



The Scapegoating of Islamic Immigrant Women in the Media

PAGE | 198

Lara Mazurski¹

Abstract

In 2010 the Sweden Democrats (SD) unveiled their campaign advertisement for the parliamentary election, they engaged a series of images positioning immigrants as scapegoats by creating a link between immigration and the domestic budget crisis. While the advert associated immigration and Islam with the economic failings of Swedish society, the SD also energized new forms of representation, a new embodiment of Swedishness and, additionally, of conceptualizations of 'the Other'. On the surface, the controversial campaign ad identified economic concerns and moral corruption with immigration, women, and Islam. Perhaps, as a result of this immediate reading, the state's leading broadcaster, TV4, banned the advertisement for inciting hate speech before it even aired on Swedish television. The act of censorship thrust the ad centre stage, with a flurry of media coverage and the Sweden Democrats (SD) proclaiming unlawful persecution. Paradoxically, or, perhaps, expectedly, censorship of the advertisement, and the ensuing public debate about censorship, dramatically increased awareness of the party and their message, in various and complex ways.

Keywords: media, gender, representation, discourses, marginalization

Introduction

When the Sverigedemokraterna (Sweden Democrats) unveiled their recent campaign advertisement for the 2010 parliamentary election, they engaged a series of images positioning Swedish immigrants as scapegoats in a contemporary domestic budget crisis. While the advert associates immigration and Islam with the economic failings of Swedish society, the party also energized new forms of representation, a new embodiment of Swedishness and, additionally, of conceptualizations of 'the Other'. Superficially, the campaign ad controversially identifies economic concerns and moral corruption with immigration, women, and Islam. Perhaps, as a result of this immediate reading, the state's leading broadcaster, TV4, banned the advertisement for inciting hate speech before it even aired on Swedish television. The act of censorship thrust the ad centre stage, with a flurry of media coverage and the Sweden Democrats (SD) proclaiming unlawful persecution. Paradoxically, or, perhaps, expectedly, censorship of the advertisement, and the ensuing public debate about censorship, dramatically increased awareness of the party and their message in complicated ways.

Through a close reading of the ad in the first section, I want to look at not only the representation of cultural, ethnic, or religious difference but also more importantly how the burqa is used in a totalizing way. I want to discuss how forms of discourse

¹ Lecturer. Department of Literary Studies, University of Amsterdam. Spuistraat 201, 1012 VT, Amsterdam, the Netherlands.
l.e.mazurski@uva.nl



those that are anti-immigrant and how the myth of the Afghan woman have been condensed into one kind of body. Within the context of this advert, otherness itself is produced and reproduced through a complex combination of visual images, text, sound, and narration. Burqas are represented as visible yet invisible, feminine and fast, parasitical and overwhelming they represent the unknown threat. Burqas are not simply presented in this advert as threats but they have also become symbols of resistance. Resistance, within this context, does not refer to the traditional understanding associated with the burqa. For example, the woman under the garment itself is not presented as struggling to get out of the patriarchy that has situated her under it, the burqa. Instead, the burqa within this context is symbolic of that which Swedish society has to fight, to overcome—it is a symbol of Swedish resistance. The burqas present in this advert serve as a form of visual overlap in where economic, social, religious, and cultural battles are fought.

Taking my cue from Judith Butler's work on discursive censorship, I theorise how the ad's representations and concepts deployed are productively vulnerable to both reinterpretation and new citations. It is here that we see how censorship does not deliver its intended consequences, but rather diminishes public spaces for contestation. In turn censorship serves to counter its own effects and produce a new set of consequences that heighten the power of the speech that it sought to silence.

Sverigedemokraterna's Advert

Succinctly, the Sverigedemokraterna's 2010 election campaign ad depicts an aging white pensioner in a dramatic competition against a faceless mob of women in burqas for the Swedish government's financial resources. The advert is multifaceted and offers the viewer a number of narratives to interpret and characterize the immigrant on cultural, religious, social and economic levels. The central threat to Swedish society is represented as fast, large in number, unidentifiable, and overwhelming. On the surface, the ad tells the viewer a story about the ills of immigration and the strain of immigrants on the Swedish economy. While it has persuasively implemented a number of tactics to appeal to voters on that superficial level, such as the scapegoating of migrants it finds itself caught in a precarious place, with more significant issues that are concerned with the freedom of speech and the act of censorship.

However, a closer examination of the campaign will yield even further information. A complex combination of framing devices are used to strengthen the relationship between imagery, sound, text, and narrative to illustrate this point even further. The opening sequence begins with a quick shot of the Statsbudget (state budget) on a counter, beginning from 505.926.342.293 (krona), and quickly decreases. In the background, a narrator's voice appears and declares in Swedish, translated into English at youtube, that, "Politics is all about making priorities". A number of heavily edited images follow that focus the viewer's eyes upon a dimly lit room and two bureaucrats, one male and the other female sitting at desks processing handfuls of bank notes from cardboard boxes.



Figure 1: Initial image statsbudget counter (“State budget”) from Sverigedemokraterna’s television ad, September 2010.

The use of the narrator’s voice in the opening sequence, as an anonymous and abstract storyteller, helps reinforce the way by which the viewer interprets the message. Narration is employed strategically in order to help situate the visual images and reinforce the subtext of the campaign platform further.

Throughout the clip, the narrator’s voice functions in conjunction with the actors and the focalizers through conceptual overlap. Through the use of such tactics, Sverigedemokraterna’s political message is conveyed and reinforced. Further, narration serves to clarify the storyline and helps shape the rhetoric of the narrative. As a speaking subject, the narrator’s voice enables the viewer to read the images in combination with the narrative form of the text. It is important to recognize that from the start the advert is framed as a factual account. Sverigedemokraterna’s narrator serves a particular role, not simply as a narrator, but also as a participant in the ad. Class struggle, gender, nationalism, and xenophobia start to appear as her voice serves to reinforce the message and transform the meanings of the ad.



Figure 2: Countdown with statsbudget counter and bureaucrats from Sverigedemokraterna’s television ad, September 2010.

As the ad continues, stacks of cardboard boxes surround both figures that process stacks of Swedish krona (bank notes). Images of the Statsbudget counter are interspersed with images of the bureaucrats, and a finally totals at 100,000,000, which dramatically appears flashing on the screen. The multiple close-ups of the budget serve to reinforce the narrator’s message. Here, the obvious link between narration and visual imagery appears, reinforcing the message for viewers. The many references to bureaucracy and technology that appear in the opening sequence—the money-counting machines, emergency lights, and sirens—serve to forebode an overburdened state budget. By framing these technologies in such a way, they serve as a visual warning system to the viewer.



Figure 3: Final statsbudget number taken from Sverigedemokraterna's television ad, September 2010.

Fast-paced editing helps set the rhythm of the storyline. Despite the number of images intertwined within the thirty-second clip, the shots do not break the ad's continuity; rather, each frame serves to contribute further to the advert, as all segments contain information meaningful for the overall effect. The frames are selectively chosen to reinforce the narrative of the campaign clip, since each image relates to the narrator's text. Visual images are used to convey particular information precisely. Figures and technologies play a central role in the creation of this advertisement, as they are used to convey a message and to heighten the viewer's attention. When the ad carries on, the narrator's voice reappears, saying, "Now you have a choice". After which, an emergency siren starts to sound, and the two tables upon which money is sorted are immediately lighted while an emergency light begins to flash. The voice continues, beckoning, "What is your choice?" The use of emergency lights and sirens in the background of the advertisement serves to heighten the viewer's attention. The sirens and lights reinforce the discourse of the ad even further by positioning what Sverigedemokraterna perceive as too many progressive demands on Swedish society as "alarming".

At this stage in the clip, the viewer as the addressee of the text begins to interpret the sirens as an emergency event. Levels of narration play an integral role with a number of embedded texts starting to appear are employed in order to reinforce the multiple levels of narrations even further. The following sequence of the clip provides further information on how this unravels both explicitly and implicitly. Two hand brakes dramatically appear from the ceiling immediately in front of the desks, with white font that reads "Immigration" and "Pensioner" (Fig. 4).



Figure 4: Handles, or levers, upon which "Pensioner" or "Immigration" is written. From Sverigedemokraterna's television ad, September 2010.

When the narrator voices, "Now you have a choice", as the sirens fire up, the emphasis of the ad becomes clear; the demands of pensioners and immigrants are competing for funding from the state budget, represented by two hand brakes that



drop from above. Mirroring occurs on multiple levels throughout this ad: the visual cues, the narrator's voice, the emergency sirens and lights, and embedded text. The ad then zooms in on a walker and the audience begins to see the image of an elderly white woman beginning to appear. The camera pans in on her and she moves slowly with a walking aid toward the direction of the levers (dropped earlier), each of which hang suspended by chains from the ceiling and have "pensioner" or "immigrant" written on them. A series of shots pan in on her walker, and focus the viewer's eyes emphatically upon her need for physical assistance. Here, the viewer's attention is drawn to how the walker helps support her while "racing" to the "immigrant" brake. The walker in this context represents a need for physical support, but also alludes to her need within the community as a whole. The framing of her as a pensioner-in-need presents her sympathetically to the viewer, and here, we, the viewer, read her as a symbol of Swedish society.

The image of the pensioner, within the language of Sverigedemokraterna's patriotism, does not immediately denote strength as usually presented within national discourse, but, instead, offers a more powerful reading that alludes to deserved need. Deserved need is expressed within this form of representation, for the woman is "anyone's" mother or grandmother, representative of the deserving Swedish pensioner and as an emblem of cultural identity. The use of her image within such a context offers the viewer a particular articulation of Swedishness. Her face and body, unlike any of the other characters in the ad, are recognizable; she is small, frail, and senior (Fig. 5 and 6). She is used to produce a vision of the Swedish pensioner as all-too-human and all-too-deserving. This representation is structured against another form of need as the next few seconds of the ad exhibits: the physical and economic needs of the immigrant. As viewers, we witness the positioning of the advertisement's central figures, while the bureaucrats find themselves indifferently positioned with pensioners and/or immigrants.

It is at this stage in the ad that immigration finds itself in a race against pensioners. This form of representation visually articulates not only difference but also how difference can be used to frame and reinforce social antagonisms. "Nationness", as a textual and social affiliation, finds itself represented in symbolic visual language. This advert employs many of the elements related to the cultural construction of nationness as social, textual, and, within this context, visual. Cultural identifications and discursive signifiers represent and/or function in the name of the people, or in the name of the nation. By doing so they become subjects who exist within static social and literary narratives. For example, while the elderly woman with the walker represents Swedish pensioners she also serves to present an image of Sweden's past. Her image is used to juxtapose past and present in a way for the viewer to see her as an ideal representation of Sweden's contemporary conception of their past (a white, non-descript woman). By juxtaposing such an image with the peripheral shots of the burqa-clad women overtaking the pensioner, the viewer receives the subtext that unidentifiable foreigner-mobs are taking over Swedish society. Such images are used to manipulate a past and present—and to offer the viewer metaphors that speak to the visibility of the past and the present—to aid in the reinforcement of a pre-existing narrative that positions Swedes against foreigners. This is not represented through one shot, but rather through a series of images used to present this storyline to the viewer simultaneously.

The nation becomes symbolically represented hierarchically over class (those in need of governmental assistance), and such representations offer the viewer insight into



how such subjectivities are framed. They are not offered as possibilities or glimpses that find themselves situated within a particular moment of time, but rather they are used to offer the viewer a visual articulation of how struggle is presented. When addressing such forms of representations, those that articulate difference through imagined communities—in this case migrant and/or native—what appears is the “temporality of representation”. Temporality of representation refers to that which moves between social processes and cultural formations without a centred logic. This occurs, for example, when cultural movements, despite their heterogeneity, are envisioned as a homogenous, invading, other. Foreigners in this advert are portrayed as a burqa-clad mob whose needs physically and economically drain the country. Sverigedemokraterna’s depiction of the burqa marks certain kinds of faces and bodies, and associates visible signs of difference (i.e. the burqa and the niqab as all-consuming garments with religion, class, and gender sewed with migration). The burqas in some way or another refer to all of these issues. The unidentifiable women under the burqas are fixed within all of these markers of difference, and are transformed into a visibly identifiable threat in the narrative. What is problematic about such forms of representation is that they have no realized interpretation of historical memory or subjectivity. The advertisement is framed within the authoritative narrative of a right-wing political party, the Sverigedemokraterna, who are vocally opposed not simply to all forms of immigration but rather to Islamic immigration (Wistrom 2010). The concepts that have been superficially represented need to be circumscribed. The following ad segment will shed more insight into how foreign subjectivities are represented as a homogenous group.



Figure 5; Detail image of pensioner with walker from Sverigedemokraterna’s television ad, September 2010.

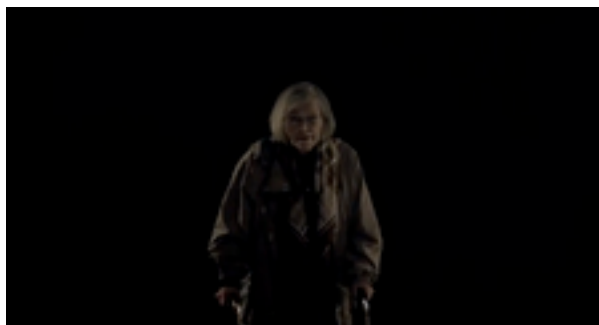


Figure 6; Wide image of pensioner with walker from Sverigedemokraterna’s television ad, September 2010.

In the next sequence, the viewers see the pensioner turning her head to the left, and in her peripheral vision she sees a mob of burqa-clad women besieging her. The image of the pensioner finds itself now positioned against another cultural force, an invading mob of covered women. In the series of quick shots that come to follow the



camera pans itself and quickly focuses its attention on the figures, of which five are in black burqas and a sixth figure in a black niqab. Two are pushing baby carriages and appear from the darkness behind. In the subsequent clip, the camera immediately pans out and offers a detailed shot of the grille covering one of the figure's eyes (Fig. 7).



Figure 7; Detail of burqa grille from Sverigedemokraterna's television ad, September 2010.



Figure 8: Grip on baby carriage handle from Sverigedemokraterna's television ad, September 2010.

The shot pans to a hand with tightly gripped fingers wrapped round a handle of a baby carriage (Fig. 8), providing a sense of urgency and violence to the mob. Oppositional representations of nationhood are progressively defined through these figures; the burqa-clad figures with their baby carriages serve as signs—foreigners, Muslims who pose a threat—resonating with the earlier discourse that frames the “other” as a threat. The mob of women is presented as a challenge to the vulnerable Swedish pensioner, and the voter risks allowing them to overtake her quickly.

The advert is laden with images serving to sculpt an imminent image of religious Muslim women as ominous threats. The burqa-clad figures are also used to represent a body that cannot be read—a body that is from a first glimpse isolated yet physically present—serving as a challenge to the pensioner (Fig. 9). In this sequence the subtext is not so nuanced or discreet: the bodies of the burqa-clad foreigners are positioned antagonistically to the white Swedish body. The suggestion is that a challenge is happening to society and that pensioners have been betrayed and victimized by immigration and the needs of foreigners. The mob is not presented as victims, nor are their children, but rather it the Swedes are suffering on behalf of the demands of the immigrants. The mob is used to marginalize the elderly Swedish woman—and here it is that the Swedes are empathetically presented as those who suffer. The narrator's voice reappears and we hear “on the 19th of September you can choose the “immigration break” above the “pensions break”. The use of particular images and bodies within this ad positions and inscribes subject positions upon the viewer as priorities to be chosen based upon that indexing of bodies.



Figure 9: Mob of Burqa Clad women all taken from Sverigedemokraterna's television ad, September 2010.

In the following sequence, the mob seems to overtake the pensioner a number of hands go up and reach for the "Pensioner" lever. As the ad fades out, the elderly women cannot grab the "Immigration" break in time. It is here that the triumph of immigration is enacted and/or represented. The image then freezes and the background transforms from blackness to whiteness as Sverigedemokraterna's logo appears (Fig. 10). At that point the narrator's voice declares, "vote Sweden Democrats".



Figure 10: Final frame which reads "Sweden Democrats: Safety and Tradition" from Sverigedemokraterna's television ad, September 2010.

Through framing the ad's inertia with state finances, budgetary concerns find themselves positioned in overtly simplistic representations that present pension and immigration funding as mutually exclusive. Such a form of representation takes economic conditions and presents them opportunistically as a threat to established nationalist discourses. The idea that the budget cannot take more financial pressure enables Swedish voters to therefore view themselves as bearing a decision to either vote for "them" (immigrants) or for "us" (native born). On the one hand, the story told is relatively straightforward, as the dominant emphasis is placed on the need for Swedish voters to "take care of their own". On the other hand, the dramatic grand generalizations used to frame and represent immigrants are problematic. The overarching image of immigrants represented as a homogenous ground, symbolized as the ultimate "other" through the burqa, employs many of the narratives that are embedded in the burqa as a cultural object. The coded burqa is deployed to represent vast cultural and religious difference in a time when there is "no time", as indicated by the drained Statsbudget counter and competition-themed narrative. Burqas are used conveniently to provide the viewer with the vision of those who are, from first glance, incredibly different—culturally and religiously. The object's recognisability and the greater narratives that link the burqa as an unknown



impending threat are used to frame the garment and to give the ad further emotive power.

The figures used to present nationness, the idea of we ‘the people’ (the Swedes), serves as a double narrative. Positioning the pensioner against the burqa-clad mob does not reflect fact, historical or present. Instead, this juxtaposition serves to further represent symbolically the patriotic body politic for to the Sweden Democrats. The use of these bodies serves as a form of commentary on the current social moment illustrates the crisis—in terms of signification. What appears is a contested conceptual territory where nationhood is read through a nationalist lens, where the Sweden Democrats offer their own take or perspective on real or historical moments, serving as a homogenizing gesture. At this point, the discourses of authority that underlie the political party and the narratives that govern the greater grand narratives represent discourses already created by another. The commentary the Sweden Democrats offer on immigration through the burqa-clad mob speaks to another form of discourse already embedded in the burqa. The impact of this is its ability to perpetuate such discourses even further. Here, they are situated as dangerous, both physically and mentally: we do not know who they are, what they want, or have any idea of their motives. What is clear from this advert is that they appear out of nowhere and are positioned to overtake the pensioner. From this perspective, the mob reflects the party’s political platform, which is both anti-immigration and anti-Islam.

The women in the burqas are not simply representatives of a particular body politic or as a threat to patriotism; instead, they serve as a point of social reference. The mob is also representative of nationalist sentiment, positioned between discourses of authority and objects of signification. Through a process of signification, the burqa-wearer becomes a subject constituted within discourse and the forms of representation that accompany it but also through the process of signification. That signification becomes a sign of how nationalist discourse in Sweden iterates and reiterates alterities positioned along the lines of cultural practices. Through the process of iteration and reiteration, symbols of marginality, as in this ad with the burqa, are used to present the other. Here, the mob becomes performative. The framing of the burqa is what makes the advert significant: the controversial representation of the mob and the story that followed were the core issues in censoring the ad. When the Swedish television broadcaster refused to televise the advert because it was deemed to contain racial hatred, the advert quickly became thrust into the international media. The act of censorship as a regulation of the domain of speakable discourse is the focus of the next section.

Excitable Speech

By reading the campaign ad alongside Judith Butler’s *Excitable Speech*, I will discuss how the regulation of speech via censorship displaces possibilities of contesting speech deemed “hateful” in the public sphere, as well as theorizing how speech and representation could be democratic sites of contestation, never fixed or delineated in advance. Here, I am not suggesting all forms of discussion concerning forms of representation and textual narrative have been removed through censorship, but rather that such possibilities are always already governed by the legible speech of subjects.

Although conventional discussions of censorship usually frame the act as something exercised by forms of government (Butler 1997), the censorship enacted by Sweden’s



TV4 to pre-empt airing of the ad serves as a practice that intended to regulate the content of that deemed offensive. For Butler, these measures “labor under a fear of contamination”, wherein the “attempt to purify the sphere of public discourse by institutionalizing the norms that establish what ought properly to be included there operates as a preemptive censor” (Butler 1997). The immediate impact is, of course, that “such regulations introduce the censored speech into public discourse, thereby establishing it as a site of contestation, that is, as the scene of public utterance that it sought to preempt” (Butler 1997). Indeed, the reality echoed this outcome, in recirculating the *circumstances* of censorship, the media has “attempt(ed) to prevent SD [Sweden Democrats] from getting its message out have been counterproductive, handing the party the chance to portray itself as is a victim of censorship” and heightening the speech as a site of contestation (Wikstrom 2010). In terms of censoring the speech’s dissemination, what became clear is that by mid-September, “after TV4 refused to air SD’s campaign, the clip was viewed more than 600,000 times on YouTube” (Wikstrom 2010).

The claim of injury by language and of representation takes us to a peculiar place where we find ourselves ascribing agency to language and empowering it with the power to injure. In light of the Sweden Democrats’ election advertisement, we, as viewers, find ourselves positioned as objects of its trajectory. Language, within the guise of censorship, is framed as having the ability to act upon us, on behalf of us, and to act against us. Through this perspective, we are formed and constituted within the structure of language and are unable to break free of the conditions or decisions we might have as a result of its power. Butler argues how,

The subject’s production takes place not only through the regulation of that subject’s speech, but through the regulation of the social domain of speakable discourse. The question is not what it is I will be able to say, but what will constitute the domain of the sayable within which I begin to speak at all. To become a subject means to be subjected to a set of implicit and explicit norms that govern the kind of speech that will be legible as the speech of a subject. (Butler 1997)

From such a perspective, the problematizing representations and narratives found in the Sweden Democrats ad can then be seen as having the ability to interpellate us. Speech then serves as a totalizing object, that which precedes the text and exceeds the censor. As such speech, from this perspective, finds itself responsible for the production of offensive or hate speech.

What is put at risk is the ability for those ‘spoken for’ to respond. In general, the scope of censorship has been a highly contested area, critical accounts have attempted to focus upon the scope of such forms of speech—those deemed as having the ability to injure. But what accounts do is exclude the recipient of the speech act in favour of their own reading of the text. Any attempt to censor speech through such a lens, then makes the offensive speech inescapable. Yet, the impact of the message is not delivered through the ad itself, but rather through the way in which it is conveyed.

The deliberately delivered speech—contained in the ad through narrative accounts, texts, and forms of representation—does not originate in this message. Rather, it is a reiterated speech, language, meaning, and intent. The Sweden Democrats are not the originators of this message, as it has already been produced within discourse. The



speaking subject is citational, which means the speaker, the maker or the representative of the speech, uses such language as a token of a community conveying a particular message. If speech is then understood as perlocutionary, meaning that speech leads to effects but is not itself the effect, then injurious speech is only problematic when it produces a set of effects. The subsequent effects of the language are what counts—what results from the utterances, in a performative sense.

In light of this, the burqa is interesting in this particular ad and subsequent censorship because it's framed as a choice in both instances. In the ad, Swedes are compelled to choose between allocating resources to burqas or walkers; in censoring the ad, *that* representation of the burqa is feared as being able to contaminate public discourse, and "we" choose not to exhibit it officially. Censoring the ad positions TV4, as 'protectors of hate speech', to again speak on behalf of those represented in the ad. That fear of contamination, and the offensiveness of the advert, stems from a reading of the Sweden Democrats' "putative power to construct (unilaterally, exhaustively) the social reality of what" a Muslim, a burqa-wearer, and an unacceptable recipient of state resources *is* discursively and visually (Butler 1997). To support this claim, I look to how Butler expounds on the performative, when she adds that,

If hate speech constitutes the kind of act that seeks to silence the one to whom it is addressed, but which might revive within the vocabulary of the silenced as its unexpected rejoinder, then the response to hate speech constitutes the 'de-officialization' of the performative, its expropriation for non-ordinary means. Within the political sphere, performativity can work in precisely such counter-hegemonic ways. That moment in which a speech act without prior authorization nevertheless assumes authorization in the course of its performance may anticipate and instate altered contexts for its future reception. (Butler 1997)

The burqa, as a link in a chain of citations in this ad, is censored because TV4 cannot imagine a counter-hegemonic speech emergent in public discourse to disidentify with the ad. From a "need" to control our imaginings of burqas, and those subjects who wear them, the regulation of the social domain of speakable discourse only further recirculates those toxic politicizations of the burqa. Because "we" cannot imagine a new critical emergence of insurrectionary discourses where the ad's unintelligible and unspeakable subjects do speak, the ad's depiction of the burqa is recited; it's abducted and inserted to fit and fill a momentary social need with a racy ghost story.

The act of restricting speech defined as injurious in turn becomes even more injurious. The very minorities depicted in this ad have no form of recourse within the act of censorship, and have no way of engaging the debate. Intervening within such forms of discourse could have re-framed the debate and repositioned the religious minorities within the context of the speech that was deemed injurious. By not allowing such forms of engagement to happen the credibility of such groups is undermined. The speech model that refers to race or religion is undermined and no longer works without producing a number of additional problematic consequences. The racist undertones of the work have been manipulated in order to make false claims about the economic condition of the country, the relations between immigrant groups, and the prevalence of Islam within the country. The social and economic conditions that underlie such issues have been brushed aside and what we



see come to power are a series of false analogies that intersect these issues. Fortunately,

the speech act, as a rite of institution, is one whose contexts are never fully determined in advance, and that the possibility for the speech act to take on a non-ordinary meaning, to function in contexts where it has not belonged, is precisely the political promise of the performative, one that positions the performative at the center of a politics of hegemony, one that offers a unanticipated political future for deconstructive thinking. (Butler 1997)

PAGE | 209

In positioning the burqa as a performative cultural objective it's my sense Sweden's public discourse has the capacity to gesture toward more of a (Foucauldian) "politics of discomfort" (Butler 1997), where speech and representation are a democratic site of contestation, never fixed or delineated in advance. Grounded earlier in *Excitable Speech*, Butler writes,

Those who seek to fix with certainty the link between certain speech acts and their injurious effects will surely lament the open temporality of the speech act. That no speech act *has* to perform injury as its effect means that no simple elaboration of speech acts will provide a standard by which the injuries of speech might be effectively adjudicated. Such a loosening of the link between act and injury, however, opens up the possibility for a counter-speech, a kind of talking back, that would be foreclosed by the tightening of that link. Thus the gap that separates the speech act from its future effects has its auspicious implications: it begins a theory of linguistic agency that provides an alternative to the relentless search for a legal remedy. (Butler 1997)

Petitioning for remedies through what the public deems as protectors of speech, like TV4, can only foreclose the field of intelligibility, and the ability of the burqa to speak back culturally. Advocating, and working toward, insurrectionary speech acts to rethink our need to control and manage discourse aligns more closely to a politics of discomfort.

Conclusion

In this paper I have argued that censorship does not deliver its intended consequences, but rather diminishes public spaces for contestation. Censorship has the ability to counter its own effects, and in turn produce another set of consequences that heighten the power of the speech it intended to silence. In the Sweden Democrats election advert a number of complex elements serve to work together to deliver a nuanced series of images and narratives that reinforce each other. By refusing to air the advert on public television, the broadcaster acknowledged the superficial elements of the video on a political level, and underscored the ad's representation of the burqa and immigrant as legible, viable subjectivities. Yet, the cultural specificities of the burqa and the greater grand narratives that serve to scapegoat immigrant groups have been ignored through their citation. Here, I chose to focus my attention on the details of the advert, addressing the forms of representation and the narratives that served to reinforce them, to demonstrate the strength of the ad itself. The productive elements of the image itself come to light and here the narratives that were initially seen as problematic and



deemed necessary of an immediate reaction - a silencing of the speech itself have been addressed.

Works Cited

Butler, Judith. *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. New York: Routledge, 1997. Print.

"TV4 refuses to air Sweden Democrat ads." *The Local: Sweden's News in English*. 27 August 2010. Web. 25 Oct. 2010.

Wikstrom, Casja. "Far-right Tests Swedish Tolerance." *Al Jazeera*. Al Jazeera, 16 Sept. 2010. Web. 15 Nov. 2010.

About the author: Lara Mazurski studied Philosophy (HBA 2008) and History (HBA 2008) in Canada. Shortly thereafter, she studied Migration and Ethnic Studies at IMES (MA 2009) in the Netherlands and in the present day is completing her PhD in the department of Literary Studies at the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis (ASCA) (2013). She is also a lecturer in the Literary Studies department at the University of Amsterdam who develops and teaching courses on the intersection of cultural studies, gender studies, and media studies.