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Muslim Women and the Rhetoric of Freedom

Alia Al-Saji

THE APPEAL TO the liberation of “other” women, specifically Muslim women, forms part of the rhetoric that seeks to justify the United States’ so-called war on terrorism. Whether explicitly evoked as part of the justification for the continuing war in Afghanistan, or implicitly used to establish a certain moral superiority with regard to Muslim cultures, this rhetoric defines Muslim women as passive victims (or pawns) of their religion or culture from which they require liberation. Their freedom can only come through the intervention of an external—in this case United States or “Western”—force that can bring about this liberation, because as “free” societies these have a genuine understanding of freedom, an understanding that Muslim societies supposedly lack. The argument for “exporting” freedom for women, whether to Afghanistan or, even less convincingly, Iraq,¹ seems easily questioned when invoked by the Bush administration.² In particular, this move is criticized for its opportunism and bad faith in light of the same administration’s disregard of women’s rights and concerns in general. Yet such criticism does not address the representation of Muslim women at work in U.S. rhetoric. The reaction to U.S. policies, even on the part of mainstream feminists, is often accompanied by a belief that Muslim women are indeed in need of liberation; it is merely the means of liberation that is at issue.³

What goes unquestioned is the underlying assumption that Muslim women should be helped to freedom. On closer consideration, the assumption is twofold: First, Muslim women are oppressed—the oppression of women being seen as essential to Islam. The symbol of this social, cultural, or religious gender oppression is identified with the “veil.” In this

sense, it is the “veiled” Muslim woman who is the target of attempts at liberation (unveiled Muslim women are seen as “escapees” of their religion and implicit “allies” of liberating forces). Second, the “freedom” promised to Muslim women is universally desirable, both for Muslim women and for “Western” women who are understood to already possess, or at least be working toward, such freedom.

These two premises, though posited as separate, in fact rely on and mirror each other. Although “Western,” liberal freedom is put forward as the natural remedy to the oppression of Muslim women, I would argue that this freedom is already conceived and valorized through the representation of that oppression, and hence cannot pretend to be a neutral recourse. In this regard, the image of the “veiled” Muslim woman is posited as antithetical to “freedom” (whether assumed to be actually available to Western women or progressively attainable by them by means of advances within Western society). The oppression of Muslim women is naturalized, specifically with respect to the “veil,” just as the “freedom” of Western society and the ideal of Western womanhood are naturalized. This concept of “freedom” confronts Muslim women with an impasse, a choice between their religion or culture, on the one hand, and their supposed liberation or full subjectivity, on the other hand.

This chapter attempts to unravel the logic of representation that defines “Western” and “Muslim” in oppositional terms—a logic that at once elides the constitutive interdependence of these representations and positions “woman” as the contested terrain between them.⁴ For women like me with complicated personal connections to both identities, this poses a false and sometimes intolerable dilemma. This dilemma is reinforced by the way feminist discourse, in its colonial and imperialist forms, assumes rather than deconstructs the dichotomy of Islam and the West, taking the latter to be the only appropriate and perfectible ground for feminist subjectivity.⁵ At stake is not only the normalization of a particular Western construction of gender and selfhood, but the exclusion of other modes of subjectivity, differently structured desires, and hybridized forms of lived experience that do not fit neatly into the oppositional grid of religious-modern, oppressive-free, or Islamic-Western.

The obsession with “the veil”—which often works metonymically to designate Islam and “Islamic fundamentalism”—sustains just such an oppositional and exclusionary logic. I observed this obsession not only in media coverage but also in personal communications around the events of 9/11 and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.⁶ As a Muslim-Canadian woman of Iraqi origin who has lived most of her life in the West and was a resident of the United States until 2002, I found myself called on to respond to questions, confirm hypotheses, and give an “insider’s” perspective on Muslim women and their veiling practices. Why, for instance, is

the veil (*abaya*) worn by Iraqi women always black?⁷ What makes this seemingly straightforward question about customs of dress problematic is revealed if I attempt to pose an equivalent question to a U.S. individual: why do women often wear high-heeled shoes in the United States? Or even, why do U.S. men wear trousers? Several troubling elements emerge.

The question about the blackness of the veil demands a level of generalization that makes it difficult to introduce any historical, contextual, or experiential nuance. A static and homogenizing representation of the veil is assumed, whose value is not itself open to question; not only is the veil black, but this material feature *must be* salient to understanding women’s veiling experiences and Iraqi society as such. Though Middle Eastern dress is not my field of expertise, the question puts me in the position of an expert, or what Uma Narayan has called an “authentic insider,” simply because I hail from that region.⁸ That the hermeneutical frameworks of social conventions are not so transparently accessible, and that situated knowledge may resist reformulation into essentialist explanations of the sort demanded, do not seem matters of concern. This brings me to a third worry: the lack of selfreflexivity that permits such questioning to appear as simple curiosity on the part of the questioner.⁹ When I asked after the motivation for the aforementioned question, this was articulated as a concern for the well-being of Iraqi women: black seems so stifling in the heat of the Middle East. A paternalistic attitude is thus revealed behind the simplicity of the question. Although I believe that those who asked me such questions did not self-consciously adhere to a discourse of U.S. nationalism, of us versus them, they inadvertently and implicitly inscribed the rhetoric of freedom that sustained such nationalist identification. The call for a cohesive nation, for a “united America,” requires the representation of an other (here Islam) as fundamentalist and oppressive, in order to maintain its appeal. These questions, and representations of the veil more generally, are part of a rhetoric of freedom that positions “the Muslim woman” as victim and foil; such rhetoric, I will argue, works to hide the gendered and racialized dimensions through which national and colonial discourses are formed.

It should be noted that the use of representations of Muslim women in the rhetoric of freedom has roots in colonial and orientalist discourses and is certainly not limited to the United States post-9/11, though it has become acutely visible in justifications of the continuing war in Afghanistan. Frantz Fanon’s study of the French colonial project in Algeria, the British framing of the “woman question” to justify its colonial presence in Egypt, the forced de-veiling of women in movements of “modernization” in the 1930s in Iran and Turkey,¹⁰ but also the more recent law banning the “Islamic head scarf” in French schools and debates surrounding the wearing of the “veil” in Quebec,¹¹ point to the fact that more is at stake here than

the attempted justification of one nation's war. In this chapter, I will more broadly follow a line of questioning that asks after the representation of Muslim women in the "Western" imaginary (an imaginary shared by, though not limited to, the United States). The term "West" is an admittedly inadequate notion that I do not intend to defend here. What I wish to indicate is, however, the way in which the representation of Muslim women (as veiled, oppressed, unfree) plays a role in this geographical and cultural formation, and hence supports the binary of "us" and "them," of West and non-West (or, more narrowly, Muslim). To the degree that I use the term, this qualification should be kept in mind. "The West" is invoked in this chapter as an imaginary construct in formation, rather than an ontological entity with predefined boundaries and identity.¹²

In what follows, my focus will be on one dominant representation of Muslim women in the Western imaginary, a representation that is both contemporary and colonial: the Muslim woman as "veiled."¹³ The use of the term "veil"—instead of "*hijab*" for instance—is itself open to debate, since this term covers over and reduces to a single representation what are culturally heterogeneous and historically dynamic phenomena.¹⁴ In using the term "veil," it is precisely this representation that I aim to study critically. This chapter does not have within its scope the presentation of empirical cases, histories or descriptions of "veiling." It is neither an apology for nor a condemnation of the "veil," but an analysis that attempts to reveal the structures that sustain the Western representation of the "veiled" Muslim woman. In other words, what is the mechanism that produces the representation of Muslim women as veiled, and simultaneously overdetermines the image of the woman "hidden behind her veil" as oppressed, unfree, invisible, and anonymous? Indeed, the motivation for this chapter lies in understanding the hold and force of this representation on the Western imaginary. Surprisingly immune to counterexamples, able to stretch to incorporate individual, cultural, and historical exceptions, as well as attempts to redefine it, this largely homogeneous and reductive representation has a hold that, I believe, reflects its investment in Western constructions of femininity, freedom, and self.¹⁵

I take as my starting point the colonial discourse on the veil described by Frantz Fanon in his essay "Algeria Unveiled"—partly because of the clarity of his account, but also because of what he leaves unsaid.¹⁶ By reading "Algeria Unveiled" together with *Black Skin, White Masks*, I critically extend Fanon's analysis by asking how dimensions of gender and race mutually support one another in the representation of the "veil."¹⁷ Drawing on French and British colonial discourses on the veil as well as contemporary U.S. discourses around the "war on terrorism," I aim to go beyond Fanon's French example to unearth the mechanisms of othering at work in "Western" representations of the veil—what I will call the

"racialization" of the veil. My purpose is to reveal the ways in which this racialization is already at work in Western discourses of subjectivity, gender, and even nationhood (as we shall see in the case of the United States). My claim is that images of Muslim women are much more than idle fictions woven around the bodies of other women, who may be located inside or outside that amorphous and imaginary construct called "the West." These representations are constituted as the support for that imaginary construct itself, in particular for Western society's selfrepresentation as a "free" society, soliciting women's complicity. That is, representations of veiled Muslim women are the negative mirror in which Western constructions of national identity and gender can be positively reflected.

In "Algeria Unveiled," Fanon describes the French colonial project to unveil Algerian women, a project that took on explicit dimensions from the 1930s onward. Fanon's analysis of this colonial project allows us to understand the degree to which the veil was identified, for the colonizer, not only with Muslim women but with Algerian culture and Islam as a whole. The "unveiling" of Algeria was, then, a project to destroy its culture, as Fanon explains.¹⁸ What comes through clearly in Fanon's account is the *homogeneity* of Western perceptions and reactions to the veil, whether at the level of colonial governance or individuals.¹⁹ Fanon's explanation of the unity of reactions to the veil attributes it to the material unity of the veil itself: "The woman seen in her white veil unifies the perception that one has of Algerian feminine society. Obviously, what we have here is a uniform that tolerates no modification, no variant."²⁰ Yet in the footnote on the same page, Fanon admits the wide variation in veiling practices in Algeria: women in rural areas are often unveiled, as are Kabyle women, except, he notes, in large cities.²¹ The Algerian *haïk* (the white body covering described by Fanon above), applies then only to women in urban centers. What Fanon has said of masculine garb could also be said of Algerian feminine dress: it undergoes regional modifications, allowing "a certain margin of choice, a modicum of heterogeneity."²² Why, then, the homogeneity in colonial perceptions of and reactions to the veil? What remains in question throughout Fanon's essay, despite the explanations that he gives, is why it is the veiled Muslim woman in particular who becomes the focus of the colonizer's cultural attack. Fanon does, however, provide hints, which I will use to construct an answer.²³

For this, we must scrutinize the *visibility* of the veil. Fanon's description of the colonial perception (or representation) of Muslim women is rendered in terms of the visibility and invisibility that the veil—as a material and symbolic sign of cultural difference and barrier to possessive vision—operates for the colonizer. Fanon begins: "The way people clothe themselves, together with the traditions of dress and finery that custom implies, constitutes the most distinctive form of a society's uniqueness, that is to say the one that is

most immediately perceptible."²⁴ What is most visible is thus essentialized as the marker of a society's difference. But most visible to whom? As Fanon writes, "In the Arab world, for example, the veil worn by women is at once noticed by the tourist. . . . For the tourist and foreigner, the veil demarcates both Algerian society and its feminine component."²⁵ Fanon explicitly inscribes the seer—an outsider, tourist, Western subject—in this perception. Visibility/invisibility are not in themselves properties of objects but are meaningful only relative to the position of the seer, to a desire to see and a way of looking.²⁶ The perception of the veil is no innocent seeing, but a gaze made possible by a world order where Western subjects can travel to, reside in, and "observe" Algeria.²⁷

In answer to the question of why it is the veil that becomes the "essential" marker of Algerian cultural or Islamic difference, we then have the response that it is the most visible feature of that society. Why it is so visible, however, brings us to the already constituted field of vision of the Western observer. This field of vision has been structured by colonization, overdetermined by the colonial apparatus of knowledge and representation. As Fanon says: "It is on the basis of the analyses of sociologists and ethnologists that the specialists in so-called native affairs and heads of the Arab Bureaus coordinated their [policy with respect to the veil]."²⁸ Orientalist knowledge and media, "written accounts and photographic records or motion pictures," allow the Western subject to already know the colonized society before she or he has any direct contact with it.²⁹ This apparatus of representation, combined with economic and political hegemony, is the lens through which the Western observer sees Muslim society. We must turn to this lens, for, as I will try to show, the lens is in fact a mirror—a negative and distorting one.

To understand the mechanism of colonial or neocolonial representation whereby the veil becomes the essential marker of Muslim woman and of her culture's otherness, we must turn to Fanon's account of racialization in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Reading this together with "Algeria Unveiled" will allow us to see how the veiled woman is "othered" in the Western imaginary. Behind the visibility of the veil to the colonial and neocolonial regard, a process is revealed that makes the veil differentially visible and overdetermines it with a particular negative sense. This is the mechanism of othering by which Muslim women are racialized in the Western gaze. The attack on the veil is then not only the means by which the colonizer aims to destroy the colonized society; it is also the means by which colonial or neocolonial society constructs its self-representation, the counterimage or negative mirror image in which it perceives itself.

In chapter 6 of *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon describes the way in which the antiblack racism of white culture constitutes the "black" as other to the "white" self through a mechanism of projection or abjection. Here,

the undesirable alterity of the self is projected or transferred onto the other.³⁰ In this process of othering, both "white" and "black" identities are constructed, and though they are constituted relative to one another, these identities are taken to be mutually exclusive. Excluded from the "white" self are any perceived impurities, undesirable incongruities, and differences that may trouble its univocity, stability, and sameness. These qualities are projected onto the "other," now seen in these terms. Only through this exclusion, which operates to essentialize both black and white identities, can whiteness be seen as pure and unified, as a stable identity. The essentialist logic of racist society thus sees the relative constructs of "black" and "white" in absolute terms; it does this by naturalizing race as a property of the black, material body, and specifically of skin color. In this way, race becomes seen as a natural category and not as a historical construct; the mechanism by which "black" and "white" identities are produced is effaced. The seeming naturalness of these categories works to justify the very racist logic that produced them. The myth or representation of the "black" as naturally inferior structures the visual field and overdetermines "normal" perception in racist society; "black" is seen as inferior and superiority, including moral superiority, is by default a characteristic of white identity.³¹ It is then, on Fanon's account, racist society that creates the "black" and, we can say, colonial or neocolonial society that creates the "native." As "other" in the Western imaginary, the black or native plays the role of "scapegoat" for the collective guilt of white society.³²

In "Algeria Unveiled," Fanon reveals a comparable racist logic in the French colonial representation of both Muslim men and women—though one that may be more accurately called cultural racism as we shall see later. The Muslim woman's condition is taken to be essentially conveyed by her veil, the material symbol of her oppression. As Fanon notes, the woman behind the veil is "pictured as humiliated, sequestered, cloistered . . . transformed by the Algerian man into an inert, demonized, indeed dehumanized object."³³ Thus, in a move that anticipates U.S. representations of Islamic fundamentalism, the Muslim man is "denounced and described as medieval and barbaric."³⁴ His resistance to "liberating" colonial policies is "attributed to religious, magical, fanatical behavior," to an "Islam" that is posited in opposition to Western culture and values.³⁵ The othering of Muslim society extends to the characterization of its family life, seen as secluding the woman in the home. Curiously, all these colonial representations can be seen to relate back to the Muslim woman and her veil. Muslim families, men, and women are defined relative to the veil—and to its associated connotations of seclusion, oppression, invisibility, and lack of subjectivity. The man is he who imposes the veil to "keep [women] out of sight";³⁶ the family and home are the prisons where she hides or abides; and the Muslim woman is "she who hides behind a veil."³⁷ In these representations we see

the identification of Muslim society with woman and of woman with her veil, itself overdetermined as oppressive.

To turn to the more recent U.S. “war on terrorism” and the rhetoric employed to justify the war in Afghanistan in particular, a similar focus on the veil (here *burqa*) can be discerned. Here, the image of the veil allows the demarcation of Islamic otherness in a visible and immediately identifiable form. By functioning as a metonym at once for Islam and for the oppression of women, the representation of the veil produces a slippage between these two concepts, making the identification of Islam with “fundamentalism” possible. It should be noted that “fundamentalism” is an amorphous and ill-defined term.³⁸ As Charles Hirschkind and Saba Mahmood have shown, the trope of “Islamic fundamentalism” collapses disparate currents of Islam into a “singular socio-religious formation.”³⁹ This reductive schema crystallizes around certain stereotypical images, notably the image of the veiled Muslim woman.⁴⁰ This image, I claim, works in large part to provide “Islamic fundamentalism” with a particular (negative) affective and moral sense, despite the difficulty of defining the term. At the same time, since the representation of the veil is largely homogeneous—lacking in historical, contextual, or lived specificity—the amalgamation of fundamentalism to Islam more generally is supported by the image itself. Although arguably the term “fundamentalist” is supposed to designate only regressive or traditional versions of Islam, it is *only* in the context of Islam that forms of extremism so clearly oppressive to women are *represented* as developing.⁴¹ The implication is that such fundamentalism and oppression are natural developments of this religion (unless safeguards are put in place and “progressive” forces encouraged by the West).

It should be noted that this construction of “Islamic fundamentalism”—and the image of the veil that in part constitutes it—plays a more complex role in U.S. self-representation than is at first visible. Once this Islamic otherness is rigidly defined, a cohesive sense of U.S. nationalism can be posited as desirable. Repeating the racist logic that Fanon discovered in French representations of Algeria, U.S. nationalism is here oppositionally defined in relation to an abjected other. The rigid disidentification with this other allows the borders of “Americanness” to be drawn. A striking example of this imaginative exclusion can be found in Laura Bush’s radio address of November 17, 2001: the “blessings of American life,” its desirability, are evoked largely by means of the contrast with the “brutal oppression of women” and inhumanity of “the terrorists and the Taliban,” seen as incapable of loving their “women and children.” It is significant here that the evocation of “Americanness” is gendered. The way that gender functions within the self-presentations of U.S. nationalism and colonialism requires us to look more closely at the role of the veiled Muslim woman as foil.

What I want to suggest, going beyond Fanon’s analysis of othering, is that the Western representation of the Muslim woman is not posited in the same way as that of the Muslim man, nor is it a symmetrical representation. Though both are racialized, the othering undergone by the “veiled woman” is what Mohja Kahf calls a “double othering.”⁴² This means that our analysis must extend to include other subject positions, so far invisible, specifically that of the “Western” or U.S. woman. For the “veiled woman” is not only the other to Western man, but also to Western woman.

In this regard, the colonial and neocolonial use of feminist discourse to justify its project needs to be scrutinized. The British colonial construction of the “Woman Question” has been described by Leila Ahmed in the context of the discourse on the veil in Egypt in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁴³ Ahmed points out that it is in the colonial context that “the issue of women emerged . . . as the centerpiece of the Western narrative of Islam.”⁴⁴ The way in which colonial rhetoric combines the discourses of orientalism and, ironically, of feminism leads to a conflation of other women and their cultures; more specifically, a conflation of the colonial representation of other women as oppressed and their culture. As Ahmed notes, “The idea that Other men, men in colonized societies or societies beyond the borders of the civilized West, oppressed women was to be used, in the rhetoric of colonialism, to render morally justifiable its project of undermining or eradicating the cultures of colonized peoples.”⁴⁵ This is what Fanon observed in the case of French colonial policies in Algeria and what we can see repeated in U.S. representations of Islamic fundamentalism/terrorism/the Taliban.⁴⁶

Key to this “colonial-feminist” discourse is the representation of the colonized society as essentially inferior *because* it oppresses women—hence the purported aim of liberating or saving these women, an aim that can only be achieved by destroying their culture.⁴⁷ The implied thesis is that only in a Western or Westernized (read: civilized, liberal, enlightened, open) culture can women be truly free. That this is the implied thesis tells us that the “colonial-feminist” discourse—and its contemporary neocolonial U.S. counterpart—have another purpose. The moral justification that this discourse seeks to impart is not limited to the colonial or neocolonial project abroad but extends to a justification of patriarchal constructions of gender in the home society. This discourse serves simultaneously to normalize the position of women in the home society, to construct other societies as inferior, and to justify the colonial or neocolonial domination of those societies in the name of civilization, progress, and the liberation of women—hence the triple function of this discourse: patriarchal, orientalist, and colonialist. It is in this way that the identification of Muslim society with the veil, overdetermined as the symbol of women’s oppression, can be understood. Given this framework, it should not be surprising that the United

Stares' rhetoric of freedom maintains the same apparent contradiction with respect to gender relations that one finds in the discourses of many former colonial powers. U.S. nationalist discourse can at once uphold patriarchal structures at home while invoking the freedom of other women as a reason for intervention abroad. In this sense, U.S. nationalism is a gendered project that is constructed through the racialization of other cultures, as we shall see.

We are now a step closer to understanding why it is the veiled Muslim woman who is the focus of the Western rhetoric of freedom, whether in the case of French and British colonialism or U.S. neocolonialism. But what, specifically, is the role of the image of the "veiled woman" in the Western imaginary? In her book, *Western Representations of the Muslim Woman*, Mohja Kahf argues that the Western representation of the "Muslim woman" is posited as a counterimage to the ideal of Western woman (itself also a representation). She is hence able to trace historical changes in this image that mirror shifting Western norms of femininity and gender.⁴⁸ Most importantly, Kahf shows that this image is formed at the intersection of two discourses of Western cultural history, "the discourse on Islam and the discourse on gender."⁴⁹ The image of the Muslim woman is hence constituted both in terms of the West's relation to Islam, its self-definition in connection to Islam, and in terms of the Western construction of "woman," the West's self-definition in terms of particular gender norms. Crucial to my reading of Kahf is that these discourses do not merely intersect—as if each were articulated separately and came into contact with the other only provisionally—but mutually support and define one another. As such, the Muslim woman is doubly othered in the Western imaginary; she is constructed at once as "woman" and "Muslim." This complex difference means that the veiled woman is the symbol of an "Islamic [feminine] otherness," whose role is to allow a certain representation of "woman" to be posited in the Western imaginary as desirable, normal, and ideal.⁵⁰

Reading Kahf in conjunction with Fanon, we can extend our understanding of this "double othering" further. The veiled woman, as I mentioned, is "othered" relative to the Western woman. The double othering of the veiled woman hence presupposes another othering, that of the "Western woman" constructed as the gendered other within Western patriarchal society. This "other within" is, however, posited in opposition to an "other without"—to the representation of the veiled Muslim woman (who, though she may in fact be living within Western society, is imaginatively projected as external to it, as belonging to a different and alien Muslim society).⁵¹ This other woman is then not only a gendered but also a racialized other. The process of double othering, in fact, puts both Western and Muslim woman in their peculiar places, as other within and other

without. The relative subject-positions constituted in this way involve complex differentiations that need to be unraveled.

To adopt Fanon's framework from *Black Skin, White Masks*, we could say that it is the undesirable alterity in woman that is projected onto the "veiled woman." This projection or abjection thereby constitutes the identity of "Western woman" as a unified and pure ideal. But since Western woman has already herself been othered, I believe a further process is at play. Projected onto the "veiled woman" is not simply what is undesirable in femininity from the patriarchal perspective, that is, what is excluded from the norm of womanhood, but also, I argue, the mechanism of gender oppression of patriarchy itself. This is significant and helps explain the positive valence of the norm of "Western woman" so constructed. Here, we have a constitution that takes place on two levels. There is the constitution of the patriarchal norm of woman with particular qualities (e.g., a particular construction of a "liberated" female sexuality and body), seen in negative form in the image of the Muslim woman (e.g., seen as suffering from an overly modest, hidden, and imprisoned sexuality).⁵² At the same time, all the weight of the process of gender othering or domination, the very mechanism that sets up the norm of woman, is projected onto the shoulders of the Muslim woman, and specifically onto her veil. This racialization of the veil renders it hypervisible. It is in this way that it becomes the most visible marker of Muslim society in Western eyes, for the veil is seen as the symbol of the gender oppression of that society. Focus on the veil deflects attention away from the patriarchal structures of Western society itself. But, more than this, it hides the othering mechanism that characterizes the subject-position of Western woman and it fosters the impression that this subject-position is not itself problematic or socially controlled, that is, that Western woman is "free."

A representation of Western womanhood is thus constructed as desirable for women in general, as an ideal that solicits women's complicity. Indeed, this representation is presented as desirable for other women as well (hence the colonizer's or occupier's belief that native women will welcome him).⁵³ This is because the ideal of Western woman implicitly excludes her gender oppression at the same time as it repeats features of the Western norm of femininity that are oppressive. This paradoxical and complex mixture of features—at once normalizing the patriarchal definition of woman and idealizing it as what women, including other women, would want and reclaim—reflects the subversion of feminism by orientalist and neocolonial discourse. As in the U.S. rhetoric of freedom, combining a feminist discourse of liberation in regard to "other women" with an implicit (or even declared) patriarchal attitude to women at home is possible, since these attitudes mutually support one another.⁵⁴ This is because the representations of the United States or "Western" woman and

the “veiled woman” are implicitly constructed relative to one another; the veiled woman is criticized and saved in the name of (Western) woman, while the norm of Western femininity is posited in opposition to the veiled woman. This ultimately means that the subject-position assigned to Western woman is one where she can see herself as free, or as becoming free, only to the degree that she sees other women as oppressed—that is, to the degree that she accepts the “othering” of veiled Muslim women. She must accept her Western society as the only potential place where freedom can be actualized.

The subject-positions of Muslim women are marked by an even more paradoxical construction. As the abjected other to Western woman, her double othering can be understood in an additional way: it is not only the colonizer who seeks to save her, but also Western women. From the colonial-feminist perspective, the veiled woman can only become “free” by casting off her veil (and her society), that is, by accepting the ideal of Western womanhood, by becoming “Westernized.” But her attempt to pass as Western will encounter limitations, for the subject-position of the Muslim woman remains marked by otherness, allowing for continued paternalism in her regard. Significantly, the discursive position from which the unveiled Muslim woman can speak about her culture is scripted in advance: as “escapee” of her religion or culture, she is expected to speak for its victims; if she argues for a more complex position, she is seen as a “pawn” still in its grips.⁵⁵ As for the subject-position of the veiled woman, she is denied individuality and voice in the colonial and neocolonial imaginary, even in relative terms. While the veil becomes hypervisible, Muslim women are posited as invisible, passive, and anonymous, as oppressed almost to the point of lacking subjectivity behind their veils. A marked example of this is the description in the U.S. press of burqa-clad Afghan women as “downtrodden ghosts.”⁵⁶

Significantly, this places Western and Muslim women in opposed, asymmetrical, and nonreciprocal subject-positions—even though their identities are constructed relative to one another. This exclusion means that commonalities between women and between societies are hidden from view. In particular, it obscures the recognition that what we may have to deal with are differently structured patriarchies with different complex specificities.⁵⁷ The nonreciprocity of Western and veiled women’s subject-positions within the Western imaginary means that the “Islamic” difference of the veiled woman takes on an absolute sense and precludes the possibility of her being seen otherwise. Once the attribute of being “veiled” is attached to woman, her commonality with Western woman is severed. This exclusion also means that the identity of Western woman can be posited in an unproblematized and seemingly stable way—that the tension and othering, which we have seen are part of this identity, can be effaced.

The racialization of veiled Muslim women hence sustains and stabilizes gender dichotomies in the West—rendering them seemingly innocuous and “natural” to the subjects constituted therein.

The U.S. context provides a striking example of how gender, race, and culture are put in play in service of a neocolonial and nationalist project. Here, a gendered construction of the nation is made possible through the racialization of Islam as other. U.S. (read: Western and white) constructions of gender and family are normalized by eliding the mechanisms of gender oppression at work within U.S. society. This society is represented either as having already attained gender equality, or as the perfectible ground for such equality, the terrain for freedom; in contrast, Muslim cultures are conceived as stagnant and closed, repeating the same fixed patterns of gender oppression (continually reinvented in the ahistorical image of the veil).⁵⁸ Curiously, U.S. gender roles are understood as unoppressive and hence go unremarked (even though there is no question of eliminating gender altogether), yet signs of gender difference (e.g., veiling) are seen as oppressive when they belong to Muslim cultures. This representational contrast allows moral superiority and emotional content to be ascribed to a U.S. nationalism that is otherwise only vaguely defined, while at once justifying the neocolonial project with respect to certain Muslim countries. In this sense, the presentation of “Islamic fundamentalism” as oppressive to women and hence rigidly other—as a practice with which “free” subjects and women in particular would disidentify—works implicitly to sustain the call for a cohesive identification with “Americanness” as liberatory.

What is noteworthy in both the United States and the colonial rhetoric of freedom is that racialization proceeds by way of gender and is not immediately visible as “biological” or color racism. Rather, it takes the form of what I argue is “cultural racism.” What is differentially visible is not race or skin color as such, but culture—defined largely through the perceived presence of gender oppression (ostensibly embodied in veiling practices). Since the hypervisibility of the veil is configured as gender oppression, the racism that structures this perception is covered over by the manifest anti-sexist and feminist concern for the freedom of Muslim women. It is this imbrication of racism with gender that confronts U.S. feminists with an apparent dilemma in the case of the veil.⁵⁹ It has been my aim to show that the rhetoric of freedom, which poses such a dilemma, not only perpetuates a paternalistic attitude toward Muslim women but also reinforces blindness to gender oppression in the context of the United States. The politics it inscribes is hence not only racist, but, I would add, antifeminist.

As with the mechanism of racialization described by Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks*, Islamic otherness is here essentialized. Islam, as we have seen, is represented as essentially oppressive to women and thus essentially inferior. This essentialist logic has as its focus the veil. Islamic difference, its

perceived oppression of women, is projected as a property of the material piece of clothing, the “veil.” This defines a *cultural racism* that, it has been argued, is continuous with color racism.⁶⁰ Though differences clearly exist in how “race” is understood or seen in each case—whether as biological inheritance or as cultural genealogy and belonging—it is important to note that bodily difference plays a role in both cases. Cultural racism is not merely intolerance of the “spirit” of another culture; it is directed at bodies, which this racist vision materially inscribes and perceives as culturally different. This racism naturalizes cultural difference to visible features of the body, including clothing, hence the backward belief that it is the ostensible visibility of bodily difference, in this case veiling, that “causes” racist reactions in Western societies.⁶¹ To imply that the solution to this racism is to forcibly or voluntarily change one’s clothing, so as to dissipate racist attitudes, is both to elide the way in which clothing functions as an integrated part of one’s lived sense of bodily space and also to misconceive the kind of racism involved.

Clothing is often seen as an artificial envelope that can be removed to reveal a “natural,” biological body. What is missed in such a picture is the way in which clothing constitutes a bodily extension that cannot be removed without transforming one’s lived sense of embodiment. As phenomenologists such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty have shown, clothing, through habituation, is no longer seen as an object apart from the body, but comes to form an integrated part of one’s body schema. Bodily extensions (which include articles of clothing but also tools) become themselves dimensions through which the subject perceives and interacts with the world and others.⁶² Crucial for my argument, such extensions affectively and kinaesthetically transform and recast one’s sense of bodily space (as well as one’s body image). The limits of my body are felt not at the skin, but at the surface and edges of the clothing I wear, redefining my sense of “here.”⁶³ In navigating my surroundings, it is in terms of this “here” that a sense of “there,” an external space, is configured. Though I do not mean to reduce veiling to a simple article of clothing—since it takes part in subject-formation in arguably more complex ways, at once spiritual, religious, conventional and cultural—both veiling and clothing more generally must be understood as more than mere superficial “cover.” None of this is to imply an essentialist or static view of veiling, or to assign a univocal meaning to veiling experiences. What I mean to point out are the ways in which veiling can be formative of a bodily sense of self, so that instead of being liberatory, unveiling comes to be experienced as bodily disintegration and immobilization.⁶⁴

In addition, the recommendation that Muslim women unveil in order to eliminate the reactions of intolerance directed against them misconstrues the kind of racism involved. In cultural racism, culture becomes

nature. The veil is seen as both a marker of Muslim culture and an explanation of its inferiority, just as, in color racism, skin color is seen as the site of racial difference and biological determinism. Bodies are not only perceived as belonging to a different culture; they are also seen as culturally determined and inferior as a result.⁶⁵ In the sense in which culture is seen as nature, it is not merely the veil but the veiled body as a whole that is racialized⁶⁶—along with any phenotypical differences that would otherwise have been seen as indifferent but that are in this way overdetermined. Phenotypical difference plays a supporting role in the racialization of veiled women. It is no coincidence that the image of the veiled Muslim woman is also of a “nonwhite” woman, and that “white” women who choose to veil pose a problem for the Western imaginary.⁶⁷ Moreover, culture becomes nature, since the determinism that characterizes cultural racism implies a definition of the other culture or religion (here Islam) as static, closed, and incapable of progress—in contrast to Western societies that are understood to be “open” and hence perfectible, to be spaces that enable, rather than determine and limit, individual expression and clothing choices. It is in terms of such cultural racism that the United States’ rhetoric with respect to the “liberation” of Muslim women can be understood as continuous with colonial discourses on the veil.⁶⁸

I have argued that the conception of “freedom,” held open to Western women, is dependent on the counterimage of the veiled Muslim woman as oppressed. Given this distorting play of mirrors, what can we as feminists do? It seems simple enough to point out that oppression is not intrinsic to veiling, that gender cannot be understood univocally, and that relations of gender and veiling have had multiple historically and culturally differentiated forms. The perception of veiling as synonymous with gender oppression (and unveiling with freedom) has roots in Western constructions of freedom and gender that result in a persistent disregard for such correctives. I want to suggest that there are no easy routes for feminist analysis or solidarity here, but that we should start with a form of bracketing (to borrow a method from phenomenology). What needs to be bracketed is the framework of freedom and oppression that prefigures the representation and knowledge of Muslim women. Such bracketing neither adopts nor rejects freedom as a category of analysis, but attempts to reveal the structures that motivate and sustain its normative force and the “natural” belief in it. Hence, the bracketing I propose questions the ways in which concepts of freedom, woman, Muslim, and Western are constructed. This translates into an initial hesitation, an impulse to listen rather than act.⁶⁹ This hesitation forms an antidote to the uncritical application of ready-made binaries (freedom-oppression, but also modernity-religion and West-Islam) to the lives of other women in feminist analysis.

A critique of representation of this sort admittedly risks becoming a narrative that is only about “the West,” perpetuating the exclusion already at work in that construct.⁷⁰ In contrast, by showing how what is so often presented as progressive and liberating for Muslim women in fact partakes of a colonial and paternalistic logic of representation, it is the aim of this chapter to open up feminist imagination. In its racialization of other cultures, U.S. rhetoric on freedom is not an isolated phenomenon. Indeed, colonial and imperialist feminist discourses perpetuate representations of Muslim women that posit Islam and feminism as mutually exclusive, silencing voices that blur these binaries (whether self-identified as Muslim and/or Western). Significantly, my hope is that the method of bracketing I propose can be useful in dispelling certain seemingly paralyzing dilemmas (in my view false) that confront feminists when it comes to Muslim women: in condemning the Taliban, should feminists support the United States’ war on Afghanistan? Does a commitment to gender equality imply advocating a law banning the Muslim veil in schools (as in France)?⁷¹ These questions only have a hold when the logic of representation that naturalizes oppression to the veil is left unquestioned. It allows such dilemmas to be posed without the difficult work of concrete communication, self-critical reflection, and attention to historical and contextual specificity being carried out. In contrast, the hesitation I propose is productive; it aims to destabilize representational frameworks that close down the imagination and limit the possibilities for feminist solidarity. The work of this chapter has been to make possible other ways of seeing ourselves and each other, Muslim and Western—different modes of understanding subjectivity and ways of thinking freedom.⁷² Such radical rethinking can only take place, I believe, once we understand the exclusions and blind spots upon which the United States, and more broadly Western, self-representation of freedom has been constructed and the misperceptions that it sustains.

Notes

I wish to acknowledge the support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and to thank Florentien Verhage for her research assistance for this chapter.

1. See Lila Abu-Lughod, “Saving Muslim Women or Standing with Them? On Images, Ethics, and War in Our Times,” *Insaniyaat*, 1, no. 1 (Spring 2003); available at <http://www.aucegypt.edu/academic/insanyat/issue%201/1-article.htm>. I should note that the rhetoric of “freedom” was used extensively with respect to Iraq, but applied mainly to “ethnic” populations (specifically Shi’a and Kurds). Although this meant that the war was not portrayed as a “feminist” cause (as Abu-Lughod observes), it

inscribed a paternalism with respect to Iraqi women (and Iraqis in general) that structured U.S. attitudes toward the war in implicitly gendered ways (as the personal example I will give illustrates).

2. The most memorable example of this appeal to the liberation of Afghan women on the part of the Bush administration can be found in Laura Bush’s delivery of her husband’s weekly radio address on November 17, 2001, more than a month after the beginning of the bombing of Afghanistan and the first time that a president’s entire radio address had been delivered by a first lady. But this justification of the war in Afghanistan can also be found interspersed in George W. Bush’s State of the Union Address in 2002. Cf. Dana L. Cloud’s analysis in “To Veil the Threat of Terror: Afghan Women and the <Clash of Civilizations> in the Imagery of the U.S. War on Terrorism,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 90, no. 3 (August 2004): 297–298.

3. See Sharon Lerner, “Feminists Agonize over War in Afghanistan,” *The Village Voice*, November 1, 2001. Lerner describes the war on Afghanistan as posing an “excruciating dilemma” for feminists. One aim of my chapter is to show how this dilemma is a false one. Once its gender politics are scrutinized, the U.S. war on Afghanistan is revealed as *antifeminist* (in line with other colonial and neocolonial interventions). For a summary of the campaign against the Taliban by the “Feminist Majority” and their stance with respect to the war in Afghanistan, see Charles Hirschkind and Saba Mahmood, “Feminism, the Taliban, and Politics of Counter-Insurgency,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 75, no. 2 (Spring 2002): 339–340.

4. I scrutinize this oppositional logic from the perspective of Western self-presentations that work by representing “Islam” as other. It can be argued that some Muslim and Arab nationalist self-definitions also make use of this logic in reaction to colonial and neocolonial policies, defining their societies as inherently “anti-Western.”

5. To draw on Marnia Lazreg’s argument in “The Triumphant Discourse of Global Feminism: Should Other Women be Known?” in *Going Global: The Transnational Reception of Third World Women Writers*, ed. Amal Amireh and Lisa Suhair Majaj (New York: Garland, 2000), 30–31.

6. I do not mean to imply that these are the only events around which Western, or United States, stereotypes of Islam and veiling have crystallized. The Iranian revolution and hostage crisis in 1979–1981 were also such events. See Edward Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (New York: Random House, 1981). Nor is it my contention that the relation between stereotypes and events is simply causal.

7. This is by far one of the least problematic questions I received. Others had to do with kinship relations, marriage customs, and their relation to veiling.

8. With all the pitfalls that such a speaking position implies. See Uma Narayan, *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third-World Feminism* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 142–149.

9. My reverse question about U.S. men and trousers usually provokes surprise, if not hostility, since it makes visible the conventional and culturally contextual character of what is a naturalized, gendered practice.

10. For the case of de-veiling in Iran, see Homa Hoodfar, “The Veil in Their Minds and On Our Heads: The Persistence of Colonial Images of Muslim Women,” *RFR/DFR* 22, no. 3/4 (1993): 5–18. Both the French and the British colonial manipulation of the question of the “veil” will be discussed later.

11. The law banning the wearing of “conspicuous” religious signs in public schools was passed in France on March 15, 2004. Both the debate leading up to the passage of the law and the majority of cases to which it has been applied have concerned girls wearing the “Islamic veil or head scarf” in schools. In Quebec, Canada, girls were banned from wearing the *hijab* (head scarf) during sports tournaments for purported safety reasons (soccer in February 2007 and Tae Kwon Do in April 2007), and a political controversy arose around women being allowed to wear the *niqab* (face veil) while voting (March–October 2007). Though the *hijab* has been permitted in public schools in Quebec since 1995 after a recommendation by the Quebec Human Rights Commission, the case of women employed in civil service or public administration, who wear the “veil,” has been a subject of debate during the hearings of the commission on “reasonable accommodations” in the province in 2007.

12. See Talal Asad on the “West” and “modernity” as political projects in *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 13–15.

13. As Mohja Kahf shows, the Western image of the Muslim woman as veiled and victimized is not timeless. Medieval images were quite different, representing her as termagant, aggressive, and transgressive. Kahf shows how the Western representation of the Muslim woman has changed, locating the appearance of the oppressed Muslim woman in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries’ discourses of orientalism and colonialism. See her *Western Representations of the Muslim Woman: From Termagant to Odalisque* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), 1–9.

14. Veiling practices are multiple and complex, with different names, forms, uses, and contextual, as well as individually varying, meanings. A nonexhaustive list would include *haïk* (Algeria), *chador* (Iran), *abaya* (Iraq), *burqa* (Afghanistan), *niqab* (face veil), and *hijab* (head scarf); these are materially and culturally different forms of veiling, some of which cover the whole body, others the face, and some only the head. For an analysis of the complexity and history of the term “hijab,” see Barbara

Freyer Stowasser, “The *Hijab*: How a Curtain Became an Institution and a Cultural Symbol,” in *Humanism, Culture, and Language in the Near East: Studies in Honor of Georg Krotkoff*, ed. Georg Krotkoff, Asma Af-saruddin, and A. H. Mathias Zahinsen (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 87–104. Today, the Arabic term “hijab” designates a piece of cloth that covers the hair and neck, though not the face.

15. Muslim women who do not veil, non-Muslim women who veil, masculine instances of veiling, and historically different representations of Muslim women—all constitute exceptions to the dominant image of the Muslim woman as veiled. When such exceptions are raised, however, the image can be stretched to accommodate them (even if sometimes stretched almost to its breaking point). For she who is Muslim but does not veil is represented as having *escaped* it. Non-Muslim women who wear an article of clothing materially similar to a veil are wearing “ethnic” dress and are thus not represented as wearing the same veil, the supposedly rigid and religiously mandated “Islamic veil.” And the veiling of men (e.g., the Tuareg) is construed as originating for climatic and pragmatic reasons.

16. In Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, trans. Haakon Chevalier (New York: Grove Press, 1965). The French edition: *L’an V de la révolution algérienne* (Paris: La Découverte, 2001). Henceforth cited as *A Dying Colonialism*, followed by the English and the French page numbers, respectively.

17. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967).

18. Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, 37–38/19.

19. *Ibid.*, 37/18.

20. *Ibid.*, 36/17.

21. *Ibid.*, 36n/17n.

22. *Ibid.*, 36/17.

23. In taking up Fanon’s analysis in this way, I also mean to point to some of its shortcomings: most importantly to a certain elision of the complex difference that characterizes the position of the Muslim woman. Her role is too frequently reduced to her participation in national struggle in “Algeria Unveiled.” For example, though Fanon famously points to the historical dynamism of the veil, he presents this dynamism as limited to the context of colonialism and revolutionary struggle (*A Dying Colonialism*, 63/47). There is an ambiguity in Fanon’s account whereby precolonial Algeria is sometimes posited as the silent and static foil (or prehistory) in contrast to which revolutionary Algeria is defined as a historically dynamic and progressively liberatory society. An instance of this logic can be found in Fanon’s discussion of the Algerian woman prior to the revolution as a “minor,” in comparison to her revolutionary “entry into history” (“The Algerian Family,” *A Dying Colonialism*, 106–107/91–93).

24. Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, 35/16; emphasis added.
25. *Ibid.*, 35–36/16–17.
26. The veil is not visible for everyone, as Fanon points out. The Algerian, he says, does not see it. This is part of a differential way of seeing women that distinguishes the European from the Algerian in Fanon's essay (*A Dying Colonialism*, 44/26).
27. As Edward Said points out, "to reside in the Orient is to live the privileged life, not of an ordinary citizen, but of a representative European whose empire (French or British) *contains* the Orient in its military, economic, and above all, cultural arms." See Said's *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 1978), 156.
28. Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, 37/18.
29. *Ibid.*, 35/16.
30. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 190–191.
31. *Ibid.*, 194.
32. *Ibid.*
33. Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, 38/19.
34. *Ibid.*, 38/19.
35. *Ibid.*, 41/23.
36. *Ibid.*, 38/19.
37. *Ibid.*, 36/18.
38. Said, *Covering Islam*, xvi–xvii.
39. Hirschkind and Mahmood, "Feminism, the Taliban, and Politics of Counter-Insurgency," 348.
40. See Cloud's analysis of these images in "To Veil the Threat of Terror," 289–296.
41. Though she says "the terrorists and the Taliban," rather than "fundamentalism," Laura Bush's radio address of November 17, 2001, performs both moves. At once pointing to how other Muslims condemn the treatment of women under the Taliban, yet noting that "[o]nly the terrorists and the Taliban forbid education to women. Only the terrorists and the Taliban threaten to pull out women's fingernails for wearing nail polish." No comparison is possible to other forms of religious fundamentalism or "terrorism," and U.S. involvement in Afghanistan is elided. Rather, it is Islam who bears the guilt for this form of extremism.
42. Kahf, *Western Representations of the Muslim Woman*, 63.
43. Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 149–168.
44. *Ibid.*, 150.
45. *Ibid.*, 151.
46. Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, 37–38/19.
47. This discourse is of course in bad faith. As Ahmed shows with respect to the British in Egypt, the discourse on the liberation of women from

- the veil was accompanied by a curtailment of women's opportunities for education (*Women and Gender in Islam*, 152–53). I owe the term "colonial feminism" to Ahmed (*ibid.*, 151).
48. As well as the shifting relation of the West to Islam. See Kahf, *Western Representations of the Muslim Woman*, 7.
49. *Ibid.*, 9.
50. *Ibid.*, 163. This is a variant on what Chandra Talpade Mohanty has called the constitution of "third-world difference" that serves to produce the representation of "the third-world woman" as foil to that of Western woman. See her "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," in *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 22, 40–42.
51. Kahf, *Western Representations of the Muslim Woman*, 9.
52. As Fanon noted, the veil represents for the Western imaginary the "demonetized [*démonétisé*]" status of Muslim women, their removal from circulation (*A Dying Colonialism*, 38/19). That the freedom constructed as desirable is that of the free circulation, or sexual currency, of women's bodies helps explain some of the fascination with the veil in the Western imaginary. It is, however, not the whole story—as I try to show.
53. This can be seen in the colonial and neocolonial ideal of "*femmes dévoilées et complice de l'occupant*" (Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, 39/20).
54. It is thus not surprising that "a reversion to traditional gender roles" accompanies the rhetoric for the War in Afghanistan; cf. Lerner, "Feminists Agonize over War in Afghanistan."
55. For an elaboration of the roles into which Muslim women are constantly scripted in the Western imaginary—oppressed victim, pawn of her society, or escapee—see Mohja Kahf, "Packaging 'Huda': Sha'rawi's Memoirs in the United States Reception Environment," in *Going Global: The Transnational Reception of Third World Women Writers*, ed. Amal Amireh and Lisa Suhair Majaj (New York: Garland, 2000), 148–172.
56. Barry Bearak, "Kabul Retraces Steps to Life before Taliban," *New York Times*, December 2, 2001. For an analysis of this dehumanizing image of veiled women, see Kevin J. Ayotte and Mary E. Husain, "Securing Afghan Women: Neocolonialism, Epistemic Violence, and the Rhetoric of the Veil," *NWSA Journal* 17, no. 3 (Fall 2005): 119.
57. See Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 215. It is unclear whether using the term "patriarchy" is useful here; to be precise, I am not assuming a universal patriarchal schema.
58. See Lazreg, "The Triumphant Discourse of Global Feminism," 30–31.
59. For more on this dilemma in other Western contexts, see Hoodfar, "The Veil in Their Minds and on Our Heads," 13; and Christine Delphy,

“Antisexisme ou antiracisme? Un faux dilemme,” *Nouvelles Questions Feministes* 25, no. 1 (2006): 59–83.

60. Though these authors have different accounts of this continuity, see Etienne Balibar, “Is There a ‘Neo-Racism?’,” in *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London: Verso, 1991), 17–28; David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1993), 70–74; and Tariq Modood, “‘Difference’, Cultural Racism and Anti-Racism,” in *Race and Racism*, ed. Bernard Boxill (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2001), 238–256.

61. By naturalizing racist conduct toward, and intolerance of, other cultures, cultural racism according to Balibar displaces biologism one degree but does not eliminate it (“Is There a ‘Neo-Racism?’,” 26). The belief that it is the veil that provokes racism is widespread, and can be found in some feminist reactions, see, for example, Julia Kristeva, *Nations without Nationalism*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 36–37.

62. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), 143. Merleau-Ponty’s examples of bodily extensions include a woman’s hat and a blind man’s stick, as well as cars, typewriters, and musical instruments.

63. Lila Abu-Lughod’s description of veiling (specifically burqas) as “mobile homes” (drawing on Hanna Papanek’s term “portable seclusion”) seems particularly apt in this regard. See Abu-Lughod’s “Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others,” *American Anthropologist* 104, no. 3 (2002): 785.

64. Frantz Fanon and Homa Hoodfar have pointed to the immobilizing effects of de-veiling on previously veiled women. See Hoodfar’s description of her grandmother’s experience in the context of compulsory de-veiling in the 1930s in Iran in her “The Veil in Their Minds and on Our Heads,” 10–11. For Fanon’s description of Algerian women’s unveiling in the context of revolutionary struggle, see *A Dying Colonialism*, 59/42.

65. Balibar, “Is There a ‘Neo-Racism?’,” 22.

66. The racialized construction of the veil, as univocally oppressive, means that veiled bodies are objectified and perceived to be passively determined by their culture. This racializing perception covers over the heterogeneity and dynamism that lived senses of veiling—such as those described in the previous paragraph—can take.

67. This needs to be examined further. For Tariq Modood, for instance, cultural racism is a distinctive phenomenon that relies on and adds to color racism. It is the racialization of “non-Whites” based on cultural difference. But Modood takes the term “non-White” to be evident. Though he shows how cultural difference renders one less “White,” he does not address how “Whiteness” is already defined in opposition to

other cultures, as well as “races,” and hence cannot be understood to be a neutral, phenotypical given. See his “‘Difference’, Cultural Racism and Anti-Racism,” 247–249, 252. Though beyond the scope of this chapter, I want to imply that cultural racism is already at work in the definition of “Whiteness” as it is in the understanding of “Western.”

68. In other words, this racism is not new; Balibar, “Is There a ‘Neo-Racism?’,” 23–24; Goldberg, *Racist Culture*, 70–71.

69. For more on hesitation as an initial strategy, see Linda Alcoff, “The Problem of Speaking for Others,” *Cultural Critique* 20 (Winter 1991–1992): 24.

70. This chapter only begins this bracketing. To the degree that it remains at the level of Western representation, it shows how other ways of being are systematically and structurally misperceived; it does not describe how representations may be internalized and lived differently, or what experiences escape them. As such, it necessarily calls for further work. See Narayan, *Dislocating Cultures*, 137–138.

71. See Christine Delphy on the paralyzing effects of this dilemma on French feminists (“Antisexisme ou antiracisme?,” 60–61).

72. Notably, Saba Mahmood’s nuanced anthropological study of the women’s mosque movement in contemporary Egypt, in her book *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), attempts just this: to challenge the normative framework of freedom that univocally constructs “Muslim women” as oppressed and to open up alternative ways for conceiving subject formation (by examining the “architectures of the self” that are concretely embodied in the lives of particular women, without assuming “Muslim women” to be a homogeneous group).