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Islamophobia, Feminism and the Politics of Critique

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Abstract

This article discusses recent critical works within the frame of what is considered a paramount concern in feminist scholarship today: How do we name and publicize acts of violence against women without providing ideological fuel for orientalism and Islamophobia? By privileging a critique of western imperialism in discussions of violence against women in Muslim contexts, I argue this work: 1) obscures a complete understanding of violence against women in Muslim contexts, 2) is unjustifiably dismissive and belittling to activists working in the Muslim world, and 3) is an expression of a Euro/American experience of Islamophobia post 9/11 that is projected in an ahistorical and politically counterproductive way onto local Muslim and Arab communities. The cumulative result is a teleology of an anti-imperialism that naturalizes the double bind between Islamophobia and gender injustice by presenting women's rights activism not just as complicit in imperialism and Islamophobia but as inescapably imperialist and Islamophobic.

Keywords

9/11, critique, feminism, imperialism, Muslims, postcolonialism, the West

In a recent issue of the e-zine *Jadaliyya,* Lila Abu-Lughod and Maya Mikdashi engaged in a tense exchange with the Palestinian hip-hop activist group DAM. The discussion centered on DAM's recent music video, 'If I Could Go Back in Time', about honor killings in Palestine. Written in Arabic for a primarily Palestinian audience, the video was hailed by *Jadaliyya* contributor Nehad Khader as 'an opening salvo in an indigenous conversation about internal problems' (Khader, 2012). But Abu-Lughod and Mikdashi disagreed. In their review entitled 'Tradition and the Anti-Politics Machine: DAM Seduced by the "Honor Crime"', the two wrote they were 'disappointed' with the video for 'succumb[ing] to an international anti-politics machine that blames only tradition for

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the intractability of (some) people's problems' (Abu-Lughod and Mikdashi, 2012a). The crux of Abu-Lughod and Mikdashi's critique was that by centering the issue of violence against women around honor crimes – a framing that is easily recruitable by empire – DAM was (unwittingly) colluding with western and Israeli imperialist ambitions. DAM's intervention was harmful by virtue of its *potential* to be usurped by imperialists who regularly invoke the issue of gender injustice to demonize Muslim societies and further their own geopolitical ends. DAM responded to the review in the same publication, finding that the review 'crossed a few lines'. They rejected the accusation that they were 'seduced by Western propaganda', calling it a 'cheap shot', and argued that they 'should not have to mention the Occupation in every song to prove [their] political legitimacy'. DAM went on to describe Abu-Lughod and Mikdashi's approach as 'a top-heavy one and stops short of a serious engagement of [the] work' (Nafar et al., 2012).

The conflict between Abu-Lughod/Mikdashi and DAM is not an isolated incident, but just one manifestation of an ongoing, contentious debate involving feminist scholars and activists concerning what many call the 'double bind' between imperialism and gender injustice (Dhawan, 2013; Khan, 2005: 2018; Shaikh, 2013: 24–5; Tax, 2012). In an age of Islamophobia, how does one engage in a feminist critique of women's status in Muslim contexts without providing ideological fuel for undesired political ambitions? When the US invokes the oppression of Muslim women to justify war, how do we practice feminist solidarity without strengthening orientalism and imperialism?

Since the events of 9/11 and their subsequent political aftermath, these questions have come to occupy a (if not *the*) paramount concern in feminist scholarship and activism, motivating a number of important contributions in the field. The literature on the gendered nature of neo-orientalism has been particularly rich, demonstrating forcefully that orientalist logic is being used once again by western imperial powers to justify their geopolitical domination by posing as the liberator of Muslim women from native patriarchal cultures and religions (Mahmood, 2008a: 83). Empirically, these scholars have taken aim at the rhetoric of US politicians and media (Stabile and Kumar, 2005), feminist NGOs (Bhattacharyya, 2008; Grewal, 2005; Hirschkind and Mahmood, 2002; Abu-Lughod, 2009; Russo, 2006), and non-fiction best-sellers (Dabashi, 2006, 2011; Donadey and Ahmed-Ghosh, 2008; Mahmood, 2008a). Theoretically, special attention has been paid to the relationship between agency and norms (Abu-Lughod, 2002, 2011; Mahmood, 2011), secularism as a political project (Anidjar, 2006; Asad, 2003; Asad et al., 2013; Mahmood, 2006, 2008b), and the 'complicity' between feminist/queer advocacy and empire (Mahmood, 2008a; Massad, 2002; Puar, 2007). Many of these critical interventions found a warm reception by anti-imperialist feminists working in Muslim contexts.

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So why, then, did DAM find the application of such work – what can be crudely referred to as the 'postsecular' strain of feminist scholarship – objectionable?

Recently, a number of scholars have read these works with a critical eye (Abbas, 2013; Bhatt, 2006; Dhawan, 2013; Robbins, 2013a, 2013b). In this essay, I extend their critiques to the arena of political consequences, and particularly the consequences vis-à-vis the double bind between imperialism and gender injustice. While recognizing the importance of this literature's contribution towards the interrogation of feminist operations that may converge with, bolster, or reproduce imperial discourses, there is an equally important challenge of how to safeguard feminist critique in postcolonial spaces from being disqualified or sacrificed at the altar of anti-imperialism. The task of double critique is made even more difficult by the fact that the condemnation of one line of domination is often co-opted in the service of the other. As Nakita Dhawan puts it, 'How can we pursue gender and sexual justice in this overdetermined discursive terrain? How can we resist being trophies either for the liberal secularist or for theocratic powers?' (2013: 195).

To explore the relationship between postsecular feminist scholarship and the double bind, I analyze a series of recent contributions from scholars at the forefront of this literature, and particularly by Lila Abu-Lughod and Saba Mahmood. I do not do this because I see these works as bad or easy straw men. Quite the contrary. It is precisely because these works represent the best scholarship in the field that I find them especially appropriate for illustrating the significant and yet unexplored political consequences resulting from particular analytic trends. Instead of trying to infer these scholars' intentions regarding the challenges raised above, I focus on the discursive work their analyses perform on the double bind, as well as the implications for scholars and activists who wish to negotiate and escape this bind. How do particular characterizations, modes of argumentation, omissions, and framings work to discursively normalize a paradigm of legitimate or illegitimate positions on the issue of gendered violence in Muslim contexts? What articulations of agency, history, power and complicity do these authors mobilize in their analysis and what political formulations do these heuristics obscure as well as make possible? How does the overall political, institutional, and social context in which critical feminists write affect their analytic priorities as well as scholarly practices?

I argue that much of postsecular feminist scholarship operates within the frame of what Gayatri Spivak recently referred to as the 'cliché' of anti-imperialism (Spivak, 2013), or the privileging of a critique of western imperialism above all else and at all costs. By privileging a critique of western imperialism in discussions of violence against women in Muslim contexts, this work: 1) reduces or flattens a complete understanding of social relations in Muslim contexts, 2) dismisses and belittles activists

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working in the Muslim world struggling to end violence against women, and 3) is grounded in a Euro/American experience of Islamophobia post-9/11 that is projected in an ahistorical and politically counterproductive way onto local Muslim and Arab communities. The cumulative result is what I call 'a teleology of an anti-imperialism' that presents women's rights activism not just as *complicit* in imperialism and Islamophobia but as *foundationally* or *inescapably* imperialist and Islamophobic. This tightens the double bind between Islamophobia and gender injustice by precluding the possibility of anti-imperialist feminism.

What is at stake in this debate is not simply the future of Muslim women's studies, but the ethos of responsible critique and its relationship to the double bind itself, a conundrum that reaches far beyond the narrow scholarly terrain of postsecular feminism. At the core of the double bind, according to Spivak, is 'liv[ing] with contradictory instructions', the paradox wherein dismantling structures of power often involves inversing, not displacing, exclusions, and thus repeating the very same mechanism of violence one purportedly critiques (2013: 3). Dipesh Chakrabarty spoke of it when he warned against decolonization turning into 'postcolonial revenge' (2009: 4). Foucault (1984) lamented it when he eschewed the 'intellectual blackmail of being for or against the Enlightenment'. While Muslim women's studies has come to occupy a particularly oppressive manifestation of the double bind due to historically contingent events and conditions, decades from now the locus of contention might lie in different scholarly terrains. Thus the lesson to be learned does not concern the substance of the debate as much as the conditions, attitudes and methodologies that inform it.

Specifically, the double bind presents formidable challenges to the exercise of responsible critique. If the task of the critic is to open the imagination, creating the analytic space to 'allow thinking to proceed in unaccustomed ways' (Mahmood, 2008c), the double bind can tempt us into using critique as a weapon, reproducing violence by privileging an interrogation of one line of domination at the expense of others. By reducing critique to accusation, this mode of engagement results in the preclusion of analytic and political possibilities, disqualifying or rendering illegitimate parallel critiques of power. Thus the double bind calls our attention to critique's uneasy accommodation of political preferences, even as the critic subscribes to a clear distinction between analytic and political modes of engagement in order to 'suspend the closure necessary to political action' (Mahmood, 2008c). In other words, critique is quite capable of making its own foreclosures. The relationship between academic postsecular feminism and gender politics in Muslim contexts is a case in point, illustrating the kinds of exclusions that critique – feminist, postcolonial or otherwise – can authorize when engaging the double bind in this fashion. After demonstrating these foreclosures, I return in the

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conclusion to these larger intellectual stakes, asking: How does a responsible critique work towards the 'productive undoing' of the double bind?

The (Western) Seduction of the Honor Crime

Abu-Lughod and Mikdashi's critique of DAM repeated many of the arguments made in Abu-Lughod's 2011 article 'Seductions of the "Honor Crime"'. In this paper, Abu-Lughod traces the construction and propagation of the category 'honor crime' – perhaps the archetypical example of 'violence against Muslim women' in both popular debates as well as scholarship (Koğacıoğlu, 2004). Drawing on ethnography from one Egyptian Bedouin community in which honor is a key moral value, as well as a critical analysis of representations of the honor crime in popular literature, human rights reports, and scholarship, Abu-Lughod argues that the 'seductive power of the honor crime' has

> enabled it to emerge as a robust category implicated in projects that include the policing and exclusions of immigrants; nation-states' disciplinary penetration of rural and urban subaltern communities; dominance by specific national, ethnic, or class groups; manipulation of liberal values in the service of assertions of Western superiority; and justifications of international intervention and transnational governance in the name of women's rights, including by feminists. (2011: abstract)

Because of its political function as a tool to bolster a number of undesirable western ambitions, Abu-Lughod concludes that 'the honor crime may have exhausted its usefulness' (2011: 53). But while Abu-Lughod goes on to powerfully critique the category 'honor crime' – laying bare some of the fields of power that both produce the category and result from it – it is clear that she does not wish to minimize or whitewash violence. 'My intention in challenging the usefulness and accuracy of the category is not to defend or excuse the violence it tries to name', she writes, 'nor is it to undermine the value of much of reparative work carried out in its name' (2011: 51).

The question, again, is not what Abu-Lughod intends to do but what her analysis actually does – how it frames, packages, and presents the social and political history of the honor crime – regardless of her stated intentions. I argue that despite Abu-Lughod's consistent calls for attention to political and historical context, her story is surprisingly ahistorical, and betrays profound omissions that strongly bias the reader's understanding of the political and social history of the honor crime. Nowhere in Abu-Lughod's analysis is an acknowledgment of actual honor crimes, the patriarchy that sustains them, or indigenous resistance

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to said patriarchy. Crucially, such omissions are symptomatic of a deeper analytic strategy: the privileging of a critique against western imperialism at the expense of a basic understanding of this particular form of violence against women, its history, and its politics.

For instance, take Abu-Lughod's stance on whether honor killings – that is, the act the phrase describes – actually exist as a distinct form of violence. The answer is not at all clear. On one hand, Abu-Lughod concludes that her analysis

> is not to imply that the honor crime is a figment of the imagination. *The specifics are important*, and as an anthropologist I insist that we must go deeply into different systems of gender, power, and morality if we want to understand interpersonal violence: how it is provoked, understood, experienced, and regulated. (2011: 51, emphasis mine)

On the other hand, not once is a bona fide honor crime ever presented, discussed, or hinted at in the entirety of the 47-page essay. The examples that are mentioned turn out to be frauds, cover-ups or mislabels. These conjoint moves – acknowledging the realness of honor crimes while simultaneously avoiding all mention of them – provide the bases for the rest of the essay to unfold in the mode of insinuation rather than argument; that is, it suggests to the reader that the honor crime is a fiction invented in the mind of western feminists and popular writers while avoiding the empirical responsibility of proving so.

Abu-Lughod undoubtedly acknowledges the existence of something called 'honor' that is practiced among the Awlad 'Ali Bedouin, and proceeds to embark on an ethnography of the women in this community in order to trouble and correct the conceptualization of honor circulated in western advocacy. After lambasting mainstream definitions of honor crimes for 'ignoring agency', Abu-Lughod pays special attention to the agency present in these subjects:

> The young women of Awlad 'Ali spoke about themselves as persons who knew right from wrong. They defended themselves not by saying they had the right to do whatever they wanted but by asserting their own modesty and morality, even if they did like bobby pins or nail polish. (2011: 2)

The description of the Awlad 'Ali community is thus meant to complicate the 'easy association between love, sex, freedom and individual rights' (Abu-Lughod, 2011: 33) that so often underlies western media portrayals of honor killing. This is a worthy (and needed) task indeed. But considering that this essay concerns honor *crimes*, it would be reasonable to ask: *Do honor crimes happen here?*

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Unfortunately, we cannot answer this question definitively because punishment and coercion are entirely absent from the Awlad 'Ali community, at least in Abu-Lughod's presentation. Ironically, as soon as Abu-Lughod dismisses mainstream usage of the term 'honor killing' for ignoring *agency*, she embarks on a discussion of agency while completely ignoring *honor killing*:

> In the community in which I lived, girls were full members of households, families, and communities, appreciated for their personalities, scolded for their mistakes, valued for their everyday participation, counted among those who make up one's world, and loved as individuals and family members. Mothers and fathers worried about them and for them; most wanted to arrange good marriages for them so they would find happiness and comfort. (2011: 22)

Serious scholars and activists who admonish honor killing are not arguing that young women have the right to do whatever they want, that morality is always a bad thing, or that parents should never scold their children. They are saying parents should not *murder* their children. I do not deny the fact that western media proliferate dehumanizing tropes around honor killings in order to reproduce orientalist, racist, and xenophobic discourses. The question is whether the honor crime should be categorically dismissed as a valid scholarly enterprise or political concern (as Abu-Lughod repeatedly suggests it should) as soon as people attach it to projects we don't like, even if they don't make the same arguments we make, even if there are good reasons to keep it.

That question is obscured, however, because the essay contains no serious consideration of why an activist would insist that the category 'honor crime' is necessary for her work despite the problems the category entails. While Abu-Lughod acknowledges that '[n]aming and criminalizing forms of violence *may* have positive effects in particular communities' (2011: 18, emphasis mine), she never offers us an example in which doing so actually *produces* positive effects. Throughout the essay, acknowledging the distinctiveness of the honor crime never constitutes a legitimate enterprise, while it is relentlessly sutured to a number of illegitimate projects such as imperialism, Islamophobia and western superiority.

This oversight may be due to the paper's temporal scope. Abu-Lughod's analysis is limited to the last decade and a half, when the 'sudden prominence' of the honor crime, facilitated by rights activists, popular writers, and scholars, began to trouble her (Abu-Lughod, 2011: 19). One must ask: prominent for whom? Eurocentrism is no less attractive, even when dressed in critical garb. By beginning her study in the late 1990s, Abu-Lughod severely truncates the history of this term, limiting her consideration to the honor crime standing as a trope for international

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feminists, western media, and human rights regimes to condemn the violence it describes. Ignored is the honor crime standing as a trope for conservative actors who wish to *defend* the violence it describes (Hossain and Welchman, 2005).

As a brief summary: 'Honor crime' was a legal category that renders a lighter sentence than murder, and these laws are still on the books in a number of places. In Palestine and Jordan, legal codes assure that crimes against women carry lesser penalties if a man can prove that he committed violence (even murder) against a female relative after catching her engaged in an illicit act (Hossain and Welchman, 2005). Legal historians agree that these laws were derived from western colonial practices and share genealogical roots with 'crimes of passion' defenses in western nations (Fournier et al., 2012). It is such laws – and their support by conservative forces – that incited a rich movement of indigenous women's rights activism calling for their eradication (Hossain and Welchman, 2005). If the goal is to understand the social and political history of the honor crime, one must account for this other honor crime – that is, the one circulated, defended, and institutionalized among conservative actors. Even if Abu-Lughod is only interested in feminist involvement and advocacy, it still behooves her to appreciate the honor crime's long conservative history, given that a great deal of honor crime activism has been *in response* to this history.

And yet these laws, and this activism, are only alluded to in Abu-Lughod's story. The legal double standard at the root of the honor crime is mentioned once in the paper, while the derivation of these laws from the Napoleonic Code, Ottoman Law and British Common Law – a crucial era in the lifespan of the honor crime – was allocated a sentence. Local resistance is taken even less seriously; there is no discussion of any indigenous, pre-Amnesty International effort to reform penal codes or eradicate honor crimes in non-western contexts. In her endnotes Abu-Lughod cites an interview with a journalist and leader in this movement, Rana Husseini; but in the text, mentions of Husseini are limited to her contribution to the 'monstrous' category of the honor crime (2011: 24), her involvement with Norma Khouri's faux honor killing 'memoir' (2011: 29, 37), and her collusion with the 'modern infrastructures' that 'perpetuate such practices' (2011: 40). The reader never hears what Husseini has done independent of western involvement or evaluation (i.e. report on honor crimes in Jordan and the laws that sustain them) or what prompted her to do it (i.e. a concern over internal patriarchy).

Some may argue that these shortcomings are simply causalities of academic journal word limits; no scholar can include everything in a single paper. But as Mahmood and Hirschkind explain with their critique of the Feminist Majority: 'The point is not on the inadequacies and omissions … but the assumptions and attitudes that made these omissions

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possible' (Hirschkind and Mahmood, 2002). The analytic moves and omissions I point to above are symptomatic of a deeper rhetorical strategy: to disguise a critique of western imperialism in what is ostensibly a discussion of a particular form of violence against women. Insofar as Abu-Lughod's essay is about the myriad 'fields of power' that produce the honor crime, this rhetorical strategy constitutes a serious analytic problem because it ahistorically obscures any power that is not emanating from the West.

The result is less an objective analysis of the social and political history of the honor crime than it is an enumeration of all the ways in which the honor crime bolsters, colludes, or is instrumentalized by Islamophobia and imperialism. In this way, the honor crime is reduced to the honor crime *as it is perceived by the West*; western engagement with the honor crime wholly determines its history, politics, and normative value in all contexts. Ironically, although she chastises other scholars for letting 'unremitting moral judgment' interfere with their anthropological understanding (2011: 25), Abu-Lughod is exercising the same moral judgment by explicitly 'challenging the usefulness and accuracy of the category' and making the case for its eradication based on this limited set of normative concerns (2011: 51). That is, by critiquing the honor crime, she is engaging in a political, not just analytic, project. Thus the political implications of her argument warrant further scrutiny.

The Complicity Agenda

If those who go untroubled by honor crimes (e.g. the Awlad 'Ali women) are notable for their agency, those who condemn honor crimes are characterized less by their agency and more by their *agendas*. Even as Abu-Lughod insists that her work does not 'undermine the value of the reparative work carried out in its name' (2011: 51), she presents those who condemn, discuss, or fight against honor crimes in consistently undermining ways: as 'Westernized elites' (2011: 18); as second-rate scholars whose 'visceral stance toward immigrants has swayed [their] anthropological understanding' (2011: 25); as 'mostly white, Western academics' who 'collectively contemplate what might be done to save the Muslim woman and to keep the "dangerous" Muslim man in line' (Razack, 2008: 146, quoted in Abu-Lughod, 2011: 26); as frauds, emotionally troubled persons, and compulsive liars (2011: 29); as propagators of hoaxes for their own monetary benefit (2011: 30); and as faux-scientists (2011: 38). As far as non-westerners are concerned, those who condemn honor killing in their own communities do so, according to Abu-Lughod, not because they, too, have agency but because it 'provides a badge of distinction for them, asserting that modernity and the liberalism that it has come to signify are achievable even in "the East" and marking them as carriers of these ideals' (2011: 35). They are presented as 'elites in Muslim communities' who condemn honor

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killings in order to 'distinguish themselves from their local "backwards" compatriots and hence gain new opportunities' (Abu-Lughod, 2011: 36).

One thing yokes these actors together: they are 'complicit in other serious forms and institutions of harm' (Abu-Lughod, 2011: 53) – imperialism, Islamophobia, racism, empire. Here Abu-Lughod replicates the arguments of other scholars in marking 'complicity' as the defining agenda of those concerned with gender inequality or sexual oppression in Muslim contexts. In the post-9/11 context, western feminists and popular Muslim 'native informers' were the first targets; Ayaan Hirsi Ali's memoirs, Laura Bush's plea to save Afghan women, and the Feminist Majority's campaign against the Taliban were cited again and again as proof of this agenda (Bhattacharyya, 2008; Cloud, 2004; Dabashi, 2006; Hirschkind and Mahmood, 2002; Abu-Lughod, 2002; Maira, 2009; Russo, 2006). Saba Mahmood then denounced the 'feminist contributions to the vilification of Islam' that had become 'the bedrock of neoconservative politics' (2008a: 90). What we are seeing, she argued, is not just an instance of 'discourses of feminism and democracy being hijacked to serve the imperial project' but rather evidence of 'feminists' complicity in this project' (Mahmood, 2008a: 82). The complicity critique then moved to queer activists and scholarship (Puar, 2007), the 'Gay International' (Massad, 2002), and devout Muslim reformers who are outspoken in their opposition to American imperialism (Mahmood, 2006). Even Edward Said has been accused of complicity (Anidjar, 2006); as Bruce Robbins characterizes the argument, 'Said's espousal of secularism means he is not, after all, a critic of the West, but one of its most insidious propagandists' (2013a: 255).

What is 'complicity'? This is not a rhetorical question but an honest plea. And by complicity I am also referring to its plethora of synonyms and associated prepositional phrases – alibi for racism, sponsor to imperialism, grammar of liberalism, handmaiden of empire, compatible with, useful for, facilitator of, convergence to, etc. Considering the centrality of this hook in critical feminist scholarship – not to mention the damage it's done to reputations of activists around the globe (deserved or not) – it would behoove us to understand what it actually means; that is, what mechanism it denotes. Unfortunately the term 'complicity' is more often used as an epithet than a sharp critical tool. In privileging a critique of western imperialism in discussions of power, and by relying on a poorly defined, pejorative 'complicity' framework, this work is unjustifiably dismissive and belittling to activists working in the Muslim world, struggling against perpetrators and defenders of violence against women.

Abu-Lughod and the Western Elite Muslim Women's Rights Defender

The charge of complicity seems appropriate when applied to figures such as Laura Bush and Ayaan Hirsi Ali; here, complicity connotes, simply,

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endorsement. These individuals explicitly endorsed the War on Terror on feminist grounds and faced well-deserved scrutiny by critical scholars for propagating the falsehood that patriarchy in Muslim communities is especially potent, intractable, or dangerous. But when the critique moves from Ayaan Hirsi Ali onto anti-war feminist activists living and working in Muslim majority countries, we can no longer reckon that complicity denotes explicit endorsement. These latter individuals and groups are not being paid by the RAND Corporation, nor do they write on the humanitarian merits of the War on Terror. For some critics, these divergences are irrelevant. Saadia Toor, for instance, argues of the 'new feminist front':

> The fact is that there are many underlying similarities between their discourse (and policy prescriptions) and that of the anti-Muslim right wing in the West – in which I am including neoconservatives, the religious right, as well as white supremacists and nativists. (Toor, 2012: 150)

Here, the complicity of anti-war feminists is equivalent to the complicity of white supremacists, regardless of the differences between the two sets of actors in terms of goals, justifications, location, strategy, discourse, alliances, policy recommendations, etc. In this world, that a duplicitous concern for Muslim women was used to justify the War on Terror means *any* concern with patriarchy in Muslim contexts, especially within Islamist movements, is coterminous with supporting US militarism, imperialism, Islamophobia, and bigotry.

For more thoughtful scholars such as Abu-Lughod, the differences between anti-war feminists working in Muslim contexts and the type of colonial feminists represented by Ayaan Hirsi Ali are acknowledged and considered significant, and yet 'complicity' may still be at work. While Abu-Lughod never defines what she means by 'complicity', her usage is more akin to discursive reiteration, or the unwitting consolidation of subjectivities and assumptions underlying hegemonic operations. But when we look closer at the ways in which Muslim feminists are presented, we see that 'complicity' still has less to do with the nature of hegemony than with the personal character of its targets. In other words, while Abu-Lughod insists that her critique does not mean to discredit its targets, the accusation regularly implies a kind of personal moral failure, to allow oneself to be duped, conned, or manipulated in the project of empire when one ought to know better. In all cases, 'complicity' serves as a tool for discretization, painting the subject as culpably ignorant, and outweighs all other concerns – especially local concerns about gender inequality – in the critic's ethical calculus.

Oftentimes Muslim feminists are dismissed simply as hapless fools, seduced into the service of western imperialism, pawns who betray

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their own kin in favor of white/liberal prestige or material opportunism. Notably, what determines the behavior of these women is not agency but something similar to false consciousness. For instance, Abu-Lughod writes of the network Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML):

> The ironic contribution of feminists from the Muslim world who are absolutely vigilant about the politics of racism and the dangers of civilizational discourse is to have let their fears of Islamic 'fundamentalism' lead them to adopt uncritically the timeless category of the honor crime, conflating a bewildering range of practices. (2011: 49)

While no organization is above critique, a richer discussion would avoid belittling women's experiences with religious extremism by putting 'fundamentalism' in scare quotes, or dismissing as 'uncritical' the testimonials and analyses of a tremendous number of feminists working in the Global South who have been documenting fundamentalism for decades. To reduce a critique of fundamentalism to some kind of orientalist impulse, driven solely by a hysterical reaction to an imperialist boogey man, is both inaccurate and condescending. And when this assumption goes untroubled by dialectical engagements – WLUML was never consulted before Abu-Lughod concluded they were 'uncritical' – it is also analytically short-sighted. How can scholars lambast western feminists for ignoring Muslim women's voices while simultaneously dismissing those same testimonials as uncritical or inauthentic when they present truths that are inconvenient for our own political imperatives? Doing so perpetuates the western evaluation of Islam based on the opposition between 'good' and 'bad' Muslims, even if 'bad' now stands for 'liberal'.

Some would argue that such activists lack the requisite authenticity to identify or speak 'as Muslim women' because their subject position is essentially no different from western-based scholars. Toor laments that 'detractors' (such as herself) 'with similar ethnic and national backgrounds (and therefore equal or competing levels of "authenticity") are dismissed as "diaspora intellectuals"' (2012: 151). Stunningly, Toor appears blind to the concept of diasporic privilege. Actually *living* in Islamist regimes affords these women no special access to knowledge or valuable insight; the fact that they have such experience just implicates them deeper as native informants. In other words, the complicity critique goes untroubled by the fact that these activists have to actually *live* with the laws in question, unlike 'diaspora intellectuals' who enjoy the luxury of just writing about them.

Most often Muslim feminists are simply denounced as 'western' or 'westernized', which denotes other adjectives – fake, corrupted, illegitimate – while standing in opposition to the authentic, pure, true, real, genuine, original. Marking certain practices and subjects as 'western' in order to delegitimize them has a long tradition in native patriarchies (Dhawan,

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2013: 212). In critical literature, 'western' operates in a similar fashion – tautologically and selectively. Liberal views are dismissed as inauthentic on the grounds that the holder of those views is too western to be taken seriously; and an individual is considered western if and only if she holds liberal views. Individuals who do not hold liberal views are rarely called 'western', even if they, too, are embedded in transnational networks, have lived or been educated in the West, or have received money from western governments. Throughout, 'western' is used primarily to consolidate a hypothetical class of 'authentic' Muslims for whom secular liberalism is unwanted, and legitimize an associated politics of 'Islamism' as better suited to this authentic, indigenous class (Mufti, 2013).

As an illustration, consider how Abu-Lughod describes the Jordanian engineer who started the website *There Is No Honor in Honor Killing,* which she critiques as an example of an honor crime initiative that effects modern/nonmodern distinctions (read: civilizational, bad). Because Mohammad Al-Azraq had never actually been to the West nor received western funding, Abu-Lughod had to formulate the accusation that he is 'western' using a more subliminal strategy. She did this by using choice *western-sounding* words in describing Al-Azraq's 'political alignments' (2011: 35–6, all emphases mine): 'Al-Azraq answered the call of a *Swiss-educated* Bahraini friend to take on the issue' of honor killing. His gender egalitarian views 'must be put in the context of the wider *liberal* politics of … *cosmopolitan* youth of the region'. His parent site, Mideast Youth, had won '*international* awards for cyberactivism'. Eventually Al-Azraq left the site because 'he got busy organizing dialogues between Jordanians and *Danes*, trying to convince the *U.S. Embassy* to sponsor a similar Jordanian-*American* youth dialogue project, and working with *American* college students interested in international relations and the Middle East'. The immediate conclusion to this medley of seemingly innocuous tidbits? 'The honor crime seems to function as a comforting phantasm *that empowers the West and those who identify with it* … it encourages self-righteous commitment to change those backward or dysfunctional cultures'. These days it is disturbingly easy to be dismissed as western.

A close relative to 'western' is 'elite', which operates in a similar fashion in its opposition to/construction of the 'authentic' but with the additional liability of economic or political interestedness. Abu-Lughod regularly relies on an elite/non-elite dichotomy in order to cast suspicion on those who display concern over honor crimes. '[E]ven within many Muslim majority countries', she writes, 'Westernized elites condemn honor crimes *to stigmatize the lives of ordinary people*, blaming violence against women on their backwardness and ignorance' (2011: 18, emphasis mine). The possibility that non-elites are concerned about honor crimes, or that elites are motivated from genuine concern or personal experience, goes unacknowledged.

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'Complicit' is used to describe a great many subjects, identities, and practices in Abu-Lughod's analysis. But it is also worth noting who avoids the charge of complicity. Specifically, those who conform to dominant Islamist or traditional moral structures, even as they play these structures to their own advantage, are never accused of being complicit in the normative coercion and violence these movements enact. Rather, the personal benefits they receive are framed as an exercise in creative agency:

> Moral discourses of compassion, mercy, peace, respect, and love between husbands and wives are everywhere in Islamic media. But at the very same time, assertions of independence from family and new public roles for women have gained tremendous legitimacy through these trends toward piety. Many attribute women's embrace of the hijab as, partly, a public assertion of morality, not just religiosity, for women massively present in schools, the workforce, and public space. (Abu-Lughod, 2011: 50)

Islamism, unlike liberal feminism, is to be heralded for its unintended consequences. Therein lies the double standard at the heart of Abu-Lughod's analyses, in which those who creatively use liberalism are complicit, whereas those who creatively use religious or traditional morality are agentic. In the latter case, the normative structure of Islamism is unproblematically accepted when agency of this kind is cast as the hero of the emancipation narrative. As Sadia Abbas puts it, 'agency, in this context, becomes the name of that which is exceptional, which exists in the crevices and interstices of the law. It is the law, which is always already (and apparently forever) given' (2013: 176).

Ironically, there is a longstanding and rich debate among Third World feminists concerning complicity and religious discourses (Moghadam, 2002). But for Abu-Lughod, complicity is unintelligible when it comes to Islamism, because, as she presents it, this moral discourse involves only nice things ('compassion, mercy, peace, respect and love'), and exists unpolluted by any kind of coercive violence, inequality, or conflict. The normative violence entailed in such discourses is secured from critique, as anyone who attempts to do so is admonished for 'describing women not as moral agents but as property, objects, or body parts controlled by men', thus 'trivializ[ing] and simplify[ing] systems of morality' (Abu-Lughod, 2011: 19). When Muslim women are prohibited from being victims, the very act of describing sexism in Muslim societies – at least that which is internally derived and not reducible to drones or western imperialism – is equated with the theoretically discredited rhetoric of female passivity and the politically discredited zeal of interventionist wars. It is itself complicit.

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Saba Mahmood and the Shield of Dispassionate Analysis

The most sophisticated form of the complicity critique identifies its object not in 'motivations and intentions [of certain actors] but in the *discursive assumptions* (about knowledge, history, language) that underpin their methods and programs of reform', thereby eschewing accusations of elitism or westernization (Mahmood, 2008c, emphasis mine). Perhaps the most theoretically rigorous of these critiques is found in Saba Mahmood's analysis of secular hermeneutics, or the underlying thread that connects devout Muslim reformers and American imperial ambitions. The object of analysis here is not explicit political endorsements or shared interests but the *secularity* of various actors; that is, the secular genealogy of textual hermeneutics (Mahmood, 2006: 337). This is how Mahmood defends against the charge that she presents reformers as pawns of an imperial master, reducing their arguments to an 'echo of the enemy think tank': 'Do we have to prescribe to a full fledged theory of shared interests and motivations to be able to see the common set of discursive presuppositions that cut across political projects? Could one be politically opposed and still share a set of epistemological and conceptual truths? Could one analyze this convergence *critically* without being accused of "belittling" the heroes of our stories?' (2008c).

These are leading questions, and the correct answers are obvious. But the more interesting questions for me are not rhetorical but empirical: Is *Mahmood* able to analyze the common set of discursive presuppositions that cut across political projects without resorting to an implication about shared interests and motivations? Does *Mahmood* analyze this convergence critically without belittling the heroes of our stories? When we look closely at these questions, we see the extent to which an argument about shared epistemological assumptions can be subliminally laden with particular political imperatives and normative evaluations, even as those imperatives and evaluations are disavowed when directly challenged.

To see this, consider the precise way in which Mahmood presents the relationship between Muslim reformers and US imperial interests. The article opens with 'Since the events of September 11, 2001 . . .', a common opening hook that not only baits the anti-imperialist reader but also serves to justify the inquiry that follows by referring to a commonly-accepted political imperative, i.e. the need to undermine post-9/11 US foreign policy. Likewise, Mahmood introduces her main object of analysis – secularity – by tying it directly to US imperial interests:

> Over the last two years, in addition to its military 'war against terror,' the United States has embarked upon an ambitious theological campaign aimed at shaping the sensibilities of ordinary Muslims whom the State Department deems to be too dangerously inclined toward fundamentalist interpretations of Islam. (2006: 329)

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Mahmood immediately sets the stage for normative evaluation by centering the analysis around what is perhaps the most universally despised enemy among *Public Culture* readers: post-9/11 US imperialism.

Once the reader is sufficiently primed in the anti-imperial mindset, expecting to hear about the 'ideological arm of an otherwise military campaign to subdue and discipline the vast population of Muslims' (Mahmood, 2006: 329), the secular Muslim reformer is introduced: 'In this elaborate undertaking, the U.S. government has found *an indigenous ally* in the form of moderate or liberal Muslims who, in the opinion of State Department planners, are most open to a "Western vision of civilization, political order, and society"' (Mahmood, 2006: 329, emphasis mine). And although Mahmood notes that many reformers oppose the US military occupation in Iraq, she still refers to 'their *recruitment* into the U.S. imperial agenda' by virtue of their common 'interpretative' framework: 'In this understanding, the U.S. strategists have struck *a common chord* with self-identified secular liberal Muslim reformers who have been trying to refashion Islam along the lines of the Protestant Reformation' (2006: 329, emphasis mine).

The 'common chord' Mahmood identifies is *secular hermeneutics*: a practice of textual interpretation that distinguishes 'secular' Muslims (including quite religious ones such as Nasr Abu Zayd and Abdolkarim Soroush) and 'traditional' Muslims. Crucially, secular hermeneutics constitute a space not only of *epistemological overlap* between Muslim reformers and US imperial interests but of *political overlap:*

> In analyzing the programs and strategies of State Department planners, I have suggested that they have located a *powerful partner* in secular liberal Muslim reformers who *agree* with them in their diagnosis that the central problem haunting Muslim societies lies in their inability to achieve critical distance between the divine text and the world, and a concomitant overvaluation of received authority. (Mahmood, 2006: 344, emphasis mine)

How can one describe a group of people as an 'indigenous ally' in the 'ideological arm of an otherwise military campaign to subdue and discipline the vast population of Muslims' and still maintain that one is not belittling? How can one claim that particular individuals 'agree' with State Department planners and still disavow normative evaluation? Is the casual mention that some of these reformers may be opposed to US occupation of Iraq sufficient for an honest analysis of these reformers' political alignments?

Mahmood may be justified in pointing to shared epistemological assumptions between two movements; but identifying epistemological commonalities, even common origins, is not enough to explain

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convergence in political meaning. Bruce Robbins' critique of Talal Asad can be applied to Mahmood's argument as well:

> The Foucauldian genealogist is supposedly someone who realizes that meanings are not 'intrinsic,' not determined by origins, and who therefore pays special attention to discontinuities. Asad says he is practicing genealogy, but he is not. When he looks at the present, all he finds is origins. He is not a genealogist but a myth-maker. (Robbins, 2013b: 70)

Without explicating the mechanism by which common epistemological assumptions generate political meanings, arguments such as these amount to little more than guilt by association. This is especially true when the 'heroes of our stories' are yoked together with a shared diabolical enemy – e.g. the RAND Corporation – discrediting the former by their association with the latter. Indeed, it may be worthwhile to explore common epistemological assumptions between RAND and Muslim reformers, despite their political differences. But perhaps it would be more worthwhile to explore how they reach divergent politics *despite* their common epistemological assumptions.

While critiquing the modes of complicity deployed by Mahmood and Abu-Lughod, I want to be unequivocal: We must absolutely take feminists – Muslim or not – to task for ideologically producing a narrow, reified, stagnant and irredeemably misogynist 'Islam'. But, unfortunately, what is intended as a plea to nuance too often gets swung around as a blunt instrument. The subliminal normativity operating under the term 'complicity' is especially problematic given the fact that scholars who deploy this kind of critique rarely admit to making a normative critique, but rather maintain that their project is strictly analytic or empirical (Mahmood, 2008c). Insofar as the complicity critique is an accusation disguised as a hypothesis, it gaslights the accused, retreating back to principle in the face of empirical challenge, while at the same time rejecting normative concerns as misplaced in the face of purely analytic propositions that are neutral to ethical or substantive commitments. The *question* over whether and how liberal and/or secular feminism bolsters Islamophobia or imperialism, a valid and important empirical inquiry, has morphed into an unquestioned *principle* akin to a new common sense: liberal and/or secular feminism is irredeemably Islamophobic and imperialist.

False Promises and the Teleology of Anti-Imperialism

There is a kind of subtle orientalism to be found in analyses I discuss above, in which western scholars attempt to adjudicate internal debates between Muslims based on their own political imperatives. Throughout, Islam

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seems to exist only to reveal the inadequacies of secular liberal assumptions. For instance, even as she insists on an analytic/political distinction, Mahmood's analytic projects are explicitly motivated by political concerns – ones that many western-based scholars, including myself, tend to share. We ought to critically investigate secular hermeneutics, she writes, because its constituent subjects might 'necessarily be sympathetic to the geopolitical ambitions of the United States government' and 'we know that the unabashedly imperial goal of the United States to secure its domination in Muslim lands is morally flawed' (Mahmood, 2006). To borrow the language of Sadia Abbas, 'the lives of Muslims are there to help make an ironic point about the West' (2013: 163). In a mode that Aamir Mufti calls 'ethnographic philanthropy', anti-woman politics gets rationalized along the way and, according to Sindre Bangstad, 'reduc[es] ethnographies of actual Muslim women's lives to the function of templates for ideologically motivated critiques from either side of the political spectrum' (2011: 41). Ironically, the imperial ghost of the savior fantasy hasn't gone away as much as it has morphed from 'saving brown women from brown men' to 'defending Muslim women from universal, rights-based values, laws or freedoms' (Shehrbano Zia, 2013).

What political consequences result from such a framework? In this section, I argue that the privileging of a critique against western imperialism in these discussions is an expression of a Euro/American experience of Islamophobia post-9/11 that is projected in an ahistorical and politically counterproductive way onto local Muslim political conflicts. It results in an empty promise; that is, with sufficient critical thinking and diligence, feminists can approach violence against women in Muslim contexts while remaining 'vigilant against having our analyses hijacked by others or unconsciously infiltrated by divisive values or fantasies' (Abu-Lughod, 2011). The teleology of anti-imperialism – which assumes a permanent and totalizing relationship between feminist critique and imperialism – strikes at the very *possibility* of being an anti-imperialist feminist. Many critical scholars affirm the possibility in their intent, but their actual analysis leaves no room for it. Like most empty promises, it unloads the burden of failure onto the one to whom the promise is made by diverting attention from the very impossibility of success.

To see this in action, let us revisit the exchange between Abu-Lughod, with coauthor Maya Mikdashi, and the Palestinian hip-hop activist group DAM in *Jadaliyya,* which serves as an insightful case for investigating how Abu-Lughod's original framework engenders a certain kind of activist/scholar praxis. To begin with, the video, the two argue, 'operates in a total political, legal, and historical vacuum', implying that DAM are naïve to such contexts or deliberately chose to obscure them. Supported by UN Women, the video 'faithfully follows the script of an international campaign against the so-called honor crime', suggesting that DAM were somehow duped into serving as the UN's puppet for

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its own nefarious purposes. Again there is the extremely problematic statement that the honor crime 'emerged as a potent cultural-legal category in the 1990s to become a popular international cause for feminists and progressive men', omitting the long history of the category before western feminists took it on and suggesting that these feminists made it up and somehow tricked DAM into believing it to be real. But the most dangerous aspect of the video, according to Abu-Lughod and Mikdashi, was its recruitability by imperialists. The video 'reinforces, and perhaps justifies in the eyes of many, the conviction that it is Palestinians' backwardness and lack of civilization that should be blamed for violence against women in the community' (Abu-Lughod and Mikdashi, 2012a).

For all of these problems, DAM are denounced as having 'failed here to treat women as political subjects. Women in this song are decontextualized victims of their culture, to be championed by young men with enlightened views, and by foreign intervention and international aid' (Abu-Lughod and Mikdashi, 2012a). Because they tackled honor killing, DAM fit seamlessly with neoliberal feminists and native informants, propagators of a neo-orientalist discourse working to legitimate Israeli occupation by manipulating (constructing? inventing?) the issue of violence against women in Muslim contexts. Abu-Lughod and Mikdashi contrast DAM with the 'committed Palestinian feminist activists' (read: the good activists) who are more legitimate by virtue of the fact that 'they have not isolated or elevated the "honor crime" because their priority is to develop effective interventions for women's wellbeing' (2012a). While these feminists go unnamed (and their 'effective interventions' unspecified), they are to be lauded not for the *way* in which they fight honor crimes but the fact that they do not do so whatsoever.

Abu-Lughod and Mikdashi's critique has significant implications for our previous question: Is it *possible* to publicize and challenge violence against women in Muslim contexts without being complicit in other serious forms and institutions of harm? If the critique of DAM is any indication, the answer is categorically negative. If DAM could not escape criminal complicity, even with their veritable nuance, sophistication and thoughtfulness, it appears that the promise of 'a way out' of the double bind is disingenuous. We can only conclude that Abu-Lughod and Mikdashi's problem with DAM was not that they confronted the honor crime in the wrong way, but that they confronted it at all. If this is not akin to western feminists imposing their own political priorities on the lives of Muslims living elsewhere, it is difficult to tell what is.

The asymmetrical practice of scholars critiquing activists is commonplace; in this case, however, DAM responded to the review, finding that it 'crossed a few lines'. One such line was basic intellectual honesty:

> *Tradition and the Anti-Politics Machine: DAM Seduced by the 'Honor Crime.'* The title, like the article's content, implies that

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> DAM (and Jackie and the other artists who created the song and the video) are politically and intellectually naïve. This approach is a top-heavy one and stops short of a serious engagement of our work. (Nafar et al., 2012)

DAM go on to explain why Abu-Lughod and Mikdashi's critiques were misplaced, unhelpful, or plain wrong. They flatly rejected the claim that the video operated in a political, economic or historical vacuum obscuring the Israeli occupation, arguing that such an accusation is itself indicative of a Eurocentric perspective:

> When we write songs, we do not sit and think, 'what would America or Israel think of this?' We open the window and document what we see. We document the struggles of our generation in the service of our communities. We are confident that our artistic and political work is one that engages its context. Our view is, if nothing else, a close and engaged one. … We should not have to mention the Occupation in every song to prove our political legitimacy. (Nafar et al., 2012)

This point addresses the teleology of anti-imperialism at the root of Abu-Lughod and Mikdashi's critique: that any discussion of violence against women in Muslim contexts *necessarily* downplays imperialism, occupation, and/or Islamophobia because, in orientalist discourse, violence against women has *historically* justified imperialism. The logical leap from historical trend to future necessity is the pith of teleology. Against this, we may ask: What possibilities do we foreclose when we assume, a priori, that any discussion of violence against women will necessarily downplay, justify, or bolster imperialism and Islamophobia?

DAM also rejected the implication that the video's value was overshadowed by its role in bolstering western imperialism. The fact that empire co-opts women's rights is not sufficient reason to reject women's rights; that is just what empire does:

> To claim that we were seduced by Western propaganda is a cheap shot. DAM's song was written in Arabic, for an Arab audience, followed by workshops in the same areas in which these murders occurred. We have a strategy that we are implementing. We see the risks in singing about Arab social and political issues. *Opportunistic actors can co-opt and manipulate these messages. But this is not the case for us*. DAM is addressing an Arab audience in Arabic. We can speak to our own communities without being worried about how others will abuse it. (Nafar et al., 2012, emphasis mine)

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DAM explain here what most thoughtful activists already know: one must accept due diligence for controlling how a message is interpreted while acknowledging that, once the message is released, complete control over its circulation is impossible. Scholars that rely heavily on a 'complicity' heuristic would do well to reorient their inquiry away from the question 'how is the author mobilized by others?' to '*at what point* is the author responsible for her mobilization by others?' Following Foucault, we may ask: What do we *reduce* when we fix an indefinite source of significations to the author, drawing a neat causal line between her words and their circulation, manipulation, and mobilization?

Finally, DAM affirm what Abu-Lughod and Mikdashi implicitly denied: the possibility of an ethically responsible engagement in issues of sexism while simultaneously fighting racism and imperialism:

> We are part of a new artistic movement in Palestine that is secure enough to take on occupation and domestic violence, racism and sexism. We will not shy away from engaging our society's taboos. We believe we can, and we must, tackle these issues with openness, bravery, and honesty. (Nafar et al., 2012)

It is interesting that DAM use the word 'secure' to describe the conditions on which their movement is possible. In their response to DAM's counter, titled 'Honoring Solidarity during Contentious Debates', Abu-Lughod and Mikdashi acknowledge their own insecurities writing in the West:

> Because of where we are based, and because we do research and teach about women and gender in the Arab world, and in Maya's case, are activists as well, we are especially aware of the international and Western machinery that has de-politicized women's issues. (2012b)

It is not at all surprising or unreasonable that Abu-Lughod and Mikdashi prioritize the problem of cultural reification in their analysis. I write from a very similar institutional context, one that is overwhelmed by Islamophobia, racism and neo-orientalism, all of which depend on cultural reification for their coherence. To unveil these machineries at work is a laudable task. But DAM reminded their interlocutors that what was ubiquitous in one location (e.g. a feminist critique of Muslim cultures) may be considered taboo in another, and that political priorities (e.g. Islamophobia) may not travel well across diasporic cleavages. Any critique that begins and ends with 'complicity' fails to appreciate the messy politics of local contexts, the multiple and interwoven strands of domination that affect women's lives. It is the opposite of nuance; it flattens all social and political complexities to a rubric derived from

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the western experience of Islamophobia. Crucially, we cannot allow our preferred lens of analysis to lead us into reproducing the same orientalist assumptions we wish to critique.

Concluding Thoughts: Responsible Critique

In this paper I make three challenges to scholarship that reduce discussions of 'Muslim women's rights' to a critique of anti-imperialism. First, there are analytic costs: biasing an understanding of gender and sexual politics in Muslim contexts in order to minimize, naturalize, or disavow inconvenient historical trends such as internal patriarchy. Second, there are normative costs: belittling women's rights defenders and activists who are struggling against patriarchy and anti-woman, anti-queer practices. Third, insofar as this framework rests on an analytically-unsound teleology that assumes an ahistorical and totalizing relationship between feminist critique and empire, there are political costs: foreclosing the possibility of an anti-racist, anti-imperialist feminist critique internal to Muslim societies.

I laud scholars such as Abu-Lughod and Mahmood for urging us to put our most beloved assumptions – gender equality, secular critique, the liberal subject – under critical scrutiny. But when speaking of our most beloved assumptions, we must add the framework of orientalism to that list. At what point, we must ask, does a critique of orientalism and civilizational discourse move from illuminating to totalizing? This is not to minimize the West's power over the non-West or to palliate its profound reach in a now global system of control. I am simply arguing that such a framework is not determinative or exhaustive of social relations in Muslim contexts. If scholars are genuinely interested in understanding the social and political conditions affecting people's lives in Muslim contexts, we must leave open the possibility that orientalism, civilizational thinking, and Islamophobia may lose its privileged position in our analytical toolkit. We must also be prepared to listen to those on the ground if and when they tell us that Islamophobia is not their primary concern, that 'fundamentalism' is indeed a real and important problem in their lives, or that the analytic of orientalism is tertiary to their own analyses. Just as Mahmood (2011) urged us to eschew the 'false consciousness' explanation regarding pious Muslim women, so too must we refrain from disqualifying the people I hypothetically describe above as pawns of western imperialism, unwitting native informants, or self-righteous opportunists.

Crucially, moving beyond a critique of orientalism does not entail a reversion into orientalist colonial feminism. When Einstein critiqued Newton, he did not advocate a return to Galileo. Clearly neo-orientalism discourse is still hegemonic in western media, policy circles, and some sectors of civil society. But within *critical scholarship*, the tides have

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veritably reversed. In feminist and critical theory circles today, pointing out feminisms' complicity in imperialism is no longer subversive or even significantly questioned, and has in fact risen to the level of 'common sense'. Even more worrisome, as Mounira Charrad recently pointed out, is the possibility that feminists risk being denounced as irredeemably orientalist simply for critiquing local gender practices in Muslim societies (Charrad, 2011: 431).

What this signifies is less an undoing of the double bind than its reversal and thus its reinforcement; the pendulum has simply swung the other way. What we need is a multidimensional analysis of the many lines of domination facing women in Muslim contexts, including an anti-imperialist critique of postcolonial feminist movements as well as a critique of those political formations that can escape scrutiny precisely because they present themselves as anti-imperial movements. As Nakita Dhawan put it recently, 'one without the other reinforces violent mechanisms of oppression' (Dhawan, 2013: 195). I would add that this is especially so when the dimension of domination being privileged is the one most visible or personally disconcerting to the critic, who stands in a different location and different subject position to the object of critique.

Such an approach would entail the 'productive undoing' of the double bind: displacing, not just reversing, oppositions (Spivak, 2013: 1). Crucially, if scholars are interested in engaging this 'productive undoing', we must rethink our understanding of what constitutes responsible critique. The double bind tempts us into constructing a litmus test for critique relating to its potential to be co-opted: The 'responsibility' here is 'to be vigilant against having our analyses hijacked by others or unconsciously infiltrated by divisive values or fantasies' (Abu-Lughod, 2011: 53). This standard fails on two accounts. First, it presumes an ideal of purity – as if the legacies of imperialism can somehow be circumvented – that is cast selectively on certain subjects, identities and practices for ideological purposes. Not only does this purity not exist, it is too easily mobilized towards the silencing of dissidents. Second, this ideal tends to orient legitimate critique toward the critic's preferred line of domination – that is, her own political priorities – thus deeming any other critique (of other forms of domination) as irresponsible for failing to acknowledge its complicity. The constant dredging operation works as an alibi, allowing the critic to disclaim her own responsibility, that is, to ignore the forms of complicity in which she herself is implicated. It also precludes the possibility of what Spivak calls a 'productive acknowledgment of complicity'; that is, the 'power to proceed minus the cleanest bill of health' (1999: xii). Given that empire tends to co-opt everything, this leaves us very little room to critique anything responsibly, if responsibility is based on the litmus test of recruitability. For all these reasons, the 'recruitability' ideal of responsible critique tends to foreclose possibilities and tighten the double bind.

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In order to engage in the 'productive undoing' of the double bind, I propose we shift the paradigm of responsible critique from recruitability to one based on openness. A responsible critique is one that opens the widest analytic space in which a double critique can take place, qualifies the most voices, and allows for the greatest creativity in producing new political imaginaries. This applies to both feminists in the Muslim world who prioritize the critique of religious fundamentalism as well as academic postsecular feminists who prioritize the critique of liberal secular power. For the question posed in the beginning of this paper – 'how does one critique patriarchal practices without bolstering imperialism?' – is just a version of another, albeit more rarely addressed, question: 'how do we critique postcolonial feminist movements without bolstering patriarchy?' Both are derivatives of the fundamental concern: how do we critique *responsibly*?

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