contrast to Europe’s earlier depictions of the Orient’s physical and intellectual strengths, charges of physical and intellectual *weakness* took over.

A prominent example of this is Scottish writer John Reid’s historical account *Turkey and the Turks: Being the Present State of the Ottoman Empire* in 1840 – coinciding with the peak of Western European imperialism. Gone are references to any positive attributes among the Ottomans, who are instead collectively described as ‘depraved’, while their soldiers are described as ‘almost without discipline’ (Reid, 1840: 16). Littered among the military accounts are numerous and lengthy narratives of ‘barbaric’ palace intrigues, with particular references to the various sultans’ lack of judgment, ‘debauched and dissipated habits’ (Reid, 1840: 15), ‘grossly intemperate habits’ (Reid, 1840: 16) and propensity to luxuries in the midst of war, where, for example, they are found to be ‘reclining on [their] divan’ (Reid, 1840: 14) or engaging in ‘every species of sensual and abandoned behaviour’ (Reid, 1840: 18). Regular allusions to their indolence and rashness were designed to contribute to a demasculinization of the Ottomans.

This is juxtaposed with Reid’s valorization of Europeans, whose military courage and moral rectitude stand as examples of their superior civilization. In contrast to Knolles, every early defeat suffered by the Europeans at the height of Ottoman power is qualified by Reid with references to their (for example) ‘gallant resistance’ (Reid, 1840: 10–12) and assurances that ‘the knights and followers of the cross fought bravely’ (Reid, 1840: 8) and ‘unweariedly’ (Reid, 1840: 12). We are told a Turkish naval defeat in 1571 meant ‘their maritime power was forever crippled’ (Reid, 1840: 13). Focusing on one of the few instances where the Europeans were able to check Ottoman progress, and in a clear connection between military prowess and reason, Reid states that ‘the fury of the Osmanlees [the Ottomans] was no match for the cool science of the Christians’ (Reid, 1840: 14). Where the Ottomans engaged in pragmatic diplomacy with the Europeans, Reid (1840: 14) describes them as having ‘sued for a humiliating peace’, portraying any concession as a defeat.

Two further observations are worth noting here: First, Reid’s account describes the Ottomans as reaching their zenith in 1673. But his most scathing accounts are reserved for the 200-year period of Ottoman *ascendance* prior to that date. In contrast, the later chapters chronicling the Ottomans during their so-called decline are less subjective, focusing on the technicalities of battle. Thus, Reid’s chief concern was to address 19th-century Europe’s anxieties regarding their position on the civilizational schema back in the Early Modern era, fearing their past weaknesses would tarnish their present quest for superiority. Reid compensated for that insecurity through a revisionist history and by generating derogatory stigmas about their rivals.

Second, and particularly fascinating, is the fact that Reid’s derogatory account looks back at the exact period in history when Knolles’s hugely popular contemporary account, praising Ottoman military strength, was first published and subsequently reprinted multiple times. Accordingly, Reid’s history is a retraction of Knolles’s; it is a distancing from former European admiration for Ottoman military successes and a retroactive attempt to recast the Ottomans as inferior even when they were militarily superior to Europe. There is significant disparity between the earlier and later European chronicles of the Ottomans, with the latter coinciding with the rise of European imperial militarism and constructions of race.

The cultural shift between these eras, before and after the rise of European militarism in the 19th century, is also dramatically reflected in the changing artistic representations of the Crusades. Thus, in medieval and early modern paintings of the Crusades, the ‘Saracens’ are depicted as equal combatants in battle – their soldiers are visible, possessing military agency whether in victory or defeat, and at times shown to have the upper hand.⁶ Contrast this with artistic depictions of the Crusades in the 19th century during renewed popular fascination with the Orient, such as Émile Signol’s famous 1847 painting ‘Liberation of Jerusalem by the Crusaders, 15th July 1099’, in which the European, and pointedly Christian, armies and generals command all the attention, no longer in equal combat with the barbarian armies but in a state of triumph – the only remnant of the Muslim Other in these latter paintings are as obscure casualties, lifeless and vanquished under the feet of the Crusaders’ horses.⁷ The message of such historical and artistic revisionism was clear: the Crusaders were victorious *because* of their civilizational superiority, while the Muslim enemy had always been inherently weaker, foreshadowing the inevitability of contemporary (19th-century) European military superiority.

The Muslim identity of the barbarian enemy was not an incidental factor. While the Enlightenment proceeded in Europe, confirming its intellectual superiority and therefore its right to exert military superiority abroad, the Orient’s apparent failure to secularize like Europe was seen as an indictment of its racial inferiority – the fact that the religion in question was *Islam* made it doubly so (Said, 1978: 207, 1981: 7; for Orientalist accounts, see Gibb, 1962; Lewis, 2001). So, even though Islam was labelled a religion, it also became a container for racial stigmas. Indeed, the term *Homo Islamicus* came into usage during the 19th century in Europe, assigning Muslims their own racial category regardless of their ethnic roots, along with their own evolutionary trajectory (Lockman, 2004: 74; Rodinson, 1966).⁸

This racialization, like the fabrication of historical military weakness, was necessary to undo the uncomfortable theological, geographic and military closeness between the Muslim Orient and the West – a closeness that threatened to blur the boundaries of the civilizational schema. The fact that the so-called Muslim world had enjoyed intermittent periods of military superiority and conquest against the West in fact produced greater rivalry and hostility than comparisons with other religious communities (Lockman, 2004: 36). Military one-upmanship against Europe’s Ottoman and Muslim rivals mattered more to the European ego and as proof of European superiority than victories against communities lower down the racial hierarchy. This explains the popularity and ‘stickiness’ (Ahmed, 2014) of the derogatory label ‘the sick man of Europe’, foisted on the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century – a label that was not even materially accurate at the time. Nevertheless, this one epithet provided a vessel, a short-hand code and a speech act for multiple emotions and intentions: it marked a triumphalist devalorization of the once-powerful Oriental empire; it was an indirect form of self-praise for masculine, civilized Europe; it later suggested an inevitability to Ottoman defeat in World War I, and thus an inevitability to European military victory; and it offered a preemptive justification for the carving up of the Middle East into colonial mandates in the aftermath.

In these ways – via culture, history and colonization – an insistence on the Orient’s military and intellectual weakness was baked into European militarism. This racial militarism initially compensated for European self-doubt and insecurity, later provided chauvinistic self-knowledge, and finally offered moral justification for colonization.

The exclusionary function of racial militarism

As discussed above, racial tropes supplied European militarism and colonial expansion on a global level. However, they also had deep implications on a local level within the metropolises and

colonies, where the imperial militarist encounter and an oppressive relationality was continually reproduced. Thus, globally, militarism supplies racial chauvinism and domination; locally, militarism performs an exclusionary function, shaping insider–outsider boundaries of national identity.

Feminist scholarship has already expanded the way we understand militarism as having a deeper sociopolitical function within the state beyond a basic military one, playing a unifying role and reinforcing the cohesion of an ‘insider’ group. Thus, European nation-states depend on militarism to produce ‘communities of feeling’ through acts of war commemoration (Berezin, 2002: 44, cited in Basham, 2016: 885–889; see also Mills, 2020), donations to veteran charities (Millar, 2018), or via communal spaces celebrating the country’s military past (Partis-Jennings, 2020). These acts create stories of service and duty, which are packaged within the ‘everyday’ and localized in order to humanize soldiers and foster greater ownership of national histories of war and sacrifice.

But, as with any nationalist endeavour, creation of a strong insider community necessitates a clear *outsider* category as well, and once again militarism plays a prominent role in this, especially aided by its constitutive relationship with gender. Thus, historically, masculinity combined with militarism defined who was a good nationalist, while the perceived *lack* of these traits became a source of shame and delegitimation of one’s nationalist credentials (Mosse, 1996: 7; Nagel, 1998: 249). A key function of gendered militarism, then, is not only to confer identity, but also to enact exclusionary politics within the nation-state. Thus, citizens who choose not to participate in – or, worse, denounce – the nation’s militarism are feminized and stigmatized. In this way, non-militarized citizens are rendered to the private sphere (Basham, 2016; Yuval-Davies, 1997).

However, just as militarism depends on an ideal masculine identity, it also requires an ideal racial identity within the nation-state (or colony), and necessarily produces an inverted type too: the degraded social and political pariah, against which the ideal nationalist is favourably juxtaposed. This is the man who does not, will not or cannot participate in the nation’s militarism, and is therefore stripped not only of his masculinity but also of his *civilized* identity. Thus, the non-militarized man, or the one dissenting against the nation’s militarist projects abroad, is rendered both effeminate and, if he can be racialized, barbaric, demoted in the racial hierarchy and worthy of scorn. The best he can do to redeem himself is to remove himself from public life and shield the nation from his barbarism.

That barbarization is intensified when religion, specifically Islam, is added to the stigma. Just as religion played a role in the gendering and racialization of the Orient at the global level, it similarly continues to play a role in exacerbating the gendering and racialization of communities and individuals *within* the nation-state. As Khan (2021) argues, the mere designation of religion is inherently gendered and racialized. Thus, via its gendering, and on account of its emotionality, religion is only safe and useful in the private sphere – just like women. Meanwhile, religion outside the private sphere is rendered ‘maniacal’.

Since Islam’s supposed backwardness makes it resistant to enlightened secularization, its presence within a nation-state remains a constant threat. This threat justifies the necessity of militarism at home – a militarism that is constituted by its opposition to and defence against a maniacal religion, and a militarism that in turn defines who belongs and who cannot within the nation-state. Consider, then, the stigma heaped on the racialized, religious member of the nation-state who opposes its military adventures, especially those in Muslim-majority lands. The nation’s militarism, so necessary in demarcating the insider group, was conceived in opposition to their being, while their racial inferiority renders them an unfit participant in the nation’s militarism anyway. This strips them of the capacity to defend the vulnerable nation, which in turn renders them untrustworthy and (conversely, given their demasculinization) suspected as an internal threat. Thus, in the militarized nation-state, they will always be depicted as a fifth column seeking to violate the feminized nation.

Gentry and Sjoberg (2015) argue that a militarized woman in the public sphere, who, if operating beyond a designated role in the national army, becomes unnatural and monstrous. Akin to that, I argue that the racialized and dissenting person within a nation-state who refuses to hide in the private sphere is similarly deemed unnatural and monstrous. The Muslim terrorist trope that is so prevalent in Western political and popular discourse is the logical culmination of this racial militarism. The disloyalty and antipathy towards the British army expressed by Muhammad Sidique Khan, one of the 7/7 bombers in 2005, and of Michael Adebolajo and Michael Adebowale who killed British soldier Lee Rigby in 2013,⁹ thus fit seamlessly into this archetype, extending the imperial frontier from the global to the local. They represented the inevitable outcome of a non-privatized Islam in Britain against which the British people needed to be defended, thereby justifying and reinforcing the racial constitution of Britain's militarism.

As with so many tactics of state control, this exclusionary system of belonging and trust based on militarist and de-Islamicized loyalty had already been tested in the colonies long before the rise of imperial patterns of immigration to the metropole. Just as Fanon observed, the military encounter and subsequent colonial administrations in the colonies facilitated false racial hierarchies among people who shared the same ethnicity. Thus, as Delatolla and Yao (2019: 650) show in their study of 19th-century Syria, Syrian Christians were granted 'civilized' status, and viewed as morally and intellectually superior to the 'barbaric' Syrian Muslims, owing to a perceived religious proximity to Europe. Manchanda's (2018: 175–177) work on British classifications of Afghan society in the 19th century similarly shows how greater (Islamic) religiosity was considered a sign of backwardness, while Afghans who were less religious were considered more civilized and easier to negotiate with. This intellectual and moral weakness of the Muslim Orient was extended to constructions of physical inferiority and demasculinization in the 19th century (Sinha, 1995), stigmas that were brutally weaponized in recent imperialist projects in Bagram and Abu Ghraib (Khalid, 2011; Owens, 2010). Thus, in cases where it was difficult to construct and impose a racial hierarchy based on skin colour, religion was used instead. Being able to detach from Islam was thus presented as a way of escaping *some* of the barbarism of the Oriental race. This will be significant when exploring the Syrian case study in the next part of this article.

Syrian racial militarism as fleeing from internalized stigma

Having explored racial militarism among the colonizers, I now turn to the other side of the imperial encounter. Others have been motivated by similar enquiries, focusing on the experiences, strategies and influences of imperial forces in the colonies (Barkawi, 2017), or of those aspiring to be recruited by them (Chisholm and Ketola, 2020). But what about the militarism of *anti-imperialist* postcolonial states? The example of the Syrian militarist state shows racial militarism is reproduced there, too. A continued colonial relationality between Syria and Europe has produced a desire to flee from racial stigmas through military competitiveness with the colonizer. In this case, the colonized seeks to outdo the colonizer via the civilizational schema rather than discard that paradigm altogether, a typical consequence identified in Fanon's notion of internalization.

The role of such civilizationalism in Syrian militarism is not a recent phenomenon but nevertheless has been largely overlooked by scholars of Syrian politics. With Syria being the only state in the Middle East to retain an Arab nationalist ideology, officially at least, existing work has tended to focus on the 'symbiotic relationship' between Syrian militarism and anticolonialism (Gani, 2014, 2015; Ginat, 2005; Olsen, 1982; Rabinovich, 1972) rather than its parallel, less obvious, connections with race. Militarism was a feature of Syria's intellectual thought and anticolonialism since colonization by the French in the 19th century and the Mandate period after World War I (Torrey, 1969). Then, after decolonization, the establishment of Israel in 1948 (viewed by Syria as

a European settler-colonial project) and its victory over the Arab states in 1967 renewed the need and justification for militarism in Syria.

Syria suffered heavy losses in the 1967 war; its air force was decimated, and its strategically vital Golan Heights occupied by Israel. Thereafter, Syria was on a constant war-footing, enacting emergency law and compulsory military service. Militarism imbued all levels of Syrian politics and society (Ismail, 2018: 100–105) – from the institutional level, where Syria’s head of state had to serve in the upper ranks of the military, to the ‘everyday’, such as enforcement of military fatigues as the state primary-school uniform. A synchronous development in which the state’s military was ‘ideologized’ with anticolonialism, while its anticolonialism was militarized, was meant to be symbolic of the state’s (and the army’s) permanent role as a vanguard against Western imperialism in the region. As Syrian intellectual and activist Yasin Al-Haj Saleh (2017: 99) states, ‘Israel facilitated the militarization of thought and public life’.

Evidently, then, Syrian militarism is directly connected to and shaped by the experience of colonization. But is it racial militarism? Here, again, feminist work on militarism opens the way for understanding not only its gendered but also its racial functions. Nagel (1998: 257) describes the gendered stigmas attached to military defeat, in which the losing army is rendered ‘as sexual eunuchs, incapable of manly virility’. For Arab regimes and armies, the 1967 defeat to Israel (known as the *Naksa* or ‘Setback’) was and remains a continued source of shame, especially for Syria, which prided itself on its military credentials. It was not just the defeat but the swift nature of capitulation that revived old racist stigmas of Oriental weakness versus European might. Regardless of the huge military and economic disparities between the two sides that explained the outcome, old tropes about disorganized Arab armies, lacking in physical strength and the loyalty of a truly civilized nation, were reinforced. The humiliation felt by the Syrian army was exacerbated by the fact that much of the discourse of shame came from within, particularly from disillusioned Syrian intelligentsia, artists and poets (see Almazaidah, 2019). Syrian poet Nizar Qabbani, whose poems were promptly banned by the Syrian regime, famously spearheaded this internal criticism in ‘Footnotes to the Book of Al-Naksa’ with these words:

Stirred by Oriental bombast,
 By boastful swaggering that never killed a fly,
 By the fiddle and the drum,
 We went to war
 And lost.
 Our shouting is louder than our actions,
 Our swords are taller than us,
 This is our tragedy.
 In short
 We wear the cape of civilisation
 But our souls live in the stone age. (Qabbani, 1967)

Additionally, influential historical accounts of 1967 written in the West, often with political intent, such as works by Fouad Ajami (1979), Adeed Daweesha (2003) and Bernard Lewis (2001), have reinforced the *Naksa*’s association with Arab humiliation, Arab failure and Western triumphalism

for decades afterwards. Lewis, in particular, played a leading role in promulgating the notion that Arab military defeat and political malaise were both attributable to an enduring attachment to Islam.

In response to that perceived emasculation, the Syrian state reinforced an existing masculinist nationalism through militarism. Al-Doughli's work draws attention to the everydayness of this masculinist militarism, where nationalist songs glorifying war and resistance to Israel form the daily routine for Syrian school children (Al-Doughli, 2019a: 144, 2019b: 147). This pervasiveness of militarism is thus not only anticolonial but also a chauvinist reaction to defeat and subsequent Israeli triumphalism. While such work argues that Syrian militarism is heavily gendered, I argue such chauvinism should also be understood as a desire to flee from the *racial* stigmas of Oriental weakness.

This chauvinism is also supported by the Syrian military's secular identity and its disassociation from religion, a container for both gendered and racial stigmas. As outlined earlier, secularism was installed in Syria as an administrative pillar under French colonialism, acting as a civilizational marker, and continues to constitute Syrian militarism even after decolonization. Sectarian pluralism in the army acts as evidence of the secular progressiveness of Syrian militarism, ostensibly playing an inclusionary function. For minority sects in Syria, enlisting in the army facilitated nationalist inclusion and a refuge from socio-economic and political marginalization. The minority Alawite community in particular, a heterodox sect comprising roughly 10% of the Syrian population, earned greater political protection, prominence and social mobility via the army (Daoudy, 2020: 115; Hinnebusch, 2001). Their fortunes were epitomized by Hafez Al-Assad, himself an Alawite, whose rise to power was only possible via legitimacy gained through the army. But secular militarism played more than just an inclusionary function. As Saleh (2017) explains, the army represents a disassociation from Sunni Islam. Thus, it is a remnant of sectarian prejudices installed during French colonialism, mirroring Fanon's description of French education in the Antilles as a means of fleeing from stigma. The army in Syria thus offers an actualization of a civilizational vision, in which Syria might flee from the backwardness of religion that has stunted its progress and contributed to its emasculation and humiliation. The pluralism of the Syrian military thus offered proof (to Syria's enemies as well as to Syrians themselves) that Arabs had the capacity to be rational and unaffected by fanatical religious loyalties.

Militarist racialization of dissent in Syria and legitimization of violence

In a retort to colonial othering and disparagement, Syrian militarism elevated loyal nationalists via masculinist and civilizational chauvinism; but, without actual military triumphs against its colonial enemies, the regime sought its own internal 'Other' over whom it could declare victory.

Who, then, became that local 'Other' under Syria's militarism? Under Hafez Al-Assad's authoritarianism, *all* political dissidents were othered. As Salwa Ismail (2018: 32) explores in theoretical and historical detail, Syrian militarism, or what she terms the 'civil war regime', turned war into a permanent social relation within Syria, drawing divisions between those who should live and those deemed expendable. In particular, she focuses on detention camps and regime violence as apparatuses of government, which instituted authority by 'inciting feelings of humiliation and abjection in the subjects of rule' (Ismail, 2018: 31). I posit that such apparatuses of power should be viewed, in part, as manifestations of internalized stigmas of inferiority wrought by the colonial encounter. The need to not only overpower but also *humiliate* one's opponents at home

signified a reproduction of racial hierarchy as a way of transferring those stigmas. As Fanon demonstrated, this psychological realm is pivotal.¹⁰

Again, the importance of religion cannot be overlooked in this process. The exclusion of religion, specifically Islam, from modes of governance meant that those seeking a greater role for religion in political and public life could not be equal participants in the nationalist project. This ideological policy discreetly retained and upheld the racial hierarchy inherited from French colonial rule (Delatolla and Yao, 2019) – discreet because the hierarchy was based not on skin colour or visible ethnic differences but on a racialization of Islam. This othering of religion in the political sphere provided the regime with a racial, and thus scientific, justification for its violence against so-called Islamists. That is not to say that the state never co-opted Islam for the sake of legitimacy: the versions of Islam that were acceptable for the Assad regime were in the private/cultural sphere (where Islam's 'irrationality' could not impinge on the state's progressive nationalist project) or state-controlled public religiosity. The Grand Mufti of the Umayyad Mosque, for example, and quietist Muslim groups have routinely been called upon for the government's public relations campaigns (Pierret, 2013). But, for a militarist state competing with colonial rivals, any political association with Islam's 'backwardness' risked reinforcing Orientalist stigmas and was not merely a hindrance but a danger. The Syrian state thus mimicked European practice in which (public) religion is gendered and racialized.

In contrast to the regime and Muslim quietists, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood advocated a public and political role for Islam and came to position themselves as opponents of the Syrian state. Cooperation between the Brotherhood and the Syrian state in the 1950s and 1960s (Conduit, 2019) fell apart after the war of 1967; the Brotherhood argued the defeat proved secular ideologies could not restore Arab dignity, and that only Islam and a return to God could redeem them against the colonizers. Their presence in the political sphere and opposition to the state was swiftly labelled with the same Orientalist stigmas the Syrian regime had sought to escape. The Brotherhood provided the much-needed internal Other on which to transfer those stigmas at a time when the Syrian army needed to restore its masculinist, civilizational valour against the backdrop of Arab nationalist decline.

A disturbing example of this racialization of dissent can be found in the events of 1982 when the Muslim Brotherhood instigated an uprising in the Syrian city of Hama. This was the greatest challenge for the regime since the 1967 war; it also coincided with a period of ill health for Hafez Al-Assad and growing signs of dissent from a faction within the military. The need to reassert authority at a time of regime vulnerability, via a show of militarist masculinity against the easy target of an already racialized, barbarized Other, explains the ferocity and disproportionality of the military suppression of the Hama uprising. Tanks cordoned off the city so that no one could enter or leave; a communication blackout was then enforced as aerial bombardment ensued for days. By the end, the entire city had been razed to the ground, with anything between 5,000 to 25,000 people massacred.

Lisa Wedeen's analysis of the regime's discourse on the Muslim Brotherhood in official newsletters between 1976 to 1982 shows how deeply racialized and gendered the framing was. On 7 April 1976, senior Ba'th party official Fadl Al Ansari wrote in the party newspaper *Al-Ba'th* that the regime would 'protect the Arab nation from factionalism, backwardness and corruption' in a coded message against the Muslim Brotherhood, clearly applying the familiar civilizational narrative to the latter's public, 'political' Islam (Wedeen, 2015: 42). In other newsletters, the Muslim Brotherhood were regularly described as 'vermin' who were 'contaminating' the body politic (Wedeen, 2015: 44), classic racist terminology most notoriously deployed in Nazi Germany to dehumanize Jews, paving the way for genocide.

This racialization and dehumanization continued in the aftermath of the suppression: a newspaper report on 23 February 1982, written by the Ba'th party leader in Hama, stated that 'their [the Muslim Brotherhood's] black hatred is like that of mad dogs' but that the Syrian army defended themselves with 'national and revolutionary spirit emulating the morals of the Arab knight' (Wedeen, 2015: 47). Thus, not only were the protestors cast as inhuman, with their 'madness' conforming to the racialization and gendering of Islam as irrational and dangerous when unleashed beyond the private sphere, but these characterizations were directly used to reinvigorate the Syrian military's valour and civilizational superiority.

Syrian state reports also invoked Syrian women in need of protection to justify their actions. Apparently quoting 'the masses of women in Hama', *Al-Ba'th* newspaper wrote that 'all the mothers of Hama reject the ugly crimes of the Muslim Brotherhood [and ask Assad to] protect the nation'. It went on to state that these women requested the army 'to kill [the Brotherhood's] members without compassion or mercy because they do not deserve compassion' (*Al-Ba'th*, 24 February 1982, cited in Wedeen, 2015: 47). The coterminous dehumanization of racialized religious political actors and valorizing of the Syrian army is made apparent here. Masculinist legitimacy was conferred on the army (by Syrian women), not in spite of but rather *because of* its willingness to kill the 'maniacal' Muslim Brotherhood.

One could argue that the Muslim Brotherhood did represent a real, insurrectionary threat to the regime, and such discourse might have been used against any military threat. However, the Syrian military also targeted non-politicized, public expressions of Islamic practice. One such example occurred a year before the Hama uprising when female parachutists from the Syrian defence corps attacked civilian women wearing the hijab on the streets of Damascus, an event described by Saleh (2017: 106) as motivated by 'cultural contempt for their presumed "backwardness"'.

Such events left an indelible mark on Syria's political landscape, tightening the insider–outsider binaries that come with all forms of nationalism, but that are fortified by racial militarism. Whether or not one supported the secular Syrian army became an easy signifier of one's insider or outsider status. In turn, what the above events and ideological connections allowed was the simultaneous racialization and gendering of all domestic opposition towards the regime. The 'discursive power of "religion"' (Khan, 2021) as a label allowed the regime to racialize any opposition simply by characterizing it as religious, even if the opponents' attachment to religion was tenuous or non-existent. Grouping dissidents under this label confirmed their inferiority, and thus their dispensability.

This legacy of Hafez Al-Assad's regime continued under his son, Bashar Al-Assad. While the latter engaged in compromise and co-optation of quietist Muslim groups and figures in the mid-2000s, the othering and stigmatization of *politicized* Muslims and Islamic groups remained unchanged. This was especially evident during the civilian protests in 2011 and subsequent conflict, when all opposition groups, even secular liberals, were characterized as treacherous, Muslim Brotherhood or Al-Qaeda affiliates, bent on overhauling order and reason. As the uprisings escalated into conflict, the regime sought to project its strength not only through military rhetoric but notably also through civilizational language that focused on barbarizing the opposition – especially when statements were meant for a non-Arab audience, whether in the West or in Russia. Thus, in a speech on 4 June 2012 to the newly elected Syrian parliament that was then translated into English and publicized by the government news agency SANA, Bashar Al-Assad claimed the rebels were trying to

weaken Syria and violate its sovereignty and perpetrate acts of killing, sabotage, ignorance, and backwardness. (*al-bab.com*, 2012)

In an interview with *Russia Today* (2012), Assad was more explicit in appealing to Western stigmas and fears of religion, stating:

If you have a problem in Syria, and we are the last stronghold of secularism and stability in the region and coexistence, let's say, it [the rise of an Islamic threat] will have a domino effect that will affect the world.

While, in the following year, Assad reinforced the association between the opposition and religion via a coded reference to the Middle Ages:

These political systems and establishments which are seeking division and fragmentation are preparing for wars which might last for centuries rather than decades in our region – destroying everything, preventing development and prosperity, and taking us back to life in the Middle Ages.¹¹

Such statements were made *prior* to the rise of extremist groups such as *Daesh*¹² and stigmatized all the opposition against the regime. They were uttered as justification for the regime's brutal crackdown on protestors, in which the state's militarized response was portrayed as necessary and even a protection of secularism and 'civilized' ways of life. Words such as 'civilized', 'barbaric', 'backward' or 'savage' are routinely used by the regime to deploy the civilizational schema. This narrative helped to legitimize the regime's military suppression of any opposition, whether 'Islamist' or not, and delegitimized the protestors' original calls for democracy.

Crucially, and confirming the provenance of the regime's internalized racial stigmas, this narrative was often directed towards non-Arab audiences, especially in the West, with a clear point to prove. The regime appeared to succeed in its purpose. Thus, for many Western observers and governments, whose own racial militarism was conceived in imperialism, the Syrian regime's secular authoritarianism was deemed more tolerable, more civilized even, than the spectre of a fanatical, backward, religious alternative.

Conclusion

Militarism cannot be fully understood without also recognizing its co-constitution with race and dependence on a civilizational schema, both in the imperial metropole and in the postcolony. To demonstrate how that schema manifests in both contexts, I turned to Fanon's discussion of racial hierarchy and the internalization of racial stigmas among the colonized, which is manifested in two ways: attempts to flee them by mimicking the 'civilized' European and attempts to transfer them onto an 'Other' within their own communities.

Militarism, generated by the imperial encounter, plays a crucial role in upholding and validating that civilizational, racial hierarchy. Both racism and militarism function through a belief in and support for domination, and thus both ideologies draw utility from each other. The development of that symbiosis must be historicized and located beyond the nation-state. Thus, the fact that Western nationalist militarism emerged with Western colonialism is no coincidence – the latter was baked into the former. This coterminous development meant that Western military expansion and support for militarism at home were imbued with racial stigmas of the 'Other' in non-Western territories. Military domination was justified by beliefs in racial superiority, while racial hierarchies appeared to be validated and proved by military successes.

Drawing on Fanon's psychoanalytic account of relationality and imperial proximity as an enabler of domination, I have argued that racial militarism in Europe has especially developed in relation to the Muslim Orient. Thus, for Europe, the civilizational imperative to dominate its closest, though still racially inferior, rivals provided a competitive motive. To militarily dominate its

barbarian rivals restored order to the civilizational hierarchy that had been threatened by Oriental military victories and expansion in the past. The militarism this produced was both practical and performative, supported through cultural discourse and colonial policies that generated and recycled racist stigmas, particularly stigmas about the intellectual, moral and physical inferiority of Islam and Muslims. Given those stigmas, the more an 'Oriental' person or community could distance themselves from religion and Islam, the more chance they had to escape their racial backwardness and attain greater proximity to civilization and whiteness. Moreover, such stigmas concocted through racial militarism were not only reserved for the Other outside of Europe but have historically been utilized domestically to fulfil an exclusionary function within the imperial metropole.¹³

But racial militarism also has a psychoanalytic and practical impact on the other side of the imperial encounter in colonized or postcolonial states. Syrian militarism demonstrates the extent to which fervent anticolonialism can sit alongside internalized colonialism. Thus, the state's militarism emulates European civilizational values of masculinity and secularism, while also transferring the Orientalist stigmas of backwardness and humiliation onto a racialized Other. Mirroring the European context, racial militarism in Syria has played the role of enacting an insider–outsider binary within the Syrian population; but, unlike in Europe, that binary cannot so easily be cast along visible racial differences. Consequently, religion, especially political expressions of religious practice and identity, has been racialized and gendered as the necessary 'Other', used to supply and cohere an insider, militarist-nationalist identity and delegitimate dissent. The Syrian case demonstrates the highly adaptable ways in which race as an exclusionary factor can be constructed and introduced to buttress the exclusionary function of militarist ideology, even where race is initially absent or inapplicable.

Acknowledgements

My thanks to the journal editors, and especially Nivi Manchanda, Katharine Millar and Chris Rossdale, for their rigorous and constructive feedback on the article and their scholarly generosity throughout the review process. I am also grateful to the anonymous reviewers for their critical engagement and suggestions that helped to improve the article. My sincere thanks to all those who kindly read and gave feedback on earlier versions of the article; listened to my ideas; or offered pointers towards useful literature, particularly: Nour Halabi, Omar Imady, Lubaaba Al-Azami, Catherine Charrett, Ariadne Collins, Faye Donnelly, Aurora Ganz, Caron Gentry, Raymond Hinnebusch, Hudda Khairah, Rabea Khan, Shehla Khan, Roxani Krystalli, Laura Mills, Zeinab Moustafa, Ananya Sharma, the attendees at the IR seminar series at Ashoka University, the St Andrews IR research workshop, the audience and panellists at the 2021 International Studies Association panel 'Erasure, Invalidation and Recasting of Global South Knowledge Production and Activism', and Layal Niazy who assisted me on an earlier project that was a prequel to this one.

Funding

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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Notes

1. Nagel (1998) and Mosse (1996), for example, explored the welding of masculinity and militarism to nationalism at its conception, but did not race play just as important a role in the birth of the nation-state? See Bhabra (2018); Mamdani (2020).

2. While it is beyond the scope of this article, it is feasible that non-racial militarisms in alternative geographical, historical and non-colonial contexts exist(ed). However, in a globalized era in which the imperial encounter has affected so many parts of the world, it would be increasingly difficult to separate militarism from race – as I argue with the example of Syria, an anti-imperialist postcolony that still internalized imperialist stigmas and civilizationism.
3. It is imperative to note that not all refutation of racist stigmas can be labelled as an internalized inferiority complex. Fanon (2008: 105–106) rightly rebuked Sartre’s belittling suggestion that negritude is merely the antithesis of white people. But if purported resistance to the colonizer also contains mimicry of racism, and particularly transferral of racial and dehumanizing stigmas on another community, then the hallmarks of internalized colonialism – including racial militarism - are there.
4. It must be remembered that this separation between the Orient and Africa, especially on the basis of religion and race, was a false construction by Europe. Some of the oldest Muslim communities are in Africa, preceding Arab and Asian conversions to Islam, and thus Islam transcended these racial categorizations. Nevertheless, a ‘Muslim Orient’ as distinct from Africa with a large presence of ‘Moors’ was a useful construction for Europe’s civilizational schema.
5. Robertson (1838: 18) stated that the ‘barbarism and ignorance’ of European society began to be dispelled on account of European encounters with the Arab world during the Crusades.
6. For example, medieval paintings: ‘Saracens and Crusaders’, 1325–1330, illuminated manuscript of *Les Chroniques de France*, British Library; ‘Histoire de Voyage et Conquet de Jerusalem’, 14th century, Bibliothèque Nationale Paris; ‘King Richard I of England in Combat with Saladin’, illumination from Luttrell Psalter, c. 1340, Granger Historical Picture Archive, New York; ‘Battle of Hattin, 1187, the Defeat of Guy de Lusignan, King of Jerusalem, c. 1159–94, by Saladin, Sultan of Egypt and Syria, 1138–93, and the Loss of the Relic of the True Cross’, manuscript illumination, c. 1460, from the *Chronique des Empereurs*, Ms. 5090, f. 73, compiled by David Aubert.
7. Even an illustration of the Battle of Hattin (‘The Battle of Hattin, 4th July 1187’ – The French School, 19th century), which the Crusaders lost, only depicts Europeans fighting valiantly, with near erasure of their Muslim combatants.
8. While the racialization of religion in general (not just Islam) is a growing field of research, the following have all made important contributions on the colonial origins of religious categorization, some explicitly and others implicitly: Antonio and Hopkins (2012), Grosfoguel (2012), Mahmood (2009), Maldano-Torres (2014), Masuzawa (2005) and Vial (2016).
9. In both cases, the perpetrators cited their opposition to Britain’s military campaigns in Muslim countries as the reason for their attacks.
10. Investigating any state, especially an authoritarian regime, via a psychoanalytic framework such as Fanon’s delimits an empiricist approach. Indeed, calls for measurable data that trace the racism of any system routinely disadvantage victims. For example, Syrians opposed to the regime have consistently argued that the dismissal of their plight by some intellectuals and parts of the international community is symptomatic of racism; they have also expressed frustration that their interpretation has not gained traction. This is indicative of the disproportionate burden placed on victims to prove the racism inflicted on them. And yet, in this case, the parallels between European Orientalism and racialization of Islam and the Syrian regime’s discourse and actions are too strong to ignore. I am not arguing here that the regime is racist per se, but rather they are demonstrating clear consciousness – i.e. internalization – and instrumentalization of the racist stigmas against the Orient. While ultimately it may be impossible to know exactly what is happening inside the minds of members of the regime, their discourse (which contains plentiful examples of civilizationism) and actions (routine arrests, torture, and scapegoating of religious dissenters and deliberately mislabelled secular activists) are crucial yardsticks by which to judge the regime.
11. See ‘Full interview President Assad with the Turkish Ulusal TV (5 April 2013)’; available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EHELwKpipCI> (accessed 2 October 2021).
12. The Arabic name given to the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS). I have opted to use the name that those from the region have preferred to use to refer to the organization.
13. This article’s (written) journey began with the start of the pandemic and is ending as Covid restrictions are being lifted. In that time, there have been over 134,000 (officially recorded) deaths from Covid in the

UK and millions more around the world, with racialized and disabled communities disproportionately affected. In the UK, many of those deaths were due to government indifference, negligence and exacerbated racial inequalities. While writing about civilizational ideology in this article, with its capacity to dehumanize and designate dispensability, I could see it being manifested in real time via the state's strategies in the pandemic. Instead of admitting weakness and failure, the UK government routinely invoked the 'Blitz Spirit' and wartime resilience. Yet again, militarism was used to galvanize a racialized national unity and loyalty to the state to stave off criticism, while the 'outsiders' within bore the brunt of the pandemic. I acknowledge and pay tribute to all those who lost their lives, those who are grieving, those who are recovering, and those who worked tirelessly to save lives and support others during the pandemic.

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