In what sense are those populations not part of the "we"? In other words, who precisely is the "we" to which Muslims and Islam are to provide the other? That such a designation must be slippery is easily evident, because in the very next paragraph it is implied that the Northern Alliance is within this pronomial ambit, suggesting furthermore that to allow the lines drawn in the war to be the parameters of what constitutes Islam only leads to a giddily perpetual and perennially opportunistic metropolitan redefinition of Islam.

An engagement with the question of American force, and the imperial remaking of the world in the interest of change and the market, might well call into question a national "we" in which Muslims are the other and a historical "we" from which Islamist groups are excluded as foes despite the centrality of so many of them to the Cold War. Such an interrogation might then lead to a broader consideration of a less pronomially divided planet, in which the relations of force are thought in terms that do not elide third world realities to privilege first world dispensations; it might also require a more sustained understanding of the intimacy of the historical relations of force that have come to shape the structures of American power and their transformative effect on "local" realities across the world, including those parts of it in which Muslims are a majority. Maybe the questions are not what do Muslims think or why and how can "we" redeem "their" humanity but rather how did the planet come to be so? And then might one ask: How did its becoming so go unnoticed by "us"?

CHAPTER TWO

The Echo Chamber of Freedom

The Muslim Woman and the Pretext of Agency

For it is against the grain of this responsibility of the national in the international that we feminist internationalists strain. I am thinking now of the worldwide group called Women Living under Islamic Law, extending all the way from North Africa to Indonesia with members from immigrant communities in the First World. These feminist internationalists must keep up their precarious position within a divided loyalty: being a woman and being in the nation, without allowing the West to save them. Their project, menaced yet alive, takes me back to my beginning. It is in their example that I look at myself as a woman, at my history of womaning. Women can be ventriloquists, but they have an immense historical potential of not being (allowed to remain) nationalists; of knowing, in their gendering, that nation and identity are commodities in the strictest sense: something made for exchange. And that they are the medium of that exchange. When we mobilize that secret ontic intimate knowledge, we lose it, but I see no other way. We have never, to quote Glas, been virgin enough to be the Other. . . . Cultures are built violently on the enforced coercion that they are. War is its most extreme signature, and, like all signatures, patriarchal. Our lesson is to act in the fractures of identities in struggle.

GAYATRI SPIVAK, "Acting Bits/Identity Talk"

WE'RE ALL INDIVIDUALS

"You're all individuals," cries Brian, the not-quite Jesus, of Monty Python's *Life of Brian*. "We're all individuals," chant the followers, who want to turn him into their leader. "I'm not," someone from within the crowd insists. "Shshhh," says someone else.[1] This could be read as a punchy but slight comic identification of a paradox, but it turns out to be part of *The Life of Brian*'s larger exploration of the theme of how a life might acquire a transcendent shape, and of what makes a prophet singular. The prophet is, after all, a figure who is chosen and who uses this status to give him a transcendent autonomy

from extant norms. The prophet is also the figure who alters those norms—one might think of Jesus in the Temple or Muhammad smashing the idols in Mecca: antinomian, iconoclastic, and yet apparently acting with transcendental authorization. *The Life of Brian*'s governing conceit, that Brian is not Jesus but could well be, folds into an unexpectedly serious meditation on individual lives and the way they get caught in the mesh of history. Like the individual who does not want to be one and thus becomes one (if only in a moment that is both joke and paradox), Brian, too, is invited over, by circumstance and by those who would impose a shape upon it, to become singular, a prophet, at the end of the film: a martyr. As he hangs upon the cross, crying out that his crucifixion is the result of a terrible case of mistaken identity, he is claimed as a martyr by one of the Judean fronts, and the followers he has not sought, but who have attached themselves to him, sing hosannas, finding transcendent meaning in his imminent death.

The Life of Brian is a reflection on human pain. Brian's proximity to Jesus, and his simultaneous exclusion from prophethood, makes his crucifixion a judgment on Providence itself. For most people, including those who would have been on the crosses next to Jesus, life is painful happenstance, mishap, and inglorious accident. The final scene has all of those on the crosses singing "always look on the bright side of life." Brian's death is not a resurrection into a happier eternity, even if the scene of torture is read by witnesses, or by those who wish to transform his suffering into martyrdom, as a theodicean promise of hope. On the film's terms, Providence is a fiction that attempts to redeem human pain and the terrible violence of history; and the very fiction enables further violence. The song's changing refrain charts the ease of that slide: from "always look on the bright side of life" to "always look on the bright side of death."

Brian cannot refuse his suffering even if he is not a prophet. Perhaps the point becomes clearer when one thinks about the implications of the thought of what Jesus's death would signify if there were no claim of resurrection underpinning the theology of the passion. There is no Providence, and yet Brian is picked for crucifixion, and the only individual in the film is the one who refuses individualism. Suffering does not produce prophets, and individualism (the very "ism" implies a norm, something external to the person) does not produce individuals. The film strikes at a cherished ancient and a favored modern narrative of redemption. What links the two narratives is the

presumption of singularity (of prophet and of modern person) underlying both of them. The film's meditation on the figure of the prophet (on that which Brian is not) is resolutely anti-Romantic, indifferent to Enlightenment reason (what shape of history, what rationale, could possibly justify this?), and yet profoundly secular: the prophet is displaced in the film not by a secular Romantic poet figure but rather by an ordinary man. The film compresses a historical allegory into a joke-paradox: the man mistaken for prophet, collectively designating a host of people individuals, who then assent in chanting unison, could well signify the modern age's slow banalization of the idea of the subject: from "true" prophet to Romantic poet- prophet to everyone is an individual. The moment refuses every historical step of this notion of the subject.

The Life of Brian showcases, in the odd abstraction of farce, central tensions in modernity and the paradoxes that come to mark the limit of the subject: Who gets to be an individual in the age of individualism? Is emancipation a necessity, and if so, how can one choose it? Indeed, how does one free oneself from freedom? These paradoxes are globally ubiquitous and consequent. In debates about religion, they have come to acquire a particular resonance, especially in the current encounter between Islamicate cultures and Muslim-majority societies and the West. Cultural works are increasingly anxious to stage their political implications. So, in a very different context, they erupt into the fury of the lead Islamist in *Snow*, Orhan Pamuk's political novel about the battles surrounding religion in contemporary Turkey. In the novel, Blue, the charismatic Islamist, cries, "There's a word Europhiles very commonly use when they denigrate our people: to be a true Westerner, a person must first become an individual, and then they go on to say that in Turkey, there are no individuals! Well, that's how I see my execution. I'm standing up against the Westerners as an individual; it's because I am an individual that I refuse to imitate them."[2]

Blue articulates the problem relatively explicitly: imitation of Western norms lands one in the kind of group Western individualism seems to eschew on principle. But in *Snow*, the paradoxes are most evident in the decision of young women to wear the headscarf against state law, in the character Teslime's decision to commit suicide in order to claim the right to wear it and to claim thus the right to be freed from the "emancipation" from the veil, which the Turkish state has forced upon women.[3] The Islamists in the novel are the ones

most determined to refuse the Kemalist state's Europhilic manipulation of the notion of secularism, but the male Islamists are also happy to manipulate the women's choice to wear the veil.

The historical situation to which *Snow* speaks so well is one in which the Turkish state has cast itself as Westward- looking in its project of brutal top-down and statist secularization. This has in turn helped coalesce a pan-Islamist reaction to secularism, freedom, and individualism and their ostensibly inherent connection with Western modernity. Of course, the discourse of individualism has always been entangled with the rhetoric of emancipation and freedom; and in the wake of September 11, 2001, it is virtually impossible to hear the word "freedom" without an entire colonial history, and the consequences of the encounter between Muslim societies and the West, being summoned. It is not news that the forcible imposition of a much-touted and entirely denied emancipation has frequently been an ideological justification for Western colonialism. Individualism and freedom can sometimes seem like the discursive struts upon which the entire edifice of contemporary imperialism rests. In the current encounter between the West and a range of varieties of Muslim practice and life, these notions have acquired an additional layer. They are the rhetorical sticks with which the West beats Muslims and calls into question the civilization of all Islamicate cultures; they have been pressed into service to "liberate" Muslim women, secularize Muslim culture, "save" the "Muslim world." In turn, the War on Terror has simply calcified an Islamist imaginary in which the lost power of the Ottoman Empire and betrayal by the subsequent Kemalist project loom large. If secularization and individualism have a negative face in a variety of Muslim contexts, it is because they are associated with Muslim imperial decline, Western imperial success, and Kemalist brutality.[4]

But Pamuk layers the choice to embrace conservative Islam within contemporary Turkey through differences of gender. The women's decision to veil very quickly gets manipulated by everyone. State-sponsored secularists, seeking to further consolidate their sponsorship by the state, and antistate male Islamists are both happy to use the women, and within their clash the choice to veil inhabits a precarious place. One of the young women seems to choose suicide as a kind of deliberate pride—no one can have the woman's body unless on her own terms. The explanation gets slowly more complicated through the many interpretations of those still living, but it appears that the

female suicides attempt to subvert capture by all ideological sides and, sometimes, their families by refusing the world.

Self-extinction emerges as a refusal to surrender to extinction by someone else, as a tragically ironic form of self-assertion. What *Snow* suggests is something that we increasingly see elsewhere as well: notions of the subject, individualism, freedom, agency, change, and history (in other words, the ideas that are used to mark the boundaries of the West and that generate the most sensitized aporias of modernity) have come to cluster around the figure of the Muslim woman for whom the metonym is increasingly the veil. The Muslim woman is object of imperial rescue, justification for imperial warfare, Orientalist cipher, target of jihadist violence, and, increasingly, the discursive site on which the central preoccupation of our time—how do you free yourself from freedom?—is worked out.[5]

THE WOUND AND THE VEIL

Within the academic turn to religion, and the postsecularist theoretical machinery that has led this turn, the Islamic resurgence is the most sensitized node. Muslim women are perhaps the most visible emblems of this resurgence. In classic fashion, they have come to be seen by both Muslims and non- Muslims as bearers of Muslim identity. The veil, in turn, has become metonymic of Muslim women and of Islam. The "problem" of the veiled woman in Europe and America has generated a series of theoretical responses whose fascination lies primarily in their sinuous, creative, usually more philic than phobic attempts to deal with the anxiety generated by the veil and by the Islam it is taken to signify.

When Alain Badiou turns to Saint Paul in his attempt to find a personage in history who can satisfy the requirements of the search for a "new militant figure," he interprets Paul as a "subjective figure of primary importance," someone who can bring forth the "entirely human connection between the general idea of a rupture, an overturning and that of a thought practice that is this rupture's subjective materiality."[6] Badiou's aim is, in his own words, "to refound a theory of the Subject that subordinates its existence to the aleatory dimension of the event as well as to the pure contingency of multiple being without sacrificing the theme of freedom" (*SP*, 4).

Badiou's work is part of a larger project of left self-questioning fueling the theoretical turn to religion and reveals that one impetus

for this turn is the desire to find precedents for successful change in history. The historical moment is ripe for a series of elisions. The Left's ideological crisis after 1989 is exacerbated by a paralysis in the face of the culturalist and identitarian challenge to left universalism, which, in Badiou's context, acquires a particular charge because of the confrontation between immigrants from France's former colonies and the French state.[7] The challenge to French identity—to *laïcité* and the asserted if not always honored ideal of republican universalism—posed by the counterassertion of a Muslim-identified politics in the form of the *affaire du foulard* spirals into a threat to the very possibility of a universalist politics.

Badiou's answer to these difficulties is to configure the French law banning the headscarf as a contribution to the Pétainization of the state: the law is an identitarian phenomenon that refuses the singularity of cultural difference even as it falsely universalizes its own identitarian proclivities. The "sorry affair" of the foulard reveals that the law is valid only for the French. The demand to integrate demonstrates that what is being produced is the "communitarianization of the public sphere, the renunciation of the law's transcendent neutrality" (*SP*, 9). The creeping Pétainization of the state recalls protocols that were once used to define the "Jew as the prototype of the non-French" (*SP*, 9). Within this configuration, the veiled woman is a challenge to the law. And this conceptual stretch is truly elastic: Paul's stand against the law both mirrors the situation of the veiled Muslim woman and supersedes it by offering a universal vision that absorbs difference even as it appears to preserve it. For Badiou, the Muslim woman and Paul turn out to be interchangeably antinomian, and Paul is, at the same time, a salve to the anxiety generated by the veiled woman in the European midst. Such communitarian categories as veiled Muslims must be subsumed upward into a more universal cancellation of the law, and for that Badiou's figure is Paul (*SP*, 8–9). The figure of Pétainization equates the Muslim woman with Jews in Europe, and Paul functions as the universal Jew who both represents the Jew and breaks the barrier of his identity: "How clearly Paul's statement rings out under these conditions! A genuinely stupefying statement when one knows the rules of the ancient world: 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female' (Gal. 3.28)!" (*SP*, 9). Paul is the solution to a historical, a conceptual, and a national crisis, catalyzed by the anxiety generated by the sensitized knot of culture, identity, the memory of Cold

War atrocity, and left failure, which the Islamic resurgence represents in the renewed age of empire. The happy secular use of a religious figure, such as Paul, as a solution to the culturalist problem ends up offering a diagnostic of a contemporary political anxiety.

Joan Scott's critique of the French law banning the headscarf takes her in a different direction. *The Politics of the Veil* offers a critique of French racism and links the outrage over the headscarf to a history in which the veil represents resistance to French colonialism. To the extent that Scott describes and analyzes a history of the French attitudes toward the veil, the critique is powerful enough. But Scott is not only interested in the secular French view of the veil, although this is indeed what she claims; she also has views about how Islam should be represented by those who have lived under Muslim regimes or who are Muslim themselves. An Iranian feminist is described as giving "sensationalist" accounts of life in Iran; others who support the law are said to have lived under Islamist regimes and thus to not understand the French context.[8] Significantly, their lives under Islamist regimes do not give them any access to knowledge; their experience only implicates them in a web of interest, which works to their discredit. As Scott represents the matter, in this French context, those who oppose the law and are ardent in their commitment to orthodox Islam assert their agency as they choose to wear the scarf. They get more space, their personal testimony is treated with far more respect, their experience and choice are valorized; they are the agents who get to represent Islam.

Scott is eager to minimize the possibility that there might be any coercion involved in girls younger than eighteen wearing the headscarf. Reporting on a study by François Gaspard and Farhad Khosrokhavar, she mentions the example of the "adolescents whose families demanded it as a sign of modesty, a way of controlling sexuality. This was a way of reworking tradition, a way of dealing with the chaos of urban life, and it allowed girls from orthodox families to gain access to public schools—schools, for example, or jobsites—otherwise forbidden them" (*POV*, 137). Here, when she does acknowledge coercion as a reason some young girls don the headscarf, that coercion is represented as a reworking of tradition, as a cultural therapeutic meant to mitigate the chaos of urban life, as if this somehow explains the issue away. One of the political effects of this manner of casting the matter is that when she says that honor killings are not, in fact, sanctioned by Islam, the position seems indefensible (*POV*,

66). Once coercion has been cast as a reworking of tradition, and tradition implicitly cast as Muslim in this hurriedly exculpatory way, there is no way of arguing that a practice that claims the sanction of a tradition associated with Islam is not, in fact, authorized by religion. It is hard to see how the transformation of religion into culture (implied here by tradition) can be superseded by a recourse to doctrine. As I understand it, there is no doctrinal basis for honor killings, but how is one to argue this in a discursive context such as the one provided? Which tradition, which cultural practice, gets to prevail? Whose interpretation of Islam is relevant in such a context? Who gets to decide between competing claims?

Scott acknowledges that there is, in fact, patriarchy in Muslim contexts as well. She is frequently quick to remind us, however, that this is no worse than the French case. At the level of the sentence, one can see the anxieties pervading her work in the following case from her report on Gaspard and Khosrokhavar. Another reason for the turn to the headscarf is that it is "chosen by young women as a form of self-protection, or as an expression of identity—a way they found to assert themselves in environments that endangered and discriminated against them" (*POV*, 137). The need to instantly equate self-protection with assertions of identity reveals that Scott cannot bring herself to write about what kind of danger would make the veil a form of protection on a French street. The reference to a threat from men who think women who do not veil are inviting trouble has to be quickly made equivalent with the threat of discrimination in a book that is already focused mostly on racism. Does the first kind of danger not even require a sentence of its own? Who is served by such haste?

But perhaps the most stunning moment of what ought to be called "the politics of no worse than" occurs when Scott claims that Islamic jurists who use the concept of *fitna* (the threat of female sexuality as a cause of disorder in the public sphere) have conceived a politics of recognition of the power of sexuality, unlike the French, who have a politics and culture based on the denial of the disorder brought on by female sexuality. A regressive concept in Islamic jurisprudence is rehabilitated because it is claimed to be no worse than French patriarchal norms. There is a sophisticated Orientalism here: the case of the Islamic jurist is used to show the limitations of the French case. The lives of Muslims are there to help make an ironic point about the West. I would like to borrow Achille Mbembe's language about the function of Africa in the Western imagination, not just because

it is apt, but because it helps to register the ubiquity of such moves. What Mbembe says about Africa is still apt about Islam, more than twenty-five years after the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism*: "Africa is the mediation that enables the West to accede to its own subconscious and give a public account of its subjectivity."[9] There is not much new about this practice, or even in my critique here, but what is so intriguing about the current discussion of Muslim women is how familiar it seems, even if the rhetorical garb is occasionally dusted and refreshed with some new theoretical ribbons. Perhaps *fitna* is additionally interesting to Scott because it offers a principle of sexual regulation appealing to a feminism suspicious of the manipulation of female sexuality. But if we think of the "positive" aspect of *fitna*, as conceived by Scott, we should also be able to consider its contemptuous and coercive force. Khaled Abou El Fadl, who has the honor of having been called a "stealth Islamist" by Daniel Pipes, points out that the concept of *fitna* is often at the heart of arguments that insist on the necessity of the veil and that discourses that exclude women from public life have "an obsessive reliance" on the idea.[10] El Fadl argues that it is not uncommon to find language of the following sort in classical commentaries that rely on such notions: "Since God has made men desire women, and desire looking at them, and enjoying them, women are like the devil in that they seduce men towards the commission of evil, while making evil look attractive [to men]. We deduct from this that women should not go out in the midst of men except for a necessity, and that men should not look at their cloth and should stay away from women altogether."[11]

This, then, is what a politics of the recognition of the power of sexuality can sound like. There are arguments to be made for the right of women to veil, but why filter them through a recuperation of *fitna*? El Fadl, it is worth pointing out, argues that the application of *fitna* to women emanates from a juridical tradition that is at odds with Islamic principles, early Islamic history, and the Qur'an. It is an argument that is often made. Whether one agrees with this or not, the fact remains that there are less regressive interpretations available than the ones Scott chooses to emphasize. The veil in the context El Fadl describes becomes the only thing mediating between (deserved) affront and safety. If this is a form of recognition, then what it recognizes, or perhaps more accurately *institutes*, is a notion of "uncovered" femininity as a magnet for evil, whose (inescapable) invitation is a source of disorder and must be contained.

We might say that Scott's reading of *fitna* is just an anodyne apology prompted by a panic about the fight about the veil. But, repeatedly, the very haste of Scott's apology in the book begins to smack of condescension. Does Islam really need that much help? Are arguments between Muslims simply irrelevant? Can coercive practices of subordinating women that seek Islamic authority ever be critiqued when they take place in contexts where Muslims face discrimination and where there is the backdrop of a brutal and long colonial history? Are secular or reformist Muslim feminists allowed to talk about patriarchal structures that draw upon Islam, or are they always to be subjected to disciplining by the metropolitan gaze, which, in Scott's case, exercises an Archimedean privilege derived from an American position external to France and to Muslim communities across the globe?[12] In other words, are Muslims always to remain caught between the distortions, misrepresentations, and bigotries of the media-empire-neocon complex and the high-minded apologias of this configuration's left-liberal critics?[13]

In an ironic inversion of the neoconservative hierarchy, the priority given to metropolitan concern, and postcolonial guilt, means metropolitan intellectuals get to anoint good Muslims and tar bad ones. They get to choose between those who raise acceptable concerns, and thus get to retain their Muslim status, and those who do not. A more counterintuitive consequence is that Islam and Muslims both become an undifferentiated block, despite the numbingly familiar and yet increasingly meaningless assertion that Islam is not a monolith—within the postsecularist universe, there can be no secular or anti-Islamist Muslims or Muslim reformers.[14] There is, in other words, a recurrent invocation of the plurality of Islamicate cultures and yet a continuous subsumption of most Muslims to the most orthodox kinds.

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The desire to accommodate Muslims in Europe and make restitution for America's conduct in the War on Terror permeates John le Carré's *A Most Wanted Man* (2008). At the end of the novel, the left-liberal German lawyer, who works for Sanctuary North (a vaguely Christian organization that provides legal help to refugees and illegal immigrants), tries desperately to intervene as American spooks crash into an operation staged by German spies and violently rendition two

Muslim men. The men are a cleric and former Muslim Brother, Faisal Abdullah, who is (rightly, it turns out) suspected of aiding a militant organization outside Europe, and a young Chechen-Russian Islamist, Issa Karpov. The agencies know that Issa is innocent. After they have been driven away, the lawyer, Annabel Richter, stands on the empty street with a banker, who has also been duped into trapping the two men, and the good German spy who had hoped to turn Abdullah. In a final gesture of futility, Annabel places the scarf she is wearing back on her head: "Her scarf had fallen round her neck. Absently she lifted it over her head and retied it under her throat."[15]

The politics of *A Most Wanted Man* are impeccably European and left-liberal. The novel is indignant about America's handling of the War on Terror, of Britain's complicity in post–Cold War atrocity, and is sympathetic to the Chechen plight. Nonetheless, the real interest of the novel lies not in its rather European critique of the War on Terror but instead in how the plot becomes a vehicle for another kind of encounter, for which rendition is the negative frame. In this other encounter, the scarf that Annabel reties around her head in an ultimate gesture of failure is central.

Annabel is presented as a beautiful woman who disguises her beauty in masculine and deliberately desexualizing clothes. That she hides her body and has refused to make social capital out of her sexuality makes the veil she later puts on for Issa merely an extension of an implicit distaste for Western norms of sexual objectification. Early in the novel, she has donned the scarf out of "respect" for Issa, who gives her periodic lectures on her sex life and tells her that when they are married she will stay at home and have children while he undertakes her education. Issa seems arrogant, but she has the key to the apartment where he is hiding from the authorities while she tries to get him legal permission to stay in Germany. Annabel is from a very well connected German family, is, of course, legal, and thus, crudely put, has more power.

This is how le Carré has her explain her decision to wear the scarf in response to the banker's questions:

[Annabel:] "He's a Muslim. That's number one. Devout. So it's tough for him when he's got to deal with a woman lawyer." "But tougher for you, surely?"

"He asks me to wear a headscarf. I wear one. He asks me to respect his traditions. I respect them."[16]

Issa (the name is significant: he is as brutalized as the tortured Jesus, whose Muslim name he has taken) is presented as wounded, destroyed, and otherworldly—a child-man:

> Issa was lying on his mattress in his underpants, drenched in sweat and hunched on his side. . . . [H]e seemed unaware of Melik's presence. . . . Issa's upper body was a slough of crisscross blue and orange bruises. Some appeared to be whiplashes, others bludgeon marks. On the soles of his feet—the same feet that had pounded the Hamburg pavements—Melik made out suppurating holes the size of cigarette burns. Locking his arms round Issa, and binding a blanket round his waist for propriety, Melik lifted him tenderly and lowered the passive Issa through the attic trap and into Leyla's waiting arms.[17]

The novel contrasts the brutalized male, tortured in a network of prisons across Eurasia, deprived of his virility by a childlike frailty (Issa and, briefly, at the end of the novel, Abdullah), with the masculinized liberal European woman. Yet it also unites them in a strange equivalence. She may be more socially powerful and less likely to be arrested but is nonetheless helpless: she cannot prevent her government from colluding in this terrible war. In response to her own helplessness, the liberal woman can only don the headscarf as a gesture of "respect" for the innocent Islamist who is arrogant but yet powerless. In fact, his arrogance is presented merely as an effect of his brutalized helplessness. The novel allegorically recasts a sexually regressive Islamist ideology as merely a form of politically desperate bravado.

In order for this machinery to work fully, Muslim women, too, have to be imagined differently. The Muslim women in the story are either veiled like Leyla (the simple, devout Turkish woman who takes Issa in and is fierce in his defense) and Abdullah's ambitious graceful daughter (on her way to the London School of Economics) or raped and dead but still traditional, like Issa's mother, whose specter haunts the novel and, the implication is, modern history. Issa's very conception is an allegory for the birth of Chechen Islamism. He is the son of a Russian officer who subsequently falls in love with the young girl he has raped. Unable to have her (she is killed by her brothers for having been violated), he takes his son to Russia with him. Issa is simply a wounded son making restitution for the raped mother he has not known.

The women themselves either freely choose their empowering and comforting Islam or, in Issa's mother's case, are the absent victims of Cold War atrocity. At the end of the novel, Leyla, too, ends up in a Turkish prison, but we do not see her frail and destroyed. The wounded masculinity of the Muslim male is the spectacle that requisitions the veil into service as an emblem of respect. This "respect" is the name of the sentiment that tries to compensate for the helplessness of liberal opposition to torture and the War on Terror at the same time that it seeks to absorb the torment of women who are brutalized by the war, who have to see the men of their communities detained, renditioned, and tortured, and who may also have to endure their misogyny.

If le Carré cannot imagine any other Muslim woman, it is because he is channeling left-liberalism's intense anxiety about doing right by Muslims. This liberalism matches its own helplessness by focusing on the defeatedness of the Islamist. But that vision of defeat also displaces the contempt for women in Issa's version of Islamism. The white woman donning the headscarf in this way works as an erasure of struggles over patriarchy and misogyny in Muslim contexts. The symbolic elevation of that gesture in *A Most Wanted Man* is the cultural trace of that erasure.

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The spectacle of humiliation and pain offered by Guantánamo and Abu Ghraib, to speak only of those visions of atrocity that are (partially) visually available to us (Bagram, renditions, and so much more seem more mythic because they are less present to the eye), is central to the way Muslim masculinity is now conceived.[18] The discussion of torture, its defense, its ostensible newness within American political practice, is part of the discourse of this war. In fact, as I suggested in the previous chapter, if there is anything that marks out the war, it is the attempt to legalize and justify torture—as if it is an aberration within U.S. state practice, as if it were not already a normalized part of the prison-industrial complex, had no genealogies in America's Cold War history (although one has only to think of the School of the Americas), and did not have a ready lineage available in practices from racial slavery.[19]

In *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, her generally apt critique of the role of homonationalism in the War on Terror, Jasbir Puar remarks this history and its continuities with the current abuse of prisoners in Abu Ghraib.[20] Alongside Badiou and Scott, Puar's work showcases the growing importance of the claims of Muslim minorities in the West upon the global discourse about Islam,

and, equally, of the merging of the concerns of these minorities with the discursive apparatus that has grown around the War on Terror. But what interests me is the way that Puar configures Muslim women, Muslim feminism, and anyone critical of conservative brands of Islam in her account. In her discussion of the Abu Ghraib photographs, she mentions the fact that photographs of women being tortured have not been circulated, perhaps, she suggests, because the exposure of the abuse of women would completely discredit the pretense that the United States is attempting to save Muslim women from oppression in its current wars (*TA*, 98). But, in a powerful and disturbing paper on the connections between lynching postcards and the Abu Ghraib photos, Hiram Perez has also raised the question of why critics of the U.S. government have tended to remain silent on this issue.[21]

I would like to suggest that the silence of the critics speaks to the way in which the vision of a wounded and destroyed Muslim masculinity is necessary as much to the administration as to its critics, not least because, within critical discourse, Muslim female suffering is too equated with a theoretically discredited rhetoric of female passivity. This has, of course, a general theoretical provenance and also a specific political one. In the political context, even describing Muslim female suffering at the hands of the torturers seems, counterintuitively, to feed on the ideological zeal of interventionist wars. More troublingly, the silence seems to emanate from a kind of discourse fatigue: the media talks about Muslim women suffering so much, the critics are just bored. Ironically, although women can no longer be seen as victims, and that prohibition fuels much of the theoretical critique of liberal feminism, Muslim men can. Although Puar points out the way in which the discourse around the images has worked to create a vision of Muslim masculinity as both flaccid and pathologically virile, and though she mentions the absence of Muslim women in these accounts, she reproduces some of these tendencies by (1) taking a characteristically vigorous and rhetorically fierce stand against all secular positions (which are usually also twinned with liberal as epithet) while absenting all Islamist ideology or Muslim historical complexity from her discussion, thus reducing the position of the Muslim male to only a tortured brown body (*TA*, 55, 60, 85–87); (2) using the critique by the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) of the Feminist Majority's role in the war but then pointing out its complicity in a middle-class privilege that erases working-class Afghan women without offering any account of these

displaced women (*TA*, 6); (3) speaking of Muslim feminists, who apparently refute what she reports as Barbara Ehrenreich's claims that "gender-segregated spaces are the product of Islamic fundamentalist misogyny," but then being unable to account for this work at all (*TA*, 59); and (4) asserting and then disavowing analogies between the turbaned Sikh body and the veiled woman in a long chapter on the Sikh male turban. The effect of this is to displace the veiled woman, who is, as we shall see, simultaneously turned into all Muslim women (*TA*, 181, 182, 200).

The sum of all this is to produce a vision of a striking absence of any contestation within Islam—in a range of Muslim diasporas or Muslim-majority societies—and, at the same time, a bizarre tendency to adjudicate between Muslims. The mandate is sheer, but it seems as if Islam exists only to reveal the fallenness of secular-liberal assumptions. Puar spends more time on the religious symbolics of wearing the turban than she does on any Muslim practice but is happy to make all sorts of assertions about Muslims.

Perhaps the problem can be rendered visible if we look more carefully at the terms in which she dismisses Ehrenreich, "who otherwise rightly suggests that linkages among misogyny, masculinity, and terrorism need further probing" (*TA*, 59): "Ehrenreich's assessment that gender segregated spaces are the product of Islamic fundamentalist misogyny (veiling is usually cited as the most egregious example of oppression by liberal feminists) ignores decades (centuries even, per Fatima Mernissi's work) of Muslim feminists arguing the contrary. As Saba Mahmood argues, this myopia is due to the inability of liberal feminism to conceptualize the agency of religious women unless it appears as a resistance to the nonsecular" (*TA*, 59).

It is a bit hard to unpack this, but it is important to do so. What is the myopia in question? Do Muslim feminists argue that gender segregation has nothing to do with Islam, or that it has nothing to do with fundamentalism, or that the veil has nothing to do with gender segregation, or that the veil does not necessitate segregation, or that Islam does not require the veil? This is not mere quibbling; the question is an object of some considerable debate. All these, and more, positions are possible. Many quite devout Muslim women do not veil, even though they are religious, and some veil for other social reasons. Many male Islamists in a variety of contexts do try to impose the veil, and a number of religious women do not like that. Mahmood's book,

which is made to speak for all religious women, is about a particular group of neo-orthodox women.

This passage, however, affords an opportunity to open into a different history. The one article Puar cites in the footnote, by Lila Abu-Lughod, defends the burqa in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan as a "customary" Pashtun garment, thus attempting to delink it from Islam flatly construed.[22] On this view, the belief or religiosity of the wearer is irrelevant. So too is any enforcement of it by Taliban forces or the Northern Alliance—it is all just custom.[23] Abu-Lughod does not cite any of Valentine Moghadam's work on the role the Mujahideen played in the persecution of women refugees in Peshawar (the murder of the founder of RAWA, the poisoning of the wells of girls' schools) or the complicity of the CIA and the Pakistani ISI in sustaining disciplinary misogynistic regimes of gender segregation.[24] Neither Abu- Lughod nor Puar shows any awareness of the consequences of the role that the Pakistani state played in the cultivation of the "religiosity" of Pashtun Afghans.[25] For instance, in order to receive aid from the Pakistani government, refugees had to register with one of the Islamic parties. What does it mean to talk of custom in the face of such massive and brutal (multi)state-sponsored social engineering?

Puar's reference to Mernissi is particularly interesting. Presumably, she means to refer to *The Veil and the Male Elite*—Mernissi's attempt to reinterpret the Muslim tradition regarding the veil—to argue against the continued necessity of veiling and of gender segregation. But it is equally possible to read that book as a response to the orthodox aspects of the Islamic resurgence, especially when one recalls that Mernissi also wrote a pamphlet titled *The Fundamentalist Obsession with Women*. In this context, it is worth recalling that, in 1990, the group Women Living under Muslim Laws held a conference engaging with reinterpretations of the Qur'an, with the feminist theologian Riffat Hassan (who is happy to speak as a practicing Muslim but does not veil) as the keynote speaker, as a response to growing state religiosity in many Muslim-majority countries after 1979, the year of the Iranian Revolution.[26]

Is there a claim about Islam and feminism here, or is there not? Practicing and devout Muslims take many attitudes to the veil, and many of them, in fact, do not veil. Moreover, the discussion about the veil simply forgets other forms of covering that have been customary. One might think of the South Asian *dupatta*, which is worn over the shoulders but can be, and often is, used to cover the head. The

most visible form of head covering current in the West (and growing elsewhere), the contemporary hijab, has circulated rapidly in the era of neoliberalism and globalization. The homogenization it represents is itself an effect of the forces associated with late capitalism. To reconstitute Islam only through such a position on the veil, or indeed through the veil at all, even when responding to a critic who seems to be doing that, seems puzzling. Muslims who do not practice are also known to refuse the veil. Secular Muslims (not all of whom are elite—there is a history of vigorous Marxism in many Muslim countries) also do not veil. Abu Ghraib, it must be said, holds many secular Iraqis as well, given that there are many former Baathists there. Nor do cluster bombs, depleted uranium, and daisy cutters discriminate between the devout, the orthodox, the heterodox, the apostate, or, for that matter, non- Muslims, who also live in Muslim-majority countries. (This is usually forgotten in most media and theoretical discussions.) A person from any of these groups might collaborate. The secular/religious divide does not mean much in this context.

Puar's argument about the turban must be read within the frame of her discussion of Muslim women. She discusses the turban as an object that evokes hate and violence, marks Sikh men as bearers of communal identity in a reversal of the more common view that women are bearers of tradition, and leads to hate attacks that involve their feminizing subjugation. This reading works to displace the veil as the focus of attention. Queerness, as an optic, provides a discourse of alterity that consolidates the disappearance of Muslim women and replaces them with male Muslim and Sikh bodies, which are linked together by the figure of terrorism.[27] Puar's is a discourse in which an analysis of homophobic and racist ascriptions of sexual perversity to the "faggot" terrorist Muslim male can be made to recuperate the veil—by substitutive way of the turban—as the redemptive token of violated male bodies (*TA*, 87). Puar's way of queering the brown male body takes attention away from the obsessive imperial focus on the brown female body as an object of rescue, but that deflection, though somewhat welcome, reveals a disabling anxiety about succumbing to that imperial fixation. The project of producing (or preserving) a substantive concomitant critique of misogyny and patriarchy becomes a casualty of an anti-imperialist anxiety. Empire and racism, pretty much as usual, get to call the shots.

Racist murder compounds imperial war, and death comes to have complete priority. In this death- and torture-determined world,

misogyny and patriarchy can be recognized, but one is not to attend to them. The problem seems deferrable, not terribly urgent. There are greater violences to face, more suffering to contend with, more visions of pain to fight and banish. The telos (and there is a telos here) is always of afterward: after imperialism, after racism, after the end of pain, of death, perhaps when we are restored to some prelapsarian future.[28] Then, we are to imagine, other injustices and violences, more diurnal, less exceptional inequities, will be dealt with.

Returning to Badiou is clarifying. Another way to understand Badiou's celebration of Paul as the figure who reduces Christianity to a single principle ("Jesus is resurrected" [*SP*, 4]) is to see it as an attempt to resolve the crisis induced by the tortured body, to find a way to redeem suffering within a ***telos*** that appears to defeat death even as it, with devastating and, one can only hope, inadvertent irony, ends up enshrining it. For to the atheist (Badiou, though not Paul), resurrection can only be a metaphor, an idea, an emblem of utopia—and here utopia is not only literally no place but also now no time, a neverwhere of political symbolism. To read resurrection from within a universe accepted as godless (Badiou's) is to read it as consolation, not as hope, is to produce, at the same time, a devastating hollowing out of the object of hope, and to enable its reduction to something emptily therapeutic even if psychically sustaining. Worse: it is to produce it as mystification, as that which obscures the world. Resurrection is, at the same time, the cover for the death- and torture-induced paralysis of our present crisis, a figure of justice and of its permanent deferral, as if Badiou is trying to imagine a time after torture, after crucifixion at the hands of the imperial army. Paul is the figure who can make that time (of very long waiting) into an idea of hope, of grace, and of the cancellation of the law. He is the one who can transform the very instrument of torture into its own permanent cancellation and yet install it eternally. Can you resurrect those who are not dead? Should you resurrect those who were not tortured? This is both a deferral of ostensibly smaller injustices and a way of coping with intolerable suffering, a way of finding meaning in death, of unearthing moral consolation so that we can achieve a way to deal with the unbearable suffering of those who are now beyond our redress. For the battered body, the battered heart, or the mind quietly battling a thousand daily inequities, is no competition. We are left not just with an ethic but also an affect of crisis and of permanent postponement.

AGENCY, PIETY, HISTORY

When confronted with discomfiting parts of Islamist ideology, especially in relation to questions of patriarchy and misogyny, postsecularists tend to reach reflexively for "agency." Indeed, the term gets adduced with metronomic reliability whenever Muslim women, or the very possibility of religious injustice, are the object of discussion. For instance, in a hedged, yet revealing, sentence, Scott presents the gesture of donning the headscarf while contrasting agency and subordination: "Far from representing the subordination of women, these gestures demonstrated a desire for, if not the actual achievement of, agency" (*POV*, 139). Another instance: as part of a critique of the "activities" of a British-based queer group OutRage! Puar responds to one of its members, who posted "No Islamic State No *Shari'a* Law": "This latter conviction reflects queer secularity; it is inconceivable that women or queers could negotiate or have agency within an Islamic state" (*TA*, 17). Since Puar is speaking of law (Sharia) and of the relationship between agency and the law, it might be worth pausing here to supply the missing term: *rights*—that is, what the law allows or forbids. Is agency, perhaps, a substitute for rights? Does it mean giving up on changing the law? 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.

Both Scott and Puar draw on *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*, Mahmood's influential study of women involved in the *dawa* movement in Egypt. In this she seeks a more thorough understanding of the way neo-orthodox Muslim women inhabit trajectories of Muslim thought. But Mahmood (as is her ethnographic mandate) is more rigorous and thorough in her analysis of the reflexive registers, discursive engagements, and ethical practices of her anthropological subjects.

Although the ambit of the study is narrow, the theoretical apparatus of the work has proven its greatest draw, perhaps, because it is more universalizable and because parts of it are more familiar. By "theoretical apparatus," I mean Mahmood's familiar and frequent iteration of the importance of context, her commitment to being sensitive to difference, and her invocation of the local. The less familiar, and more interesting, part of this apparatus is Mahmood's treatment of the question of women choosing their own subordination and, in turn, being produced as agents by it. Mahmood has given us

an account of this apparent paradox embedded in a non-Western culture, using poststructuralist and postmodern theories of subjectivity, embodiment, and agency.[29]

This theoretical apparatus is also part of Mahmood's attempt to face the conceptual challenge of writing analytically about Muslim women in a global situation in which they are repeatedly cast as victims of Islam requiring rescue by the West.[30] There are four crucial thematic struts of Mahmood's attempt to confront this situation: (1) a frequently iterated emphasis on the local, the specific, and on the importance of attention to context; (2) a suggestion that the analytical and prescriptive projects are merged in feminism and that they need to be uncoupled; (3) assertions now and then that Islamism and secular liberalism are imbricated; and (4) a rethinking of agency and subject formation. The last is, of course, the most theoretically weighty, and it is around this that the other emphases are made to revolve.

Mahmood is largely critical of the equation of agency with resistance in the liberal imagination. In order to execute her critique, she turns to thinkers who are more or less influenced by Foucauldian notions of power. She quotes at relative length from an essay in which Abu-Lughod criticizes her own earlier preoccupation with "explaining resistance and finding resisters."[31] The example of resistance Mahmood cites from Abu-Lughod is of young Bedouin women who wear alluring lingerie to challenge social norms. According to Abu-Lughod, such actions reveal that these women call upon alternate forms of power drawn from "capitalist consumerism and urban bourgeois values and aesthetics" (*PP*, 9).[32] To understand such acts, one needs to locate them within shifting and intersecting fields of power. Equally important to Mahmood is the question of whether the abstract valuing of acts of resistance such as these "impose[s] a teleology of progressive politics on the analytics of power" (*PP*, 9).

The figure most theoretically central to Mahmood, however, is Judith Butler. Butler's use of Foucault allows Mahmood to set the stage for her own position. She finds most useful two well-known insights from Foucault as processed by Butler: (1) that power ought to be understood as a "strategic relation of force," which saturates life and in turn produces "desires, objects, relations, and discourses" (*PP*, 17); and (2) that the subject does not precede but is instead produced by these relations, which are then necessary conditions of its possibility (*PP*, 17). This paradox of "subjectivation" is centrally

important. The language is crucial: "the very processes and conditions that secure a subject's subordination are also the means by which she becomes a self-conscious identity and agent" (*PP*, 17). The understanding this enables is that a subject's forms of agency do not exist prior to or outside operations of power but are instead their very product.

Once such an understanding is in play, we can see that agency is not simply another name for resistance to domination but instead the "capacity for action that specific relations of subordination create and enable" (*PP*, 18). Mahmood emphasizes that processes of exclusion and Lacanian notions such as "abjection" and "foreclosure" are central to subject formation as understood by Butler. Butler's greatest virtue, then, is the challenge she offers to liberal feminists who privilege autonomy and the separation of the individual from the social. She offers instead the prospect of subordination—of something that might be the very antithesis of autonomy, and that has nothing to do with resistance—producing the subject. By critiquing and destabilizing the sex/gender division that had underpinned feminist thinking since the 1940s, she has also made it possible to destabilize the very notion of female desire of the nonsexual kind as somehow autonomous. At least, this is implicit in Mahmood's discussion. But as Mahmood sees the matter, although Butler's critique of humanist notions of agency and the subject is powerful, it is not antihumanist enough. For Mahmood, ultimately Butler, too, is too caught up in finding resignifications and subversions of norms as sources of agency. Her theory of the subject, and of agency, relies too heavily on an agonistic conception of norms. Butler's framework depends on an untenable dualism in which norms are assumed to be entities that are done and undone, made and resisted, instead of inhabited, lived, and practiced (*PP*, 23). Such a framework makes it impossible to understand how different groups of Muslims can agree—assenting to a norm broadly construed—that female modesty is a virtue but nonetheless argue about, say, the status of the veil. Mahmood's own awareness does not lead to an account of these various groups; instead, the people who interest Mahmood are the ones who argue for the veil. The reason for this is apparently theoretical: their embrace of the veil allows for a refinement of theories of the subject. The women she chooses to focus on interest her particularly because their use of the veil shows that it both creates and expresses modesty. They can demonstrate, in other words, the subject-producing capacity of the veil (*PP*, 23).

It is evident that Mahmood is aligning herself with a Butlerian tradition that is inspired by the sections in Foucault where he insists that the presence of interdiction and prohibition has been overstated in Western traditions of sexuality, and that, as a result, it is a mistake to think that freedom and resistance are necessary for the production of subjectivity.[33] But if Butler and Foucault are both committed to overturning any notion that interdiction might be limiting of the production of agency, that it might even be a huge discursive ruse, and if Butler wants to call into question notions that emancipation and resistance are necessary to the production of agents, to pose, indeed, such a conception as misguided liberal feminist fantasy, Mahmood is able to do Foucault and Butler one better and show instead that Butler, too, is too implicitly committed to the idea of emancipation. Butler's notions of agency, gender, and embodiment are simply not theoretically austere enough, and to understand this one has to turn to the instantiation of the Islamic resurgence that can be found in the mosque movement she studies in Egypt.

In addition, Butler's draw is that she offers a critique of liberal feminism in the manner of Chandra Mohanty, Abu-Lughod, and Marnia Lazreg (figures Mahmood claims as important precursors), but her version provides a theoretical update of these figures by adding a queer analytic.[34] Mahmood relies on the queer critique of feminism and of liberal feminism's normative reliance on the idea of "woman" and of its consequent inability to recognize the constructedness of gender. Her project, then, is to mount a claim for Islamist female agency from within a queer critique of liberal feminism by framing the issue in a way that interrogates how gender norms are constructed, inhabited, and perpetuated.

But this relies on a peculiar process of doubling and alienation evident in Mahmood's ostensibly contrapuntal discussion of Butler's understanding of the drag queen's relation to norms. Mahmood argues that, unlike the drag queen, whose success in approximating heterosexual norms of femininity poses a challenge to those norms, the mosque movement participants' "excellence at piety" (*PP*, 164), which is performative, behavioral, and yet creative of subjectivity, in fact consolidates those norms.

Moreover, the effort drag queens pour into improving their performance nonetheless requires a disjuncture between what is "socially performed and what is biologically attributed," and is, indeed, "necessary to the very structure of that performance" (*PP*, 164). On the other hand, for the mosque participants, the "relevant disjuncture" is between "a religious norm (or ideal) and its actual performance: their actions are aimed at precisely overcoming this disjuncture" (*PP*, 165). Mahmood goes on to discuss these contrasts within the framework of explicating and discussing Butler's theory of embodied performativity that is so central to her own project. This longish discussion is meant to elucidate

> the range of productive questions that are generated through an encounter between philosophical "generality" and ethnographic "particularity"—an encounter that makes clear the constitutive role "examples" play in the formulation of theoretical concepts. Moreover, an analysis of the historical and cultural particularity of the process of subjectivation reveals not only distinct understanding of the performative subject but also the perspectival shifts one needs to take into account when talking about the politics of resistance and subversion. (*PP*, 167)

It is not at all clear why the politics of resistance and subversion across different cultures are made to be at stake in this discussion. Mahmood has chosen to talk about drag queens in the West versus Islamist women and not drag queens from Egypt versus those in Butler's discussion. The claim about cultural particularity affecting theoretical concepts seems strange. Why stack the question of whether a performative subject can work to consolidate norms by introducing historical and cultural difference? The contrast has little to do with culture or history and everything to do with different spheres of action within a culture: orthodox, revivalist women, on the one hand; drag queens, on the other. Mahmood sets up the contrast this way because she needs (1) a notion of culture as stable and different (despite numerous disavowals; the occasional references to the imbrication of Islamism and secular liberalism that do not seem to get developed are part of this practice of disavowal); and (2) the queerness of the drag queen to transfer onto the mosque participants. In the process, she erases the Egyptian drag queen completely.

Mahmood's is a complex procedure. The mosque participant is surreptitiously queer because, like the drag queen, she is distant from Western norms of heterosexual femininity. At the same time, she is an emblem of cultural stasis because she is irreducibly culturally different from the drag queen and the consolidator of norms of an inherited discourse. Although Mahmood says that she wishes to refine theoretical concepts, presumably by putting some pressure on the kinds of examples used, by choosing to talk about alterity

through the figure of the mosque participants, and not Egyptian drag queens, she actually exacerbates the difference, sacrifices an understanding of fault lines within cultures, and thus makes the culture seem monolithic. She could, for instance, compare drag queens across cultural divides and religious women involved in church groups committed to heterosexual norms of femininity with the mosque participants. Those comparisons then could be placed against each other. By comparing consolidators and destabilizers across cultures, we could have a different understanding of those who transgress and those who consolidate norms within a culture and thus have a more nuanced account of cultural particularity. To put this another way, we would achieve a better understanding of what is particular about cultural particularity.[35]

The way that culture can become the mediating term in this discussion shows that the spatial distance and claim of difference are crucial. The women of the mosque movement can be antinormative by being alternatives to Western norms and entirely, comfortably, consolidating of "Other" norms. They serve the appetite for antinormativity by being agents of another normativity. They destabilize notions, assumed to be Western, of freedom, resistance, and emancipation by demonstrating an alternative relation to norms, by ontologically resisting and challenging Western conceptions of agency, that is, just by being who they are. The very fact of their alterity frees them from Western conceptions of freedom.

As it stands, Mahmood's procedure can satisfy the demands of a poststructuralist-inspired queer theory (by appearing to correct it from within) and a more intellectually mainstream, multiculturally inclined liberal Anglo-American political and moral philosophy (by seeking to correct it from within). Mahmood's discussion can thus elicit the following quite stunning blurb on the back cover from Charles Taylor: "Mahmood carefully unpacks the distortions that common modes of liberalism and feminism impose on the Muslim world. She combines richness of description with theoretical sophistication to provide insight into the struggle of some Muslim women to live their faith in the face of not only Western liberal influences but also Arab nationalism and political Islamism." For Taylor, these women are both entirely exceptional (victims of common modes of liberalism and feminism, Arab nationalism, political Islamism, and Western liberal influences) and completely emblematic (in seeing what is being done to them, you can see what is being done to the "Muslim

world"). It is worth pausing here to ask: What are the acceptably uncommon modes of liberalism and feminism Taylor has in mind? Is the "Muslim world" in this imaginary immune to history, where the "influence" of ideas can be so easily externalized? That is: Was it always Muslim? All of it? Is Islam more indigenous to, say, Africa (parts of which overlap, after all, with the Muslim parts of the world) than Christianity? What is the relation between philosophical indigeneity and time?

On the question of culture, the tensions in Mahmood's work run deep. This is perhaps most interestingly evident in the manner in which Mahmood adjudicates between two different responses to what she calls the "compulsory norm" of heterosexual marriage in Egypt (*PP*, 168). She presents the example of Nadia, a woman from the mosque movement, advising a fellow participant to consider a proposal from a married man to become his second wife. Mahmood presents Nadia's explanation that there are tremendous pressures on single women within the culture. So, although Nadia does not much like polygamy, it does offer a solution to an asphyxiating social norm. By way of contrast, Mahmood offers the example of a self-declared secular woman, Sana, who is also single but who has chosen to seek "self-esteem" and solace in her work.

This comparison then becomes an opportunity to explain that the practice of *sabr*, roughly meaning "to persevere in the face of difficulty without complaint" (PP, 171), does not signal passivity as the secular subject, Sana, might think but is instead "integral to a constructive project: it is a site of considerable investment, struggle and achievement" (*PP*, 174). As Nadia has already presented the matter, Job, known as Ayub to Muslims, is the example to cultivate, not because he tried to "rise above" his pain, but because of the way he "lived" affliction and hardship (*PP*, 173). Mahmood concludes this segment by arguing:

> Neither Sana nor Nadia could pursue the project of reforming the oppressive situation they were forced to inhabit. The practice of *sabr* did not hinder Nadia from embarking on a project of social reform any more than the practice of self-esteem enabled Sana to do so. One should not, therefore, draw unwarranted correlations between a secular orientation and the ability to transform conditions of social injustice. Further, it is important to point out that to analyze people's actions in terms of realized or frustrated attempts at social transformation is necessarily to reduce the heterogeneity of life to the rather flat narrative of succumbing to or resisting relations of dominance (*PP*, 174).

This account seems to take the unchangeability of social expectations of marriage for granted. The inevitability of the humiliation, disenfranchisement, and loneliness is assumed. Polygamy is one panacea; work, simply another. Sana's solution and the language of self-esteem are clearly meant to link her to the West. The problem with finding resistance or talking about succumbing to domination is, moreover, *aesthetic*: the narrative it produces is flat.[36]

Now it seems from this account that Mahmood is merely adhering to her commitment to uncouple the analytical and the political. What she has shown, with the detachment she is also asking her readers to cultivate, is that neither a religious nor a secular orientation can guarantee social reform—or so it seems. But one has to look to an article by Mahmood, "Secularism, Hermeneutics, and Empire: The Politics of the Islamic Reformation," which I discuss at some length in the previous chapter, to see that her larger project does not just entail asserting an equivalence between the religious disposition of the mosque participants and a secular orientation; it is, instead, to discredit secular and reformist Muslims altogether.

Mahmood attempts this in the article by showing that "secularism" and "reform" are part of a "hermeneutic" advocated by George Bush and the Rand Corporation.[37] As a result, Muslims who advocate reform from within a religious (Abdolkarim Soroush is one example she gives) or secular (Nawal El Saadawi) framework are complicit with U.S. imperialism. The attempt to discredit these thinkers is almost subtle, as it comes in a bit of theoretical wrapping: Bush, Soroush, and El Saadawi are to be yoked together by a shared hermeneutic. It seems not to matter that El Saadawi might have had the commitment long before the U.S. government (once a devoted cultivator of right-wing Islamism), or that Soroush was once a fervent supporter of the theocratic Iranian Revolution and that he continues to work from within a religious framework. But what the example of El Saadawi reveals is that Mahmood's project is not just to promote a better understanding (as is her frequently iterated contention) of the agency of the members of the *dawa* movement; it is to undo the project of any kind of secular feminism as an agent of social reform in Muslim contexts and at the same time to mount a defense of the most conservative varieties of Islamism by mounting a critique of reformist Muslims.[38] Given the long and vibrant history of feminism in Islamicate societies and the sheer number of Muslim reformers out there, this requires some serious footwork.

One could argue that this is simply diaspora trying to have the last word, or, on the other hand, trying to absolve itself of its guilt for its own complicity with the institutions of empire. After all, each one of us in the diaspora is catering to a Western audience. We are paid for this service, exist in institutions of unprecedented comfort for academics, have research grants, and speak to audiences that consume what we say with a relish that depends on the vagaries of metropolitan discursive fashion. But to acknowledge this complicity does not, I think, buy us an exemption from this privilege. Self-consciousness itself is merely one more swirl in the ever-tightening gyre of reflexive sophistication, enlisted for an exemption it cannot bestow. There is no escape from complicity. Deferring judgment, or displacing the (self-)accusation of our privilege onto those who have refused the status of émigré intellectuals, simply secures our own privilege, buys our pardon, at the expense of those elsewhere. At the same time, the way that discourses circulate, the context of creation, does not have to coincide with the ambit of reception. Arguments that seem to be responding to conditions "here" can have consequences and influence elsewhere.

There are many unexceptionable claims about, and even brilliant interpretations of, practices of piety in Mahmood's book. Agency can be produced out of subordination; choosing subordination can be an exercise of agency; agency is not just comprised of acts of resistance but can consist of modes of inhabiting norms. Female desire does not have to take emancipation from religion as its object. Practicing modesty by veiling can produce an interior experience of the trait. Mahmood's behaviorism is sophisticated and even persuasive. However, her project exceeds the ethnographic specificity, value, or accuracy of these claims. One might contrast it with Lara Deeb's fascinating and more specifically located study of Hezbollah women, *An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety in Shi'i Lebanon*.[39]

But perhaps the largest contradiction in Mahmood's work lies in the claim of uncoupling the political and the analytical. On the one hand, Mahmood describes the ethical emphasis of the mosque participants as political only because it has elicited the ire of the state and of some political Islamists—so it is largely apolitical but the way it is opposed by explicit political players imposes a politics upon it. Ironically, her vision of her subjects simply repeats a conception of the politically transformative effects of feminine domesticity that Nancy Armstrong has shown to be part of liberal

feminism's version, or manipulation, of female virtue.[40] The mosque is the space that allows a personal ethics to flourish and yet stay personal, even as it appears to have a larger communal aspect to it. At the same time, Mahmood wants to protect this vision of self-subordinating piety on larger, more global, political terrain by claiming that any critique of Islamist views of women's roles in the order of things is dangerous in the world after September 11, 2001. The ease with which feminist critiques of the Taliban were used in the war means, moreover, that any critique of inequalities of the status of women in the Egyptian context is "recruitable" by empire.[41] The slide from Afghanistan to Egypt is odd, especially once one remembers the frequency with which Mahmood invokes specificity and local context.[42] There is, moreover, a certain Pollyannaish innocence about what defeats empires in this vision. Mahmood simply underestimates imperial opportunism. Obama's insistence in Cairo that America would defend the right of women to veil even though he has escalated the "Af-Pak war" shows that both religion and secularism, veiling and unveiling, reform and conformity, can be, indeed have been, recruited by empire. Trying to change one's position every time empires do leaves one tilting at very swiftly turning windmills. It also places an insultingly secular cast on a deeper religious question. Presumably, if one is indeed religious, one does things, or tries to, regardless of what expediency demands and because one is trying to live as God wills. This position is simply not sensitive to the piety of which Mahmood is otherwise such a powerful advocate.

What we see, then, is that Mahmood is not concerned so much with uncoupling the political and the analytical as she is with reframing the analytical in such a way that any position critical of conservative Islamist ideology appears as political because it is political in the wrong way. So that any criticism, whether from within (by secular, progressive, or reformist Muslims and feminists or non- Muslims in Islamicate societies) or from without (by internationalists expressing feminist solidarity), that does not bend to the more conservative claims of the Islamic resurgence becomes political because cast as interventionist.

A clue to this project lies in her claim that there is a problem with the imposition of a "teleology of progressive politics" upon analytics of power. Perhaps the claim Mahmood wants to make is that feminism ought not be progressive at all. Talal Asad, whose antisecularism underpins much of Mahmood's position, has written that he does not see what is intrinsically wrong with conservative projects.[43] If that is indeed the case, perhaps the real question Mahmood and Asad want to pose is whether we should be persuaded by a politics that is progressive. It is also not at all clear what teleology means in this context: is it a desired outcome or merely an inevitable one? What is the desired outcome attributed to progressive politics? What precisely does the word add other than a mild fog of disreputability?

It is not interesting to say that Mahmood's discussion of the participants in the *dawa* movement or her larger critique of secularism (which she tends to equate only with liberalism, as if there have never been Marxist or left manifestations) is relativist.[44] It seems to be, but, in these antifoundationalist times, most of us are relativist in the sense that we do not usually think that there are metaphysical grounds on which the superiority of ideas, cultures, or social practices rests. Neither is it academic habit to explicitly connect metaphysical concern with social observation. In Mahmood's case, what is more interesting is the way she elevates certain practices and discursive preferences within a culture to the status of "the culture" and the processes by which she attempts to secure these practices from critique.

REDEMPTIVE ANTITELEOLOGIES

Within the postsecularist universe, history is local. It is, as Dipesh Chakrabarty might put it, "History 2," which interrupts the "totalizing thrust" of a conception of history governed by teleology and necessity.[45] It is antiuniveralist, antiliberal, anti-Western, antinormative, fundamentally anti-Hegelian. One of the attractions of this antiteleological approach to history is that it refuses the idea that conquest, the destruction of lifeworlds, the eradication of peoples, untold human suffering, can be justified by a notion of progress. Crucially, the objection is not just epistemological—it is not merely to the notion of a rigid causality being imposed upon contingent events—it is ethical: it refuses a redemptive account of suffering and exploitation.

In the conversation I discuss, there has been a transfer effected from history onto agency. Increasingly, agency stands in for antiteleological history, and, at the same time, it is now the redemptive term. It sanctions the present and justifies suffering. Like most redemptive terms and practices, it absolves even as it redeems. It is the coin used to buy a way out of the irredeemability of human pain and worldly injustice, the term to which we turn when we want to be helped out

of our sense of futility and absolved of our complicity in structures of privilege. Change in history is not needed; there is always, we can tell ourselves, agency.

Increasingly, in theoretical discussions about religion, Muslim women are the pretexts for working out a series of tensions in contemporary thought. They have become the site upon which a cluster of wrinkles in liberalism is ironed out. The current discussion rotates the conversation about freedom, seeming to eschew it, and makes the very notion seem like an imposition. Muslim female agency reveals the Western imposition of freedom to be manifestly enslaving, without ever needing to make a resistant move, or so the positions I have described seem to assume—all the while, as I argued in the previous chapter, relying on tropes from the history of slavery. The way Muslim women have been used to provide moral justification for the War on Terror has made it easier to yoke these concerns together. If the West uses the rhetoric of freedom as the bludgeon to "save" them from inequity, if Sarkozy wanted to ban the burqa, the inequality is either not there or it is trivial compared to other suffering. What Muslim women require most is to be freed from "our" freedom.

In a striking and possibly inadvertent concession to the Bush Doctrine, academic discourse seems to have fallen into the habit of treating September 11, 2001, as the inaugural of history. There is a tendency thus to see the structure of repetition and exacerbation that is the present as historically exceptional. There is a simultaneous tendency to see all coercion and injustice, across cultures and time, as commensurable—no worse than. We are asked to sign on to a theory of absolute commensurability (between coercions) and occasional differentiation (between coercions). I want to contrast the commensurating impulses I have been discussing with the very different sense of coercion in the lines I quote from Gayatri Spivak in my epigraph.[46] Part of their power lies in the gesture of solidarity with which Spivak ends this essay, produced around the time of the first Gulf War. Today, that gesture seems almost outmoded in its commitment to a (complicated) internationalist feminism. But these lines and that gesture also remind us that it is crucial not to succumb to the discourse fatigue that fuels the vanguardism of many (including queer) forms of antifeminism. For Spivak, no less than for many postsecularists, all cultures are coercive ("cultures are built violently on the enforced coercion that they are"), but for her this does not translate into a license to halt a critique of a culture because it is, has been, or is being colonized. Neither does it preclude the project of trying to attain and create the conditions to be able to achieve the possibility of "uncoercive rearrangements of desire."[47] White men may be trying to save brown women from brown men, but brown men may indeed oppress brown women, and brown women (elite and otherwise) may also collude in sustaining structures of misogyny. (One may try, among other variants, Muslim and non-Muslim in this sentence.) As these lines suggest, another way to approach the question of coercion is to strain, and always to register the costs of that straining, in a colonized world, against coercion within the culture colonized without exempting colonial culture or imperial institutions. The precarious, precious enterprise of double critique means, then, that feminist concern—within colonized, postcolonial, decolonized, reimperiled cultures, diasporas, societies, nations—cannot be postponed. The project of imagining change from within the double bind of identity under conditions of conquest and war is not new. The War on Terror has done much to complicate the enterprise and little to obviate its necessity.

The project remains as menaced as ever and . . . incomplete.