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The cross-publics of ethnography:

The case of “the Muslimwoman”

ABSTRACT

Engaged anthropology, public anthropology, and public ethnography are names for a long tradition of trying to make a difference beyond the academy. The passionate and polarized responses of both nonacademic publics and engaged scholars in adjacent fields to my attempt to intervene in public debates about Muslim women’s rights raise questions about the ethics, politics, and potentials of ethnography’s travels across fractured global publics. They illuminate the geopolitical terrain of current debates about feminism and Islamophobia and reveal that ethnography may be most effective in interrupting or unsettling hegemonic representations and political formations when it makes available alternative accounts of lives and communities that can then authorize and give substance to critics’ arguments. Does this instrumentalization of ethnography benefit those whose lives anthropologists share through fieldwork? [*engaged anthropology, public ethnography, rights, ethics, feminism, Islamophobia, Muslim women*]

الأنثروبولوجيا الملترزمة، الأنثروبولوجيا والإثنوغرافيا الجماهيرية هي مسميات لتراث مديد من محاولات لتخطي المؤسسة الأكاديمية ساعية إلى تغيير ما في المجتمع. وقد أثارت مداخلتني في السجلات العامة حول حقوق المرأة المسلمة ردودا متحمسة ومتضادة لدى الجمهور بشقيه العام والأكاديمي الملترزم من الحقول المعرفية المجاورة للأنثروبولوجيا. وتضمنت هذه الردود أسئلة حول أخلاقيات وقدرات الإثنوغرافيا في الوصول إلى جماهير ممتدة في عالم متصدع. ومن أثر هذه الردود أنها تكشف عن المدى الجيو-سياسي لهذه السجلات المتعلقة بالحركة النسوية ومرض الرهاب من الإسلام (إسلاموفوبيا) مبينة أن للإثنوغرافيا شمة قدرة فائقة على إعتراض أو زعزعة التمثيلات المهيمنة والتشكلات السياسية الطاغية من حيث أنها (أي الإثنوغرافيا) توفر دراسات بديلة لحيوات وجماعات قادرة بدورها على تزويد الزخم والمصادقية لمقولات ناقدة لهذه الهيمنة. هل هكذا تسخير للإثنوغرافيا يعود بالمنفعة على من ندرس حياتهم من خلال الإنغماس الأنثروبولوجي فيها على طريقة البحث الميداني؟ [الأنثروبولوجيا الملترزمة، الإثنوغرافيا الجماهيرية، الحقوق، الأخلاقيات، الحركة النسوية، الإسلاموفوبيا، المرأة المسلمة].

Anthropologists have long tried to make a difference beyond the academy. They have used their understandings of human social life derived from ethnographic and comparative work to intervene in political debates of the day. Despite anthropology’s implication in colonial and development projects, inevitable for a discipline forged and still strongest in Europe and its settler colonies in North America, South Africa, and the Pacific, anthropologists have often challenged prevailing views and hegemonic political arrangements. They have taken public stands on everything from utilitarianism to evolutionary thinking, racism to norms of gender and sexuality, development to neoliberal governmentality, militarization and war to humanitarianism, HIV/AIDS to indigenous and human rights. Recent efforts to institutionalize public anthropology (Borofsky 2000) build on this tradition of engaged anthropology.

Today, some of the best anthropologists “make politics matter differently” by “repopulating public imagination with people and their precarious yet creative world-making,” as João Biehl and Ramah McKay (2012, 1224) have put it in a review essay praising “ethnography as political critique.” Didier Fassin (2013) follows in arguing that it is “public ethnography” rather than public anthropology that anthropologists might distinctively offer to wider publics and for the public good.

In addition to intervening in public debates, anthropologists should study the afterlives of their publications, Fassin (2015) argues, rather than imagining their task is over after they have been through the “two lives” of ethnography: the fieldwork and the writing. The trajectory of my ethnographic work and the responses to my effort to intervene in contentious debates in the United States and Europe about Muslim women, debates tightly linked to policies toward a region where the United States has been involved controversially, raise three issues that anthropologists who use ethnography to intervene in urgent social and political affairs must think about carefully: First, how prepared are we for the ways non-academic publics respond to our work, and even for the readings of our work by engaged scholars in adjacent fields? Are there ways to use these responses productively? Second, can the ethnographic specificity with which anthropologists work effectively interrupt and unsettle hegemonic representations and politics? In what contexts might these challenges be most effective? And third, is public ethnography a responsible way to repay the debts we incur to those who have given us the privilege of letting us share their lives and worlds to do our ethnographic work?

As an anthropologist with deep commitments to ethnographic fieldwork in local communities in the Arab Middle East, I felt compelled to respond to the ways women like those with whom I had worked were catapulted to the center of popular media attention in the service of disturbing global imperial political interventions in 2001. To help justify the military invasion of Afghanistan by the United States and its allies, politicians and the media put the spotlight on the rights of Afghan women, and by extension all Muslim women. For the next decade, my ethnographic work focused specifically on the question of women's rights. I returned several times to a village in Egypt where I already had been doing fieldwork for many years. I also began to study transnational and local feminist activism, to read anthropological work on human rights and humanitarianism, and to examine popular genres of writing about Muslim women, including what Dohra Ahmad (2009) called pulp nonfiction. In 2013, I published *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* (Abu-Lughod 2013), a book rich in ethnographic substance and consciously directed to a wider public. My intent was to challenge the prevailing common sense.

Many of the book's arguments were addressed to other scholars and students, but I imagined the mainstream liberal American public as an important audience for the book, given that this audience is more familiar with media representations and trade books than with academic works. *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* took up key topics of public debate: freedom, veiling, honor cultures, violence, Islam, and women's rights. I sought to offer alternatives to the multistranded, highly mediated, and institutionalized public production of what miriam cooke (2007) has called "the Muslimwoman"—a homogenized creature oppressed by her religion, her culture, and her men. I examined prevailing representations. I analyzed the forces that produced them and gave them credibility. I created frameworks for thinking differently about the lives of such women, based on intimate looks at particular lives in particular places. This was the anthropological and ethnographic contribution.

This book reached more diverse publics than my previous ethnographies. There was a range of initial responses to it: near silence in my target public sphere, the US liberal mainstream (which plays a crucial role in building a consensus about US policies toward the Middle East and Muslims), outrage in one counterpublic of which I had been barely aware, and touching personal affirmation in another marginalized counterpublic that had not been in my direct sights when I wrote. Academic reviews took longer to come in. Although these have been largely positive and thoughtful, a majority have come from outside anthropology, particularly from scholars interested in women and global feminism. Some feminist activists who work on and in the Muslim world were more ambivalent toward the book. This reaction, as I will discuss, illustrates Marilyn Strathern's

(1987) observation that the relationship between anthropology and feminism is awkward. The awkwardness has intensified, I would suggest, as feminisms have taken firm root in various settings, gone global, and aligned with other transnational political movements and institutions from human rights and humanitarian governance to the "war on terror."

Ethnography's travels

Anthropologists are increasingly concerned about the ethics, politics, and potentials of ethnography's travels across fractured global audiences. *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* differed from my previous ethnographies, which had been based on intensive long-term research in particular communities in Egypt and organized in terms of topics of interest to scholars of social life: theories of culture, gender, kinship, and morality; the politics of emotion; the social role of expressive culture; nationalism and mass media; ethnographic writing; and the politics of representation and knowledge production. Although the core of the book grew out of scholarly articles published first in academic journals, I rewrote them to make them more accessible because I wanted to influence debates on women's rights, human rights, and the politics of Islam and Islamism in the 21st century. I took tentative steps to find a trade publisher. When rebuffed, I retreated with relief to the familiar standards and intellectual freedom of an academic press.

Ethnography plays a key role in the book. Anthropologists always think through big issues using the situated and microscopic knowledges that they develop by doing fieldwork in particular places, as Clifford Geertz (1973) noted. Because I could not reconcile what I was encountering in public discourse with what I knew from years of fieldwork in Egypt, I spent a decade doing more ethnographic research so I could tackle the subject of Muslim women and their rights. Unlike other excellent recent works that challenge the common sense about the Muslimwoman by analyzing gendered Orientalism or the politics of imperial feminism (e.g., Grewal 2005; Hesford 2011; Kapur 2002; Kumar 2012), I built my arguments systematically out of the everyday lives and concerns of women who might be seen as falling within this charged figure of the Muslimwoman—a figure that runs through media coverage, security concerns, international governance, immigration policies, military intervention, and even feminist advocacy.

Can nonspecialist publics that have not been trained in reading our genre assimilate anthropological modes of argument and evidence? Is ethnography translatable? Can we expect those outside our discipline to appreciate what the particulars of everyday lives, grasped in their complicated social contexts and conveyed through narratives, tell us about the way the world works? That is the essence of anthropological and ethnographic work. It is the heart of

our method. It is what we teach our students by training them to read ethnographies.

The ways my book was taken up can provide insight into what happens when ethnographic work leaves the comfort zone of its customary disciplinary and academic publics. *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* was caught in cross-publics, in both senses of the word—it crossed different publics and made at least one public very cross. It entered multiple lifeworlds at odds with one another and with anthropology. It was opened up to different criteria of authority and judgment, not to mention rules of civility. Other anthropologists have written about what happens when the audiences for their work go beyond fellow anthropologists; some of the most troubling afterlives of ethnographies are those in the communities themselves, when their subjects read or hear rumors about the work (Brettell 1996; Scheper-Hughes 2001). Ethnographies can also get caught in wider political and institutional battles, subjecting anthropologists to hurtful vitriol, as Fassin (2015) describes for his work on HIV/AIDS politics in South Africa and on policing in France. But he steps back to show how much he learned from these responses about the political and institutional dynamics in these countries.

Similarly, by examining how nonacademic audiences received my book, we can learn a great deal about the political terrain, structure, and affective force in the United States and Europe of what some people gloss as Islamophobia (though matters are more complex than this shorthand suggests). I will analyze the early responses before turning to the more awkward responses from fellow academics who are not anthropologists; their reactions can be used to understand more clearly the ways Islamophobia has made navigating women’s-rights advocacy even more treacherous than it was when feminists had to contend with what Leila Ahmed (1982) called colonial feminism.

Although I am media shy and declined to hire any of the publicists who offered me their services, I confess that I was disappointed by the relative silence with which my book was received, at least publicly, by the US liberal public sphere. The latter includes those who write, promote, and devour books like those I criticize in my opening chapters—including the sensational franchise of the *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof, *Half the Sky*, cowritten with Sheryl WuDunn (Kristof and WuDunn 2009). Endorsed by celebrities, the book advocated saving the world, one woman at a time, by battling gender inequality. It has even led to video games and TV movies.

Perhaps this silence is the fate of almost any book published by an academic press. The *New York Times* website, it must be said, aired a video interview with me two months after the book came out; the *New York Times Magazine* published a review four months after it was published.¹ The video was two minutes long, and the book review was one line long and appeared in very small print at the bottom

of the page in a section called Marginal Marginalia. For a book that I had worked on for over a decade, that was the fruit of ethnographic research carried out over 30 years, and that was on a subject that Juliane Hammer (2013, 110) has characterized as “center stage” in North American and European public discourse—this seemed too little.

The silence seemed especially ironic when, a few months after my book was published, Kristof (2014) wrote a column in the *New York Times* Sunday Review called “Professors, We Need You!” He began by noting that “some of the smartest thinkers on problems at home and around the world are university professors, but most of them just don’t matter in today’s great debates.” He blamed some of this on the “anti-intellectualism in American life,” which is certainly the case compared to Europe. The rest of the article, however, castigated professors for being out of touch and marginalizing themselves by using turgid prose. I had worked hard to use accessible prose, and I was very much in touch with current issues. So I had to surmise that I may not have got a hearing because the liberal public sphere did not welcome my critiques of the media and of the devastating effects of US foreign policy toward the Middle East, the Muslim world, and Palestine.

The book received a different reception in the United Kingdom, providing evidence that hostile views of the Middle East and Islam—with the Muslimwoman as linchpin—have a special hold on the US public. A major UK newspaper and a number of serious UK publications reviewed the book almost immediately. These were signs that despite serious problems of racism and Islamophobia in the United Kingdom, the public debate there on Muslims is more open and inclusive; there are certainly more critical spaces in the UK public sphere compared to that of the United States. The demographics of the UK reviewers hint at this diversity: all but one (a negative review by a conservative writing in the *Sunday Times*) were writers or scholars of Arab, Turkish, or South Asian background.

Polarized online counterpublics

The blogosphere, however, was not silent. This is a relatively new facet of the mediation and circulation of scholars’ work with which we must contend. The first reviews of my book in North America appeared online, representing two opposing counterpublics. These online reviews traded in different currencies than those of the academy or the learned pages of the high-brow UK *Literary Review* or *Los Angeles Review of Books* (the only US public forum to review the book). The reviews’ criteria for judgment, their emotionality, and their politics lay outside the disciplinary and academic conventions that were more familiar to me.

These polarized responses illuminate some of the political stakes of my venture into public ethnography on the question of Muslim women. The first surprise was the

measure used by the two blogging counterpublics to evaluate the book: truth versus lies. This is foreign terrain for anthropologists raised on Max Weber, Clifford Geertz, James Clifford, Donna Haraway, Michel Foucault, and Edward Said, to name a few who have shaped our disciplinary common sense about objectivity.

On the positive side, reviews began to appear on feminist websites and blogs shortly after I published the book. These praised the book for confronting stereotypes. Some of the smartest reviews appeared on blogs not specifically oriented to Middle Eastern or Muslim issues, the most lucid appearing on *Feministing* under the title “Not Oprah’s Book Club.” Although the writer highlighted my ethnographic experience, she summed up the core argument of the book in terms of myths and realities:

It’s an age-old fairy tale: an artificial division between the West and its mythical counterpart, what Abu-Lughod calls “IslamLand.” On one side: innocent moral agents—the beneficent saviors. On the other: nefarious brown men and “caged birds,” the Muslim women utterly disempowered to resist them. In reality, the spread of international capital and centuries of (ongoing!) colonial history make it impossible to separate “their” world from our own. (Villano 2013)

Do Muslim Women Need Saving? also hit a chord with the writers at *Muslimah Media Watch* (<http://www.muslimahmediawatch.org>), founded in 2007 by Fatemeh Fakhraei. The blog describes itself as

a forum where we, as Muslim women, can critique how our images appear in the media and popular culture. Although we are of different nationalities, sects, races, etc., we have something important in common: we’re tired of seeing ourselves portrayed by the media in ways that are one-dimensional and misleading.²

The first of two reviews on *Muslimah Media Watch* opens with a quote from the introduction to my book: “I am often bewildered by what I read or hear about ‘the Muslim woman.’” The review goes on, “For those of us who share this sentiment, Abu-Lughod’s book is essential reading ... (written in an *accessible, blissfully jargon-free* style) on the issues we at Muslimah Media Watch are concerned with on a daily basis” (tasnim 2013; emphasis mine).

Another public offered the opposite judgment, expressed through accusations that I lied. This tune began to play, softly at first and then louder, in a counterpublic about which I have since learned a good deal, especially from the Norwegian anthropologist Sindre Bangstad (2013, 2014). The first review, in the Rupert Murdoch–owned British conservative newspaper the *Sunday Times*, was headlined “Drawing a Veil over the Truth.” The subtitle was “Some of Her Conclusions Defy Belief” (Russell 2013).

This judgment and language were amplified in the right-wing Islamophobic blogosphere, where the reach and particular animus of this discourse of truth and lies became apparent. The sinister notes first sounded in Bruce Bawer’s review of my book in *FrontPage Magazine*. It was titled “Saving Islam from Its Victims.” Bawer was affronted by the book. He wrote,

She knows, in short, that every day millions of Muslim women endure suffering rooted in the Koran and in Muslim tradition. But instead of using her knowledge to try to help improve those women’s lives, she uses her rhetorical skills to dance around the truth—dodging, deflecting, doing whatever it takes to uphold the stunningly callous and patently dishonest proposition that Muslim women don’t need saving. (Bawer 2014)

A US writer based in Norway, Bawer is associated with a network of writers and bloggers whose work was quoted approvingly in the Norwegian mass murderer Andre Behring Breivik’s 1,516-page cut-and-paste tract called *2083: A European Declaration of Independence*. As Martha Nussbaum (2012, 55) and others rightly point out, none of those whom Breivik quoted can be held responsible for his gunning down 77 youth leaders of a major Norwegian political party that he considered soft on Muslim immigration. But his text can be used to trace the existence of an Islamophobic network of which some of my reviewers are a part. Bawer’s book titles give away his political stance: *While Europe Slept: How Radical Islam Is Destroying the West from Within* and *Surrender: Appeasing Islam, Sacrificing Freedom*. Bawer was in touch with another writer Breivik quoted: a Norwegian who went by the name “Fjordman” and wrote for a blog called *Gates of Vienna*.³ In case readers are unaware of the significance of the title, the site explains, “At the siege of Vienna in 1683 Islam seemed poised to overrun Christian Europe. We are in a new phase of a very old war.”

As a scholar accustomed to academic book reviews, I was especially taken aback by the comments posted to Bawer’s online review. Online comments, I have since discovered, are notoriously abusive. Although sometimes frightening, they are part of what we must confront when our publics become more diverse. Public ethnography makes us lose control over the mediations of our work (Fassin 2015). I quote only two to clarify the connotations of “dishonesty” within this particular public. “Oldtimer” wrote, “i would like to see a picture of her. Is she wearing that face covering burka that the women she talks about Must wear? Or is all she says just, I think it’s called, taquia(?)”⁴

As Bangstad’s (2013, 2014) research reveals, this comment includes a telltale sign of the Islamophobic worldview that inspired Breivik’s hostility: the term *taqiyya*. The term also appeared in a comment on Bawer’s review by

“Geoffrey” (who describes himself as a conservative/libertarian and supporter of the Tea Party): “Lila Abu-Lughod is a practitioner of stealth jihad, a master of taqiyya. The author [of the review] shouldn’t be surprised at her lying. She advances Satan’s cause and he has a special place in his chest (no heart) for her.”

I was surprised to find *taqiyya*, a concept from Shi’ism related to the ethics of concealing one’s faith to avoid death, such an everyday concept for nonspecialists like these. Yet, as Bangstad explains, it emerged as a key term in the foundational writings in the genre known as Eurabia established by the author Bat Ye’or, now known as Gisèle Littman. “In Ye’or’s work,” Bangstad notes, “and in the understandings of her followers, taqiyya is ... perceived as systematic ‘lies’ or ‘deceptions’ through which Muslims everywhere in the world ‘conceal’ their ‘real’ intentions to establish Islamic dominance over non-Muslim peoples” (2013, 372). Ye’or also popularized the concept of *dhimmitude*, coined from the word designating protected minorities in the Ottoman Empire but twisted, according to Bangstad, to mean the “obligatory submission [of non-Muslim peoples] by war or surrender to Islamic domination” (Bangstad 2014, 148, quoting Ye’or). For Ye’or and those in this right-wing Islamophobic public, *dhimmitude* signifies a Muslim threat to the West, one that should be met by an alliance between Jews and Christians in support of Israel. Nussbaum (2012, 20–58) has characterized this as paranoid thinking, which marks much anti-Muslim work, including that of the extremist Americans Pamela Geller and Robert Spencer (from whose provocative book title, *Stealth Jihad: How Radical Islam Is Subverting America without Guns or Bombs*, the charge against me of “stealth jihad” was lifted).⁵

I turn now to a second element of these two marginal counterpublics’ online reviews: their very personal and emotional tone. It is not just a matter of lies and truth. On one side was another enthusiastic review on *Muslimah Media Watch* titled “How ‘Do Muslim Women Need Saving?’ Saved Me.” It was posted by “shireen,” a regular on the blog, who identified herself as a Canadian soccer-playing mom who wears the hijab. She wrote,

My contribution to this series of reviews is more of an account of the emotional impact of being able to read and apply her work.

When I received my copy, I read it feverishly and quickly. I felt I had to stop myself at times and just exhale. I was drinking her powerful and measured words in too quickly.

It wasn’t simply an intellectual experience of reading a solid piece of work that criticized and called out the disingenuity of a “global industry” that felt the need to save women. It was also a very psycho-emotional experience. Throughout the book, I found myself nodding vigorously as the author brilliantly poked and prodded at those heavy in their disdain and disregard

for accepting Muslim women as individuals as opposed to being a one big sad and repressed group that needs to be spoken for and about. (shireen 2014)

The assaults that popular culture imposes on North American Muslim feminists, and Muslim women across Europe—assaults that have been widely documented and that include not just “representations” but hate crimes, physical attacks, online abuse, and discrimination in the labor market—are palpable in her emotional response: “I had moments of intensity where I was clutching the book tightly because it resonated so deeply. A friend of mine confessed that she sometimes slept with the book” (shireen 2014).

The mirror opposite of these strong emotional responses appears in Bawer’s *FrontPage* review. Bawer can hardly contain his rage:

This was a tough book to get through. I had to keep putting it down. The world-class dishonesty, the willingness to deny the real suffering of women and girls in order to prop up the poisonous religion that’s responsible for that suffering—and to impugn the motives of noble people who do care—made me livid. (2014)

It is ironic that Muslim feminist bloggers felt so personally comforted by my book while Bawer was so offended on their behalf. In the world of Eurabia and beyond, as Bangstad and others have shown, this advocacy for Muslim women is strongly linked to anti-immigrant political platforms, and Bawer himself worked with a Norwegian secular feminist who established Human Rights Service (HRS), an NGO. Set up to assist immigrant women, HRS has served, Bangstad argues, as a conduit “for the mainstreaming of counterjihadist literature, including works in the Eurabia genre” (2013, 376).

To return to the question of public ethnography, however, I was most struck by the impossibility of there being a place in Bawer’s world for ethnographic work that might complicate understandings. In my book, I invoke the authority and results of long-term fieldwork—the detail of individual stories that cannot be fitted into standard molds, the complex meanings of religious identity and practice, the multiple efforts of feminist and human rights groups as they are caught in broader geopolitical currents, and the complex political economies that shape the local situations of Egyptian or even Afghan women. Yet for Bawer, these merited no mention.

Pulp nonfiction and the Muslimwoman

Bawer’s review was published in the magazine of the US-based right-wing David Horowitz Freedom Center, whose self-proclaimed mission is “the defense of free societies whose moral, cultural and economic foundations are under attack by enemies both secular and religious, at home

and abroad.”⁶ This refers to the Left (exemplified for them by the professoriate) and Islamists. This is the same center that in 2007 published a pamphlet (Spencer and Chesler 2007) in connection with Islamofascism Awareness Week, an initiative to recruit students to attack women’s-studies programs across the United States for being soft on the question of Muslim women. The pamphlet was coauthored by Robert Spencer (“stealth jihad”) and Phyllis Chesler, a retired feminist psychology professor. Titled *The Violent Oppression of Women in Islam*, the pamphlet offered a mishmash of examples of abuses from all over the world placed side by side with quotes from the Qur’an. The cover image, a stilted black-and-white photomontage, appears to show a veiled woman being buried alive. This pamphlet represents the purest example of the deployment of the “defense” of Muslim women’s rights to bolster denunciations of Islam.

Chesler writes regularly about feminist issues on right-wing blogs and in magazines. She published a memoir just a few months after my book came out with an intriguing title: *An American Bride in Kabul* (Chesler 2013). In this memoir, Chesler finally reveals the personal basis for her “authority” to speak on issues of gender in the Muslim world, something that had long puzzled me given that she was a US feminist psychologist, not an expert on the Middle East or the Muslim world. She reveals that she went to Afghanistan in 1961 after marrying at age 19 a fellow student from Bard College. He was a dapper cosmopolitan Afghan elite interested in theater. She went with him, her heart set on exotic adventure. But she was shocked and disappointed, escaping less than six months later and eventually obtaining an annulment.

Fifty years later, she writes this memoir, which opens with the following sensational sentence: “I once lived in a harem in Afghanistan.” The next lines perfectly affirm a stereotype while appearing to negate it:

I came as the young bride of the son of one of the country’s wealthiest men. To my astonishment, I was held captive—but it’s not as if I had been kidnapped by wild savages and ravished. This is not a tale of a white and helpless maiden taken by Barbary pirates and sold into an imperial harem. I was not *sold* into captivity. I walked into it of my own free will. (Chesler 2013, vii; italics in original)

She even confesses sheepishly that she had uttered the words (the *shahada*) that converted her to Islam. Why tell us this when she has kept it secret for 50 years? One can only surmise that it is so she can join the ranks of the abused Muslim heroines of popular (as-told-to) memoirs, such as *Forced into Marriage* and *Burned Alive*, that one finds in airport bookstores. Or to stand with the celebrated “ex-Muslims” like Ayaan Hirsi Ali who tell tales of woe to denounce Islam as a barbaric religion. Their works define and

structure feelings about Muslim women and, as I argue in my book, through this pulp nonfiction subliminally authorize a moral crusade to save them from Islam (Abu-Lughod 2013, 81–112).

Chesler’s memoir follows the formula of this genre. She reproduces the requisite chapter titles reflecting the genre’s narrative convention of going from bondage to freedom: “The Imprisoned Bride,” “Burqas,” “Harem Days,” “Trapped,” “Escape.” To bulk up her barely remembered experience, she interweaves into the narrative a series of 18th- and 19th-century European travelers’ accounts, of not only Afghanistan but also Iran, Egypt, and Arabia. For good measure, she sprinkles in some current accounts by wives who have written best-selling accounts of their unfortunate marriages to “Eastern” men. One could hardly ask for a better illustration of what Edward Said (1978) characterized as the citationary nature of Orientalism, in which other texts are more authoritative than the realities.

Here is a typical instance: after saying she is “getting used to spending my days at home,” Chesler writes,

It is impossible for a Westerner to imagine the deadening torpor of a protected life under house arrest. Eventually, one is grateful for the smallest outing outdoors—a lovely picnic in a burqa, being allowed to watch the men and boys fly kites or swim. I am looking at a photograph taken in 1865 that is titled “Sweet Waters of Asia.” (2013, 59)

The connection between 1961 and 1865, and between Kabul and a photograph taken on “the eastern shores of the Bosphorus,” 4,000 kilometers west, is left unexplained.

Chesler spent less than six months in a Kabul that is very different from what exists now. She lived in the wealthy gated household of the head of a major bank with chauffeurs and servants. She was surprised that her sister-in-law met her at the airport in the latest Western fashions and high heels. She struggles hard to make her story fit the script. Until her final days there, her greatest abuse seems to be her self-starvation, caused by her mother-in-law who refused to make special foods cooked in imported Crisco rather than the native ghee. She also blames her mother-in-law for her dysentery and hepatitis—the result of a nefarious anti-Semitic plot to leave the vegetables unwashed. She has no memory of marital rape but says she finds mention of it in her diary. She chafes under restrictions of “house arrest” and bemoans the fate of women she sees wearing burqas, which she describes as “body bags” and “sensory deprivation chambers.”

Her lack of desire to understand the new social world she has entered might be excused in a 19-year-old girl from Brooklyn. It is harder to explain why in the intervening 50 years as a scholar she has not availed herself of the rich scholarship by anthropologists and historians of the region,

scholarship that would have provided insight into the complex gendered world she had entered. Instead, she describes this world as one of “gender apartheid” and writes pamphlets like *The Violent Oppression of Women in Islam*.

One can read this memoir of Afghanistan not as what she claims it is—a reckoning with herself—but as a lure. Chesler wants new audiences for the second half of the book, in which she rehashes hundreds of articles she has posted on right-wing blogs and magazines over the last two decades, many on her pet theme of the honor crime. Here also one finds the familiar tirades against gender apartheid, “anti-Semitic Palestinian-loving Muslims who are seeking to destroy Israel,” and “Sharia law”—the subject of fear mongering by US politicians in ignorance of the meanings of legal reasoning and argument in Muslim societies, as studied by anthropologists like Brinkley Messick (1996, forthcoming).⁷

Serious engagement and that awkward relationship

Chesler’s extremist positions bring to the fore a tension that exists in more genuine forms within the larger feminist community. Anthropologists who are careful ethnographers of women and gender must confront real dilemmas, beyond the mendacity of Islamophobes who have seized on “the woman question” to further their cause. Women’s rights and issues like gender-based violence should concern everyone, and the important work that activists and practitioners in Egypt, Palestine, Lebanon, Morocco, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, or elsewhere in “the Muslim world” are doing is to be respected. This is why I had such feminists in mind as interlocutors and publics. But as an anthropologist, I also included them as subjects of some modest ethnography on what I called “the social life of Muslim women’s rights,” because it is important to understand how problems of women get framed in international discourses and institutions and how activists in particular regions work.

The most serious public to respond in a timely way to *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* consisted of committed feminist scholars, writers, and activists, most of whom work in and on the Muslim world. Their responses were different from those of the grateful writers of *Muslimah Media Watch*. The views that appeared in more academic venues reveal the uneasy relationships between anthropology and transnational feminist scholarship and activism. Yet it is in such adjacent and allied fields, I believe, that ethnography has the best chance of affecting the terms of political and public debate. It is this audience that is most genuinely concerned about the issues I tackle in the book, and they may be most open to what an anthropologist can offer, since understanding the complex forces that shape the social world matters to projects of social transformation and gender justice. As far as the Muslimwoman is concerned, it is clear that

all of us are hamstrung by this figure’s entanglement with geopolitical forces and organized Islamophobia.

The most thoughtful challenges to *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* came in an academic review symposium on it published in *Ethnicities*. The three invited reviewers who responded, all Europe-based feminist scholars who work on and in different Muslim communities in Europe and abroad, raised significant ethical-political questions about the stance of the book. The most consistent concern was how much support my book offered for what Deniz Kandiyoti (2015) called “internal critiques.” By this she meant critiques by feminists who challenge the patriarchal injustices in their own societies, working to reform law, change canons, and criticize conservative social practices, cultural ideologies, and interpretations of religion. Taking a different approach, the other two reviewers asked how much room I give to “authentic critical voices” (Malik 2015, 765) as opposed to those simply playing to Western audiences and riding the wave of Islamophobia to promote themselves, as do the well-known “native informants” (Dabashi 2006; Mahmood 2008). One of the reviewers, Maleiha Malik, rightly insisted that one must find ways to “safeguard space for legitimate critiques” (2015, 766). The other, Schirin Amir-Moazami (2015), alarmed by anti-immigrant discourse in Germany and France, puzzled over what to do about the fact that only certain feminist voices—those that blame Islam for misogyny in Muslim cultures—get authorized in the mainstream public spheres in Europe and the United States.

Given the widespread ignorance about and deliberate prejudice against Muslims, it is important to highlight the diversity of women and the existence of feminists within such communities. To counter the discourse of white women saving brown women from brown men, to adapt Gayatri Spivak’s (1988) famous formulation, I regularly teach about the long local histories of women’s movements and activism (however blurry we know the boundaries to be between local and transnational, inside and outside). There is fine scholarly literature on this subject by now (e.g., Abu-Lughod 1998; Al-Ali 2000, 2007; Booth 2001; Chowdhury 2011; Rinaldo 2013; Salime 2011; Shehabuddin 2011). Most intriguing are the movements that emerged in the first decade of the 21st century that could be labeled Islamic feminist. I examined two groups from this movement, Musawah (which means “Equality”) and the Women’s Initiative for Spirituality and Equality (WISE), which define themselves as global and work for reform and rights from within the religious tradition. There are others. These surely count among the “authentic internal critics,” alongside a range of others like the Marxist and secular liberal feminist activists and even the Islamist women who work from within political parties or movements to push for reforms and women’s leadership (e.g., Deeb 2006; Jad 2005; McLarney 2015; Salime 2011; Yafout 2015).

Yet because my touchstones are the rural communities where I have done ethnographic research and because the subjects of my ethnography are ordinary women living in Egypt who have had almost no contact with activists, my perspective on feminists is somewhat at odds with the feminists' self-images. Like all rights-based feminist projects that refer to the key international instrument of women's rights, the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the arguments of the Islamic feminists align with liberal frameworks and forms of argument whose purchase and social base are not yet clear in the regions where they seek to work. This may be the only effective path open for change, but the circumstances must be noted. My ethnographic work among the Awlad 'Ali Bedouin over the past couple of decades has shown that there is internal debate about new restrictions on women's movements, wedding practices, and even mourning (Abu-Lughod 1993, 1997, 2013) because of the influence of conservative Gulf-influenced Bedouin families. But the alternative is not "freedom" or gender equality. In Upper Egypt, women counter and resist many aspects of gendered power, "traditional" and new, but usually by invoking their rights under Islam. Ethnographic vignettes show the impossibility of disentangling individual women's problems from the global economic policies that impoverish them, the national policies that render their families vulnerable, the class politics that deprive them of dignity, and the military interventions that undermine their security. I argued that feminist activists should take these into account.

The engaged fields of feminist scholarship and activism do not sit easily with anthropology because of the different social locations from which women's lives are being assessed and gender politics analyzed. The differences between the ways NGOs and development and empowerment projects "give voice" to the women they are helping and the way anthropologists represent subaltern women have been the subject of critical writing (e.g., Sangtin Writers and Nagar 2006). Yet little ethnographic work has been conducted on women's-rights projects themselves or on the encounters between feminist activists or NGO workers and the less educated and the often nonactivist women for whom they advocate. I examine some of the organizations that feminists in and from the regions have founded, some of the causes they have taken up, and some of the languages of justice they have mobilized (Ferguson 2015; Salime 2015), following paths opened up by other anthropologists, in particular Sally Engle Merry (2006).

As an ethnographer who has worked in rural areas with women who are not urban professionals or well educated and who are mostly poor, I view feminist activists with a double consciousness: they are both respected peers and colleagues working in adjacent fields and, when seen

through the eyes of the less educated and privileged women I have come to know in Egyptian villages and desert areas, urban elites who do not share the desires and values of many of those on whose behalf they work. One can no more brush aside the internal class politics of feminist activism in these parts of the world as the imperial politics of a US State Department liberal global feminism that needs the figure of the oppressed Muslimwoman.

Articulating differences among forms of feminist critique is analytically and politically fraught. On the one hand, the tensions I experience bridging these worlds are not unfamiliar to anthropologists who have worked on human rights. Unlike critical political theorists who boldly link human rights and humanitarianism to colonialism or who interrogate the paradoxes of rights, legalism, or universalism that lie at the heart of liberalism, anthropologists proceed ethnographically, studying the workings of rights claims and practices on the ground. On the basis of ethnographic work, anthropologists have criticized the binds into which indigenous people are placed by the demands of liberal multiculturalism and recognition (Povinelli 2002; Simpson 2014) and the ways human rights work promotes social distinction, opens career paths, and depoliticizes suffering in a world of transnational governance and neoliberal governmentality (e.g., Allen 2013; Englund 2006; Jackson 2005). Although anthropologists have worked as legal advocates and rights activists, there is still debate about how appropriate this kind of direct engagement is (e.g., Cowan, Dembour, and Wilson 2001; Goodale 2009).

On the other hand, work on women's rights is burdened by the special history of colonial feminism, and it is particularly fractious in the parts of the world on which I work because of the twin pressures of religious revival and Islamophobia.⁸ I used my ethnographic work in one Egyptian village to explore the incommensurability between everyday lives and the social imagination of rights, whether by outsiders, veterans of women's activism in the region, or the cosmopolitan Islamic feminists who are doing creative new work. Such organizations are conceived and run by educated urban women who, in this age of NGOization (Grewal and Bernal 2014; Sangtin Writers and Nagar 2006; Shehabuddin 2008), spend their time studying, drafting position statements, applying for funds, and generally seeking legal reform and cultural change along tracks that might work. I was interested in how these organizations relate to those on whose behalf they work. Although my "thick" ethnography in the Egyptian village was unmatched by my ethnography of activists, I observed that even though activist projects mobilize genuinely concerned, smart, creative, committed, and often quite learned individuals, such rights work intersects with global institutional politics and class inequalities.

The public responses from some feminist scholar-activist colleagues in or of the Arab and wider Muslim

world have made me more conscious of the costs of uneven ethnographic efforts. Given the hostility and suspicion toward feminist projects and the dedication they require— aspects of such projects that I emphasized strongly in my analysis of the work of Palestinian women activists—it would have been useful to have produced more relational ethnographic work on projects of women’s development, empowerment, and rights. Ethnography of feminist activists, experts, and organizations would not necessarily have changed my analysis but would have grounded and nuanced my analysis of their contexts. The value of this approach is clear from some pioneering ethnographic work on feminists (Ali 2015; Hodgson 2002, 2003, 2011; Merry 2006; Sukarieh 2015; Sweis 2012; Walley, n.d.).

The hesitation in my support for authentic internal critics is a result of the combination of my fieldwork experiences with rural women in Egypt and my primary location in the United States, where discourses about Islam and the Middle East and the devastating policies they underwrite appear particularly dangerous. To confront simplistic or tendentious discourses about how Islam is to blame for women’s oppression, I opened *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* with a vignette of a woman friend in the Egyptian village where I had worked for 20 years. It was the eve of the revolution of January 25, 2011, though we didn’t know it. I described her shock when I explained that many people in the West blame Islam for women’s oppression. She insisted, to the contrary, that her problems were the fault of the government. She complained about the arbitrary powers of the security forces, a lack of concern for the poor, corruption, and gross inequalities. From my ethnographic work, I also shared stories about women who fought for their inheritances against their brothers, wielding the Qur’an and enjoying the full support of elders and religious authorities. I presented the troubling case of a young woman who was subjected to the violence of a husband, noting that he was condemned by the whole community as a bad Muslim.

When figures like Bawer or Chesler, who claim to care about women, lay abuses and suffering at the feet of the Qu’ran, a “poisonous” religion, or “honor cultures,” anthropologists like me, who work with more complex theories of culture and culture making and have intimate knowledge of diverse women’s lives, feel they must react. Just after my book was published, I came across new evidence of the insidious deployment of culturalist arguments: a media blitz for a documentary called *Honor Diaries*. Associated with Ayaan Hirsi Ali’s foundation, it was funded by the Clarion Fund, the same shadowy foundation that produced *Obsession*, a notorious Islamophobic film that was distributed free in hundreds of thousands of newspapers in swing states during a US presidential election to undermine Barack Obama by tarring him as a Muslim (Saylor 2014). Key players in this campaign are Israeli.

The motto of the campaign is “Culture is no excuse for abuse.” Yet it is *Honor Diaries* that is “blaming culture for bad behavior” (Volpp 2000). The film and campaign frame violence against women as happening only in Muslim or brown communities and as only being related to their culture—not to structural violence, global economic depredations, political contestations, or war, to name a few other obvious sources.⁹ My book traces the way tropes of cultural harm have functioned to stigmatize religious communities, ethnic groups, and social classes, following a path blazed by feminist scholars like Uma Narayan (1997), who, for example, coined the phrase “death by culture” to describe the way dowry deaths in India are (mis)framed. Being forced into this reactive stance by the wider context of Islamophobia may have discouraged me from fully investigating or focusing on the conservative uses of Islam by political groups seeking to undermine women’s rights and lives, something apparent across the Middle East and elsewhere; these are precisely the targets of so much “internal” feminist criticism, and for good reason.

Instrumentalizing ethnography?

In their review of the anthropology of human rights, Iris Jean-Klein and Annelise Riles argue that anthropologists should do ethnography in the world of rights since this is the only form of engagement the profession is “uniquely qualified to administer” (2005, 174–75). They suggest that our self-disciplined ethnography should be oriented to anthropological knowledge production. In contrast, Fassin makes a case for a critical and public ethnography that moves beyond the discipline, because the ethnographer plays a special role as a “presence both involved and detached, inscribed in the instant and over time, allowing precise descriptions and multiple perspectives, thus providing a distinctive understanding of the world that deserves to be shared” (2013, 642). This is especially relevant, he continues, in “understudied regions of society, but can be significant also in spaces saturated by consensual meanings: in the first case, it illuminates the unknown; in the second, it interrogates the obvious” (642). My ethnography of some Muslim women is a case of the latter: it interrogates the obvious in a space saturated by the consensual meanings that I have called common sense.¹⁰

Yet making ethnography more public and using it strategically to contribute to political debates intensifies the troubling ethical questions that anthropologists have always taken seriously. As someone with long-term relationships with specific communities in what could be construed as “the Muslim world,” I have worried about exposing particular people’s everyday and intimate lives to broader publics beyond the academy and for purposes beyond “anthropological knowledge production.” To challenge the public discourse about the Muslimwoman—and

by implication, the Muslimman, as Shenila Khoja-Moolji (2015) suggests—am I then instrumentalizing ethnography?

In the afterword to the 30th-anniversary edition of my first ethnography, *Veiled Sentiments* (Abu-Lughod 2016), I reflect on the responsibilities we have to those who have become part of our lives through fieldwork. I have known people in this small Bedouin community over 35 years. I have watched children grow up and marry, lost beloved friends to illness and death, and become over time more uncertain about anthropology's higher purpose. In the early 1990s, I had written a second ethnography of this community of Awlad 'Ali Bedouins, *Writing Women's Worlds* (Abu-Lughod 1993), because I felt that *Veiled Sentiments* had failed to capture the spirited and textured ways women lived, argued, and thought in this community. I used intimate stories of the everyday to undermine generalizations about such classic themes for the region as systems of kinship and the honor code. I placed people and their stories in particular circumstances. This "ethnography of the particular," as I called it, was meant to disrupt presumptions of the homogeneity of cultures and to confront commonplaces of both anthropology and feminist studies.

I had misgivings about this project at the time.¹¹ I likened my ethnographic storytelling to candid photographs; I knew that my Bedouin friends preferred formal posed portraits. Later, when *Veiled Sentiments* was translated to Arabic (Abu-Lughod 1995), something I eagerly welcomed, I worried that the theoretical arguments about the complexity of culture and moral systems might be lost on those unfamiliar with the ways anthropologists write. The stories of love, betrayal, and loss that I had bent to this higher purpose of social and cultural analysis and to the task of "humanizing" an Arab community to outsiders (something they would be surprised to learn was needed) might just seem indiscreet. The disclosures were for me at least partially redeemed by the justice I had done to the proud ways my friends lived. I attempted to show the richness, intensity, and complexity of their social and imaginative worlds. I recorded for posterity poetic traditions that were being lost. The fact that so many colleagues continue to teach the ethnographies suggests that they do offer something important. I like to think that these ethnographies make it possible for readers to have at least a few Muslim women populating their imaginations when they run across the manufactured stereotypes of the Muslimwoman.

Questions about the ethics of revealing people's lives to the public are even more pertinent for the more confrontational and readable *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* Anthropologists' methods produce a unique kind of knowledge and produce knowledge in a unique way. What happens when this knowledge is opened to the scrutiny of the ignorant and the hostile, not just the serious or curious? Anthropologists who work with women and on gender

politics in the Middle East and the Muslim world would like to share Fassin's measured confidence that "a conversation between the ethnographer and his or her publics generates a circulation of knowledge, reflection, and action likely to contribute to a transformation of the way the world is represented and experienced" (2013, 628). Yet we feel exhausted, overwhelmed by the hold of the cultural common sense and daunted by the structures that keep it in place, from well-meaning liberalism to Orientalism, from well-funded Islamophobia and the associated terror-expertise industry to US and Israeli geopolitical interests and media collusion. Those of us who work in these regions sometimes resent the responsibility we feel to always use what we have learned to speak back to negative or ignorant views held by Western publics, including feminists, or even local elites who sometimes share their views about the cultural backwardness or "excessive" religiosity of less privileged compatriots. This limits our foci and constrains what we can say.

Fassin concludes his defense of public ethnography by noting that "we owe in priority those with whom we worked and those primarily concerned by the issues on which we conduct our work" (2013, 640). But how does making public our ethnography repay those with whom we have worked? Anthropologists have always worried about the consequences of disclosing what we have learned as ethnographers about communities we have come to care about. We now live in a world where borders are regularly breached with social media and travel, where we cannot control who will read or see or hear what we have made public, where what we have presented in good faith may be redeployed in the service of different projects, and where those who have trusted us enough to let us into their lives might be made vulnerable or somehow compromised by what we reveal.

In this context, Audra Simpson's (2014, 95–115) advocacy of "ethnographic refusal" is compelling. Writing about the Mohawk community of which she is a part, Simpson developed this stance in light of the history of anthropology's complicity in undermining the sovereignty of the native peoples who were, after all, its original objects of study. She advocates "ethnographic refusal" as a protective move against the ongoing dispossessions of settler states that use their knowledge about native communities to discipline or undermine them. Similar dilemmas arise when we become aware of how significant the Muslimwoman is to the geopolitics of empire, the war on terror, and, increasingly, the xenophobic nationalist politics around immigrants and refugees in Europe (Ticktin 2011).

How can we decide whether it is "public ethnography" or "ethnographic refusal" that would best repay the debts we incur to those who have shared their lives with us? This must be answered case by case. The conversation in which I seek to intervene with my ethnography of women and gender is not one that the women about whom I am

writing are directly concerned. They would be surprised to discover how they are represented. But their lives and possibilities are deeply affected by the events and formations to which representations of the Muslimwoman are connected as product, justification, or affective ground for intervention. Given this context, if ethnography can make available alternative accounts of lives and communities that can then authorize and give substance to those forces seeking to challenge the standard views and policies, it is valuable. In the case of the Muslimwoman, ethnographies by feminist anthropologists have indeed populated the public imagination with women who disrupt the common sense manufactured for purposes that contribute to harming these women and their communities. For example, ethnographies such as Saba Mahmood's (2004) and Sherine Hafez's (2011) on women in the Islamic revival in Egypt, Lara Deeb's (2006) on Shi'ia Muslim women associated with Hizbullah in Lebanon, and Nadia Guessous's (n.d.) on the aversions of secular Moroccan feminists to the veil—to name just a few on the Arab world—encourage skepticism about taken-for-granted values of liberation or secularism.

Given the deadly repetitions of the public discourses on the Muslimwoman and the kinds of cross-publics that I discovered coalescing around my book, the alternatives we can offer are crucial. If our ethnographies can generate debate and lead to serious conversation about life-and-death political issues, this may change attitudes and eventually policy. The article (Abu-Lughod 2002) that led to my book is routinely one of the “most downloaded” articles from *American Anthropologist*. It rivals Horace Miner's (1956) satirical classic “Body Ritual among the Nacirema” assigned by teachers to force students to question their smug assumptions about who is a “primitive Other.” Like the multiple reprints and translations in anthropology and women's studies textbooks and readers, the downloads suggest that my counterhegemonic arguments resonate with colleagues. This work articulates, with ethnographic support, views that thoughtful people already have developed about the dangerous ways that representations of Muslim women are deployed politically.

This kind of work is therefore useful for opening conversations in the classroom and beyond. The effects of such conversations are not easy to measure. Some will be led to explore other ethnographic work on women and gender politics in the Middle East, South and Southeast Asia, Africa, and in immigrant communities in Europe, Australia, and North America. Some will be led to inform themselves better about interconnected global histories, rejecting the binary divisions between East and West. Some will reexamine assumptions and prejudices. At the least, such ethnographic work changes the parameters of public discourse.¹² My hope is that this will in turn affect global politics. In that case, public ethnography could be instrumental in repaying some of our debts to those with whom we have worked.

Notes

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1. For the video interview, see John Williams, “The Read Aloud: Video of Lila Abu-Lughod,” *New York Times* website, December 23, 2013, accessed March 15, 2016, <http://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/12/23/the-read-around-video-of-lila-abu-lughod/?r=0Links>.

For the book review, see Tyler Cowen, “A One-Sentence Book Review,” *New York Times Magazine*, February 23, 2014, accessed March 15, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/02/23/magazine/23-one-page-magazine.html?_r=1.

2. “About MMW,” *Muslimah Media Watch*, accessed July 20, 2016, <http://www.muslimahmediawatch.org/about-2/>.

3. “Fjordman” made his identity public after the shootings (Bangstad 2014, 80).

4. The comments appeared on Bawer's (2014) review but have been removed as of July 23, 2016.

5. Nussbaum explicitly links it to the type of anti-Semitism represented in an earlier era and associated with *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. The connections between Islamophobia and anti-Semitism have been explored by anthropologists, including Ruth Mandel (2008) and Katherine Ewing (2008), and by others, including those analyzing cartoons (Gottschalk and Greenberg 2008).

6. Website of the David Horowitz Freedom Center, accessed July 23, 2016, <http://www.horowitzfreedomcenter.org>.

7. Chesler's accusations on a right-wing news blog the following year expand on these ideas about anti-Israel feeling. In an article (Chesler 2014) about the 2014 National Women's Studies Association Conference, where Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions were to be discussed, she charges activists with “hijacking feminism to attack Israel” and laments that this was “only the latest, among many other examples, of the way in which Women's Studies—an idea which I pioneered so long ago—has been Stalinized and Palestinianized.”

8. Juliane Hammer argues that “a thorough analysis of gendered Islamophobia needs to take into consideration the problem of delineating the boundaries of what is identified as Islamophobia as opposed to critical feminist discourse, secular critique, and intra-Muslim reform” (2013, 110).

9. The sensationalism is patent from the graphic photos that accompany their e-mails to the promotional announcements with headings like “STATUS UPDATE: MURDERED,” “Female Genital Mutilation: In America?,” “What If You Were Forced to Marry?,” and “Don't Let ‘Intersectionality’ Stop You from Being a Feminist.”

10. It is telling that, according to Deeb and Winegar (2012, 542), about 40 percent of recent work in the anthropology of the Arab world focuses on gender. The statistic is positive in indicating that anthropologists continue to struggle against stereotypes with careful ethnographic work and that there is increasing acceptance of feminist anthropology in the discipline. The negative interpretation is that anthropologists may be inadvertently contributing to the impression of a unique pathology around gender and sexuality in the region. My own earlier review essay had labeled the strong focus on women as “harem theory” (Abu-Lughod 1989); since then, work has expanded the focus to gender and includes ethnographic work on masculinities and sexuality.

11. My misgivings are different from those expressed by Webb Keane (2003) about that project (Abu-Lughod 1991). Despite generously placing my arguments about “ethnography of the particular” in a genealogy that includes Franz Boas and Clifford Geertz, he missed the points I later made in the introduction to my book about the feminist critiques of the power (some say masculine) of using abstract theoretical language and about my own orientation toward confronting problems of hostile representations of distant communities, for which “ethnography of the particular” and “writing against culture” were tactical. He misrepresents my focus on particular individuals as reflecting ontology and arising from my simple valorization of the individual and agency when again I intended these as tactics to confront powerful forms of generalization about communities in the Middle East.

12. Maysoun Sukarieh and Stuart Tannock (2013) forcefully question the ethics of researching vulnerable communities. They argue that the “overresearched” Palestinians who live in the conveniently located refugee camp of Shatila feel they get no direct benefit from the researchers keen to give voice to Palestinians. But when a *Guardian* columnist (Bunting 2016), again, in the United Kingdom, discusses colonial feminism in the context of David Cameron’s announcement of a program to teach English to Muslim women in Britain (as antiradicalization and under threat of deportation) and suggests that *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* should be required reading for the then British prime minister, we can see how public ethnography might be useful for those advocating changing attitudes and even policies.

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