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From Opposition to Creativity: Saba Mahmood's Decolonial Critique of Teleological Feminist Futures

Muhammad Velji (iD)

Department of Philosophy, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT, US
Email: muhammad.velji@gmail.com

Abstract

Saba Mahmood's anthropological work studies the gain in skills, agency, and capacity building by the women's *dawa* movement in Egypt. These women increase their virtue toward the goal of piety by following dominant, often patriarchal norms. Mahmood argues that "teleological feminism" ignores this gain in agency because this kind of feminism only focuses on opposition or resistance to these norms. In this paper I defend Mahmood's "anti-teleological" feminist work from criticisms that her project valorizes oppression and has no vision for a nonoppressive feminist future. I argue the future envisioned by teleological feminists gets caught in "the Hegelian" trap of replicating past oppression in their feminist future. I find in Mahmood's work the tools to escape this trap. I argue, rather than a movement of overcoming oppression, Mahmood's work suggests an immanent and creative movement that emphasizes difference for a truly new future. I turn to a Bergsonian metaphor and argue that this movement can be seen as akin to the movement of biological evolution. I conclude using the work of Eve Sedgwick that the Egyptian women that Mahmood studies are being read in a "paranoid" fashion and demonstrate using Leila Ahmed a better "reparative" reading of these women.

In the *Politics of piety*, anthropologist Saba Mahmood ostensibly provides us with an ethnography of the burgeoning women's *dawa* movement in Egypt. The *dawa* movement is comprised of veiled Muslim women who meet in various mosques and impart religious knowledge to each other. Like a community of practice, they also meet to share tips and tricks and affectively support each other to become more pious in everyday life. On the surface, this was a book about the mundane struggles and triumphs of these women accumulating new capacities, skills, habits, and affects toward their goal. But the *Politics of piety* is also a work of philosophical anthropology. The book was a provocation to feminism. It descriptively critiqued feminist methodology on how women should be studied in the Global South. Most provocatively it also critiqued the normative goals of feminism itself.

The methodological argument was that assumptions of the ideal of feminist agency were occluding important descriptive work (Mahmood 2005, 9–10). The second more confrontational claim was that agency only exists for feminism if the project opposed dominant, often patriarchal norms. When women are seen as following dominant norms, this was considered "bargaining with the patriarchy." Mahmood questions this assumption by asking, what if success means truly inhabiting these norms (Mahmood 2005, 15). Mahmood's famous example is of a piano player who must submit herself to the disciplines of how to play in order acquire the ability and agency to transform herself into a virtuoso (2005, 29). If we looked at these women through the framework of resistance to norms, we could not say they were gaining more freedom. But instead Mahmood's ethnographic work reveals these women's abilities growing through the self-transformative work on themselves with the *dawa* movement.

In this paper, I defend Mahmood by arguing that we should leave open the conceptual space in feminism for women to be involved in practices that aren't oppositional nor undermine dominant norms. Doing this has its own ethical and political advantages. Importantly, this is *not* a repudiation of resisting patriarchal norms nor am I claiming that inhabiting the norm is the *only* normatively good way to change practices.

I begin by illustrating the strong feminist reactions to Mahmood's arguments. Mahmood's claims set off a firestorm from what I call "teleological feminists." Her work is seen not only as a defense, but a valorization of the status quo of patriarchal domination. My intention is to defend Mahmood's work as embracing anti-teleological feminist futures. In the next section, I explain a worry with this idea of transcendent overcoming which I call the "Hegelian Trap." I also situate Mahmood's influences from new materialism as well as the Islamic feminist problem-space. I go on to advocate instead for an anti-teleological vision of feminist futures. I argue that a focus on immanent self and community transformation would lead to creative, contingent, unforeseen, and genuinely new norms. Next I make the idea of an anti-teleological feminist future more concrete through the metaphor of creative becoming from evolutionary biology. I then argue that teleological feminist criticism comes from the perspective of, what Eve Sedgwick calls, a "paranoid reading" of the *dawa* movement. I suggest instead a shift to a "reparative reading" of this movement. I conclude by laying out some virtues of a reparative reading through the example of Leila Ahmed's 20-year work with the first and second generation of women in the *dawa* movement.

Feminist worries about Mahmood's project

While Mahmood emphasizes the bodily and affective capacities that the women she studied were able to develop by inhabiting the norm, Rosa Vasilaki argues that Mahmood ignores the various ways that religious practices are *not enabling*. Vasilaki argues that on the contrary, religion is one of the central mechanisms of social reproduction (2015, 118).

Beyond this, there are many worries from feminists about detaching the analytical, descriptive part of feminist theory from the normative critique of practices. Without normative critique in the feminist arsenal, Bangstad argues that Mahmood's work just falls into relativism. This for Bangstad is Mahmood prioritizing forms of life over women's rights which make it hard to justify calling *any* practice oppressive (Bangstad 2011, 42–43). Concurring with Bangstad's analysis, Afiya Zia argues that

if these women subscribe to a traditional, patriarchal and conservative religious ethos, then why would they engage for changing the status quo by negotiating or demanding autonomy or independence? By definition, surely, women who adhere to male-interpreted, traditional or conservative interpretations of Islam and the prescribed forms of social roles and hierarchies of relationships would not aspire towards liberal goals … What are the emancipatory goals for these said aspirants of leadership if it is not equality, as described by supposedly Western feminism? (Zia 2019, 119)

Without critique and normative lines in the sand, this kind of project "risks the neutralization of critical social theory itself" (Vasilaki 2015, 106). This is because, for Vasilaki, the motor of feminist social change has always been oppositional consciousness (2015, 119).

This assumption about oppositional consciousness as the motor of social change undergirds the third further claim that, although "Mahmood pushes boundaries like no one else, the question is towards which direction?" (Vasilaki 2015, 118) and whether this improved understanding of piety will "further" or undermine feminism as an emancipatory movement. This question about the future weighs heavily on the critics of Mahmood. Bangstad argues that, once we have accepted Mahmood's normative conclusions about inhabiting the norm, it presents no way forward for any sustainable feminist politics (Bangstad 2011, 44). Sadia Abbas' criticism weaves together Mahmood's argument about enablement of agency through inhabiting a norm with feminism and futurity.

Increasingly, [in Mahmood's work] agency stands in for antiteleological history … It sanctions the present and justifies suffering … 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," (Abbas 2013, 187–88)

Abbas accuses Mahmood of a kind of Panglossian theodicy that threatens and stultifies the hope for a feminist future where there is less oppression. She does this by making current oppression perfectly fine and possibly even redeemable. Abbas contends that the real theodicy is this more teleological future time of less oppression. Normatively, only a future of less oppression should make sense of all the patriarchal suffering of women in history, not the anemic prize of "agency" in our present.

The Hegelian trap

Rather than seeing her own work as a break with feminist tradition, Mahmood describes her efforts as one in a long line of parochializing the universalized, naturalized, and dominant Western subject (Mahmood 2005, 180).[1] We cannot know what the ideal of agency is as a concept until we analyze the world empirically. Only then can we know a culture's specific modes of being, standards of responsibility, and what effective action means (Mahmood 2005, 186). We can see from this that, through ethnography, her aim is to frame agency as historical and culturally specific.

Since Mahmood explicitly places herself and her project in line with decolonial feminist work, it is worth examining this lineage of feminism. Decolonial feminism has

always had a non-teleological and capacious attitude towards the goals of feminism.[2] The work of Serene Khader provides us with a name for and the pathologies of assuming a singular, teleological endpoint for feminism: "justice monism." This is the belief that gender justice could only manifest itself through a Western instantiation (Khader 2019, 22). It is an inability to see other ways of life as good, it confuses "difference with deprivation" (Khader 2011, 12). Justice as a general concept can instantiate in many cultural forms, not just one. In her book, *Decolonizing universalism,* Khader argues that one of the problems with what she calls Strong Idealism is that it ends up manifesting as Enlightenment teleology. In the Western social imaginary, utopia will look like Western Enlightenment Europe/North American culture. This is a kind of "transcendental institutionalism" where we assume that there is only one possible sort of just social arrangement (2019, 30). The way, according to Khader, to avoid this is to leave open "the possibility that multiple culturally specific ways of living gender, could embody gender justice" (Khader 2019, 38).

Having a fixed, teleological vision of the ideal feminist future could fuse contemporary oppressive assumptions permanently to our frameworks of thought. This should worry us because the colonial outlook is still deeply rooted in our present frameworks of thinking. This outlook can creep into not only how feminists achieve their goals, but what goals they strive for. Decolonial feminist historian Emma Pérez argues that the Mexican American project is trapped in the transcendental, Hegelian notion of becoming. This notion of becoming and the attempt to oppose this by Chicana feminists has led not to a dialectical overcoming, but instead a movement turning in circles. The simple binary of opposition to dominant norms has not rid that movement of the shadow of the colonial imaginary (Pérez 1999, 20). Taking up Foucault's anti-teleological work rather than Marx's Hegelian inspired dialectics,[3] Pérez declares that, rather than move in opposing directions, "perhaps our only hope is to move in many directions" (Pérez 1999, 20). In the rest of this section, I unpack Pérez's criticism of the Hegelian notion of becoming. Pérez proposes moving "in many directions" and I use the rest of this section to explain what this solution means.

Getting out of an oppressive norm does not just involve no longer doing what the oppressive norm prescribes. Oppressive norms seem to give a normative "directional" instruction toward what good norms are. The path toward good norms is in the opposite direction of the oppressive norm. There can be good reasons for doing this. Heading in the opposite direction of an oppressive norm guarantees that we do not fall back into what was oppressive about the norm we are opposing. This is because we are always headed "away" from the oppressive norm. For some in a more revolutionary bent, moving directly opposite a bad norm can lead to a definitive break, such that we may be free of the influence of that bad norm. But this can lead to what I call the "Hegelian trap." In opposing something and taking one's normative direction *only* from opposing something, this traps us into replicating assumptions and taking up parts of what is oppressive into one's opposition of it.

Hegel argued that overcoming historical problems always involves a "determinate negative." This is a productive opposition that both erases the "bad stuff" that was being opposed but also preserves the best content from the opposing position.[4] Hegel's work, particularly the *Phenomenology of spirit*, is a series of positive elaborations of normative ways of living, their failures when lived practically and then as a response to this failure, normatively living in the opposite way and failing again. Taken as a whole, it is a theodicy of history where all the failure is redeemed. Our history is redeemed because we as a society learned from these failures. Failure educates us

and so we overcame each failure and progress teleologically in each overcoming. Looking back on these failures, the positive aspect of opposition is conserved which becomes a permanent, diachronic record of everything we learned.

There are two things for Hegel that guarantee that this oppositional movement is a normatively good method that spirals away from injustice. First, that in actuality, we really are progressing ethically. Secondly, that what is conserved in the act of determinate negation is *only* the good stuff. The work that opposition does is of slowly but surely eliminating all the bad stuff. The view we get of the dialectic is from the view of the absolute, when every failure is overcome. In completely exhausting all normative failure, this absolute arranges the past elegantly as a theodicy. All that failure is completely redeemed in the end because we ended our journey at the absolute. The past is arranged completely rationally. Through the experience of failing, as it is happening, we might consider this as an immanent and contingent journey. But because of the importance of the theodicy and therefore the need to end up at the absolute, a strong, transcendent teleology becomes involved in Hegel's method. Craig Lundy points out that this teleological structure forecloses a future that is truly different from our troubled, oppressive past. Any newness and contingency in Hegel's project is what Lundy calls a "retrospective contingency" (Lundy 2016, 52). Going back to the more concrete criticisms of Mahmood, part of the Hegelian trap is that from the teleological standpoint of the feminist goal of gender abolition, every overcoming until that goal was merely an underdeveloped version of the final form. If it is true that only the "good stuff" is taken up when we overcome the past, then the circles we travel are like a spiral staircase that reaches the top floor of the absolute. But if oppression continues to haunt every overcoming, we get the unending circles that Pérez worries that Mexican feminist movements are trapped in.

My claim is that we fall into the Hegelian trap if what we oppose not only takes up and conserves the good stuff, but also preserves bad things. This often happens behind our back, such that we don't even know that we continue to be "haunted" by the problems of our past. As Wendy Brown argues, when we use only oppositional solutions for our contemporary problems, these solutions "frequently recycle and reinstate rather than transform the terms of domination that generated them … Such images of freedom perform mirror reversals of suffering without transforming the organization of the activity" (Brown 1995, 7).[5]

Mahmood's work is in line with other anti-Hegelian, anti-teleological work. Mahmood explicitly cites her theoretic lineage: Spinoza, Bergson, Merleau-Ponty, the later work of Foucault and Deleuze, as well as more contemporary new materialists such as William Connolly, Elizabeth Grosz, Brian Massumi, and of course Talal Asad (2005, 203).[6] Anti-Hegelianism has prompted a number of thinkers to turn to these philosophical figures in order to find new ways to think of difference in a non-oppositional manner. In doing this, difference can be truly different, rather than being haunted by those things that we want to be different from. But in embracing true difference, we must risk not knowing how our goals will change in the future. Craig Lundy contrasts Hegel's "retrospective contingency" that forecloses true difference with Bergson and Deleuzes' "continual contingency." Continual contingency can be described as a heterogenous multiplicity (Lundy 2016, 71) that carries the promise of "unforeseeable creativity" (Lundy 2016, 52). As Elizabeth Grosz argues, if we only keep this oppositional, negative concept as our solution to problems, then we remain tied to the options or alternatives provided by the present and its prevailing and admittedly limiting forces, instead of accessing and opening up the present to the invention of the new (Grosz 2010, 141).

Before moving on, I think it is important to note that Mahmood does briefly address oppositional practices. I think this is consistent with the kind of argument that I elucidate in this paper. Mahmood evades making concrete in advance both what oppression looks like and what normative strategies against it should be followed. This is because, as she argues, the conditional possibility for "any social and political transformation is always a function of local, contingent, and emplaced struggles whose blueprint cannot be worked out or predicted in advance" (Mahmood 2005, 36). For Mahmood, resisting or subverting a norm is contingent but also immanent to the situation rather than universal and general. Without the proper ethnographic work, we cannot know what actions will be taken as subversion without the cultural understanding to read it as subversive (Mahmood 2005, 167). Yet even subversion and resistance is conditional on the kind of self-transformation and agency she observes in the *dawa* movement:

> the mosque participants regard both compliance to and *rebellion against* norms as dependent upon the teachability of the body … such that both virtuous and unvirtuous dispositions are necessarily learned. This means that the possibility for disrupting the structural stability of norms depends upon *literally* retutoring the body rather than on [as Judith Butler holds] destabilizing the referential structure of the sign, or, for that matter, positing an alternative representational logic that challenges masculinist readings of feminine corporeality. (Mahmood 2005, 166)

The Islamic feminist problem-space

In the previous section, we looked at the new materialist conceptual tools of creativity rather than opposition that Saba Mahmood used to go beyond the Hegelian trap. In this section I explore the Islamic feminist "problem-space" to see both the full picture of the historical conversation Mahmood was participating in as well as the material conditions that contoured Mahmood's response. David Scott defines a problem-space as the material and ideal contexts of the arguments going around at a certain time in history. A kind of conceptual and discursive condition of possibility, that while not determining a response, *solicits* a certain type of answer, since "the way one defines an alternative depends on the way one has conceived the problem" (2004, 6).[7] As Scott argues, "problem-spaces alter historically because problems are not timeless … In new historical conditions old questions may lose their salience, their bite, and so lead the range of old answers that once attached to them to appear lifeless, quaint, not so much wrong as irrelevant" (2004, 4).

By the early 2000s, when Mahmood was writing *Politics of piety*, the agenda of this problem-space had already been set by the previous generation of Islamic feminists. These included thinkers such as Amina Wadud, Asma Barlas, Margot Badran, Leila Ahmed, Fatema Mernissi, Ziba Mir-Hosseini, and Lila Abu-Lughod. At the time, a successive generation of Islamic feminists was taking up and responding to this foundational group. To fully understand the moves that Mahmood makes and see them as emanating from an Islamic feminist problem-space, we need to briefly explore three theoretical obstacles that defined it. The first is the looming worry of colonial feminism, secondly the uneasy relationship of Muslim feminists to the concept of "feminism" itself, and thirdly the double binds that trap Islamic feminists. I conclude this section by looking at Mahmood's debt to Abu-Lughod and the conceptual move to "creativity" as a response to the Islamic feminist problem-space.

We have to start with the acknowledgment that Mahmood's work would not have been such a lightning-rod without 9/11. The event of those terrorist attacks and Western response to it exacerbated the relevance of the Islamic feminist problem-space.

Colonial feminism looks at colonized societies through the reductive lens of culture and religion to accuse these societies of patriarchy. In doing this, it excuses imperialist incursions in the name of freedom. Leila Ahmed gives the case of nineteenth-century Christian missionary women along with the British governor Lord Cromer. Both decried the veiling of Egyptian women yet condemned the suffragists back home in England (Ahmed 1992).[8] This history has always focused on what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak famously argued was "saving brown women from brown men" (1999, 287).[9]

Susan Okin infamously makes explicit the assumptions behind colonial feminism: that there is a hierarchy where colonial countries are seen as free and colonized places are patriarchal. The question, *Is multiculturalism bad for women,* can only be asked if it is assumed, like Okin does, that "while virtually all of the world's cultures have distinctly patriarchal pasts … Western liberal cultures—have departed far further from them than others" (1999, 16). But as Lena Salaymeh argues, "the notion that one society is more patriarchal than another is not a descriptive observation; rather, it is an ideological claim" (2021, 311). This is not just about feminist hypocrisy, but productively shows how colonial history either occludes or makes certain ideas natural and beyond the pale of questioning for feminists. Looking at Mahmood's work, this attempt to look beyond resistance is a direct response to assumptions of colonial feminism.

For Mahmood, colonial feminism assumes that certain religions or cultures impede agency. The assumption is that, if we could eliminate this cultural influence on women (Okin 1999, 22) and return them to a "natural state" these women would pine for a certain manifestation of Western freedom such as fashionable skirts and not veils.[10] But these assumptions cannot for instance make sense of what has been called the "STEM Paradox." Women in Muslim-majority countries not only have numerical equality, but outnumber men in science and mathematical education as well as jobs. Meanwhile North American and Nordic countries continue to have a substantial gap of women in these fields. This is despite billions being invested in closing the gap.[11] One of the main explanations is that histories of Muslim-majority countries often don't include the aspirational baggage of domestic bliss that feminists in the Global North have had to fight against.[12]

The second challenge of the Islamic feminist problem-space is the relationship between Islamic feminists and the concept of "feminism".[13] Islamic feminists worry that what is considered "feminism" is dogmatic and not open to certain ways of thinking (Seedat 2013). These thinkers simply ask, in looking through Islamic work and thought, that they should be able to follow wherever the path of inquiry takes them. But when Islamic feminists do this, they are frustrated that they are accused of normatively straying from feminism.[14] A decade-long back and forth by Badran and Barlas in the 1990s illustrates the ambivalence on being labelled as feminist. Barlas worries "the extent to which feminism as a discourse has foreclosed the possibility of theorizing sexual equality from within alternative paradigms … In fact, feminism simultaneously usurps and silences critiques that fall outside its own discursive framework … and it is this closure that I find problematic" (Barlas 2008, 21).

Of course, the conceptual and historical obstacles for Islamic feminists don't just come from feminism. The other side of the double bind comes from puritanical and fundamentalist thinking from intellectuals within the Islamic world (Zine 2006, 1).

This view questions any shaping of the public sphere by women as radical and new (Abu-Lughod 1998, vii) and feminism as inauthentic, corrupted by colonial thinking, and alien.[15] This becomes the mirror image of the worry about feminism, that in order to follow where the path of inquiry may go, it must be seen as compatible with a vision of an "authentic" Islam (Ali 2006, xii).

And so, thirdly, there are a number of conceptual double binds formed in the Islamic feminist problem-space between the dogmatic obstacles of colonial feminism and Islamic fundamentalism. One horn sees tradition as antithetical to feminism and Muslim women as essentially oppressed and passive. The other sees any change to Islamic practice toward gender equality, even if compatible with scripture, as inauthentic (Bucar 2010; Abu-Lughod 2002). As premodern, primitive, backward, and uncivilized, Islam has nothing to teach feminism (Howe 2021, 9; Abu-Lughod 1998). Relatedly, Islamic feminists must avoid the legitimate colonial elements of feminist thinking that smuggle in imperialist conceptual assumptions (Mir-Hosseini 1999; Shaikh 2003; Ali 2006). While at the other horn of the double bind, all deviation from pre-colonial Islam is seen by fundamentalists as colonial and imperialist.

The way I have portrayed the early 2000s Islamic feminist problem-space that Mahmood inhabited is not merely as problems that she had to confront but as a series of double binds seemingly choking off any reasonable response. Either way, conceptually, an Islamic feminist might turn seemed to be a dead end. In this problem-space, one cannot simply overcome the problem by choosing to oppose or resist oppression, since choosing either side of the double bind leads to different kinds of oppression. Due to these constraints, it might seem as though this problem-space would be an infertile ground for new and productive work. Instead, these constraints pushed many Islamic feminists toward the epistemology and conceptualization of "difference" and especially "creativity" that we see in Mahmood's work.

As described in the previous section, this was not the abstract creativity of an iconoclast lone genius. Instead, this is a way to bring difference into play. This difference slowly turns Islamic feminism away from dichotomies of modern/premodern, authentic/inauthentic, resistance to tradition/pure conformity etc. toward something different and new. Rooted in the actual ethnographic practices of Muslim women in the 1990s, Elizabeth Bucar gives a good way of framing the response to the Islamic feminist problem-space as "creative conformity." Bucar shows that Muslim women realize that tradition and community are important and are constitutive of the individual's agency. Yet compliance to these norms can conceptually be different than pure conformity without being intentional resistance (Bucar 2010, 666). Here a new conceptual space is created between the seeming dichotomy of tradition and resistance. This creative conceptualization gives us, according to Bucar, a new understanding of the relationship between habituation and critique (2010, 678). In her productive analysis of Badran and Barlas' decade-long dialogue on the relationship between Islam and feminism, Fatimah Seedat concludes that the way to work our way out of the easy dichotomies of Islam versus feminism is to tap into the historical/conceptual differences that Islamic-feminism as a single concept allows. These double binds are the baggage of Western feminism, not Islamic-feminism. Seedat cites Audre Lorde to argue that the difference itself of Islamic-feminism from Western feminism can be a wellspring of creativity. Rather than being solved, this framework of creativity dissolves double binds.

Particularly influential on Mahmood's work on creativity rather than resistance is Abu-Lughod. Like other post-colonial thinkers such as Emma Pérez and Edward Said, Abu-Lughod turns to Foucault to respond to the double binds of the Islamic

feminist problem-space. She was the first to problematize what she famously called the "romance of resistance." This romance ran as an unquestioned undercurrent in feminist work on women in the Islamic world. Her conceptual move was to show with her work on the Bedouin women of Egypt that there was already a historical foundation for creatively resisting *within* the Bedouin tradition. This creative resistance to patriarchy was slowly being lost with the modernization and Westernization of the younger generation (Abu-Lughod 1990).[16] In attempting to break free from the Bedouin traditionalism of their parents (something feminist analysis normatively valorizes), the new generation was both losing a source of creatively changing patriarchy and also unknowingly backing themselves into new structures of power and domination. This was done through the construction of Western aspirations of domesticity for women (which we saw from the example of the "STEM paradox" was strikingly absent from Muslim-majority countries) (Abu-Lughod 1990, 52).

From this brief presentation of the Islamic feminist problem-space we can see how much of a particularly Islamic feminist way of framing problems Mahmood took up in her own work. Also importantly, we can see what a watershed moment Mahmood's work was.[17] While lauding Abu-Lughod for revealing the problem of romanticizing resistance, Mahmood points out that Abu-Lughod herself continues to romanticize resistance. She does this by making her normative focus of analysis the creative *resistance* to patriarchy (2005, 9–10). Mahmood in her work shows that there is so much more that the concepts of creativity and difference can do that is still feminist yet is beyond just resisting.

In the next section, inspired by Foucault and Bergson, I explore how I think the work that the women's *dawa* movement does breaks from the Hegelian trap.

Projects of self-transformation and oppressive norms

Even though Mahmood describes certain teachers within the *dawa* movement as virtuosos, we should not think of the new skills, abilities, and capacities of the women in this movement as the result of an elite vanguard. Individuals from the group go out into the world and confront new situations with their new skills and capacities and bring unique and new solutions to these everyday situations. These solutions help them cope but also further them toward their goals of piety. The *dawa* groups are communities of practice. This means the knowledge and technique do not reside in one virtuous woman, but the whole community. The way this works is when women come back to the group, they share their new techniques and then these techniques are taken up such that there are changes in practice throughout the whole group. The *dawa* group is a micro-community where norms different from the majority are practiced, like a laboratory. It's important to clarify that nothing guarantees that these norms that differ from the majority will be oppositional or resistant to patriarchy. These new norms might get taken up and tried out by others in the group. Then these new norms may become more prevalent and become a "natural," taken for granted practice that is taught to everyone, including novices.[18] In the same way, I am arguing, new techniques are *incubated* within the *dawa* group endogenously. As their practices change, these incubated norms make the micro-community practices slowly, imperceptibly, different from majority norms.

The transformation of the group is much like the transformation of the individual. In social thought, from Marxists to Heideggerians, overcoming previous norms is usually premised on a crisis or break in habits. There is then a sudden break with previous

practices. The change within the *dawa* group I am describing is *not* like this paradigmatic description of the phenomenon of social change. It is more of a slow, drifting, turning away from majority norms by inhabiting a norm as a virtuoso rather than opposing it. Because the motors of this change are virtuosos of a norm, novelty comes contingently, in fits and starts, and norms can often be static for a long time. What I mean by the language of "drifting" and "turning" is that the movement away from majority norms is immanent. There is no break. Practices partake both of newness but also of potentially oppressive majority norms. This is because these women are not constantly with the *dawa* group, they are immersed in their daily lives within majority norms.

The normative promise of the drifting, turning movement is that, given enough time, incremental changes in degree can turn into changes in *kind*. Here the most apt description of this movement is one of "becoming." Becoming, in the technical language of Deleuze influenced by Bergson, is the elaboration of a self-differentiating movement that only manifests itself when we focus on its duration. Duration here is the unitary, immanent unfolding over time of the practices of the *dawa* group. The movement of a becoming follows no preset plan or teleology of progression toward a future without patriarchy. The importance of this kind of becoming to feminism for Grosz is the focus on pluralization and the proliferation of activities and practices of difference it opens up. Taken in this way, the *feminist work* that the *dawa* group does enables "more action, more making and doing, more difference … [which enables] women to partake in the creation of a future unlike the present" (Grosz 2010, 154).

Beyond the Hegelian trap, why wouldn't oppositional resistance or resistance that undermines norms create "a future unlike the present"? To answer this, it's important to note Mahmood's concentration on embodiment, habit, and affect. I can explain what I mean through a quote from John Dewey, from his book *Human nature and conduct*. Here Dewey's target is what he calls "short-cut revolutionists." In their view, paradigmatic social change is when people revolt and institutions are overturned. He argues that the person who advocates for this kind of revolution

> fails to realize the full force of the things about which he talks most, namely institutions as embodied habits. Any one with knowledge of the stability and force of habit will hesitate to propose or prophesy rapid and sweeping social changes. A social revolution may effect abrupt and deep alterations in external customs, in legal and political institutions. But the habits that are behind these institutions and that have, willy-nilly, been shaped by objective conditions, the habits of thought and feeling, are not so easily modified. They persist and insensibly assimilate to themselves the outer innovations—much as American judges nullify the intended changes of statute law by interpreting legislation in the light of common law. The force of lag in Human life is enormous. (Dewey 1922, 108)

Dewey recommends that *true* political and social change demands the transformation of habits. The root of Dewey's descriptive claim is that it takes effort, strategy, and time to change habits and emotions, that is, hard work on the self. We can see how this applies to feminist goals since oppression, racism, colonialism, and sexism have entrenched roots in our history. They are deeply ingrained in our bodies through habits and affects. What might be more controversial is Grosz's strategy of the proliferation and pluralization of practices of difference rather than opposing patriarchy. In the next section, I sketch out, using a metaphor about evolution, why the strategy of proliferation and

difference as a normative feminist agenda should be given conceptual space rather than seen as anti-feminist.

Thinking about creativity and difference through evolution

What does an anti-teleological politics of becoming promise normatively that's different from oppositional, teleological political solutions? Why should feminists be patient? Shouldn't women in the Global South get the immediate justice that "Western women" have? The truncated explanation I give to these questions emphasizes the Bergsonian account of becoming.

Bergson used many metaphors to try to get the concept of becoming and duration into better focus for his readers. In his book, *Creative evolution,* he explains his entire theory of becoming and duration using the history of the evolution of life itself. Rose Trappes (2019) argues that Elizabeth Grosz's turn to evolutionary metaphor is not an empirical argument nor a turn to methodological naturalism. Instead, it is a normative point on how to think about unpredictability that leaves open the feminist future. Here I also use this metaphor to illustrate a point about what the proliferation of difference, creativity, and time can produce. Becoming and duration as the history of the evolution of life is a good stalking horse to show various important concepts such as immanence, contingency, and creativity in more concrete terms.

What gave the conditions of possibility for human beings as the most intelligent creatures on the planet was our encephalization: the increased size of our brains compared to the rest of our bodies. This gave us the ability to create tools, to pass knowledge on to our offspring with language, and to have social practices in order to do large, complicated, and cooperative projects. Now imagine two immortal evolutionary biologists who begin at the start of life and follow along this history of evolution but have no foreknowledge of where it leads. One immortal biologist is like the teleological feminist: she knows what evolutionary progress looks like because teleology has informed her where evolution is heading. Evolutionary progress is any step that takes us closer to the kind of encephalization that looks like human intelligence. She argues we should only follow evolutionary species that progress toward the highest intelligence. Furthermore, following other species is pointless because, as far as intelligence is concerned, these other species are regressive, evolutionary dead-ends. The other immortal biologist is anti-teleological. Instead, she is willing to keep an open mind about the different ways intelligence could emerge and look different.

These two immortal biologists encounter a pivotal period of evolutionary history, the moment a mammal turns away from land to go back to water to evolve into a sea creature. The first immortal biologist might argue that it is pointless to follow the path of this mammal. She knows where intelligence is headed and the greatest intelligence on earth will evolve on land rather than water. In fact, a land animal attempting to find a niche in the medium of water could be considered an evolutionary regression.

The second immortal biologist is willing to follow this new development.[19] Evolution is a good way to show what Bergson meant by his technical term of "creativity."[20] Creativity is a kind of difference that is not oppositional. For Bergson, creativity in evolution is the durative and immanent taking up of matter and using it for a different function than they were originally adapted for. This gives a new "solution" to a "problem" that was raised by the environment to the organism. By "problem" what is meant is the kind of adaptive pressures posed by an organism's environmental niche while "solutions" are ways that organisms can evolve to survive better in a particular niche.

Bergson's ability to use the language of "creativity" with regard to how organisms have novel solutions to these adaptive problems is possible from the fact that the exact and specific "solution" to any "problem" posed by an environmental niche is "radically underdetermined" (Walsh 2012, 99). It is underdetermined in a way that looking at an environmental niche, one could not generate specific possible "solutions" in advance. Denis Walsh gives the example of the "problem" of locomotion in water being solved in three very different ways: by the side-to-side motion of fish, the smooth laminar flow of the porpoise, and bacteria developing cilia and flagella from parts that were used for other functions (2012, 99).

As a species, mammals are posed the "problem" of adapting to water. Water is a medium and environmental niche for which they were not specialized for anymore. Looking at the modern cetacean, we can see various creative "solutions." This was done using the functions and parts bequeathed to the dolphin from land mammalian evolutionary history. Unlike the fish, land mammals do not need a side-to-side motion in order to move. The modern cetacean took the basic, undulating "galloping" motion of most four-legged mammals and adapted it to the medium of water.[21] Through certain selection pressures 35 million years ago, smaller water mammals with larger brains survived. This became the condition of possibility for completely new kinds of solutions that fish, with their very different evolutionary history, did not have the capacity for. There is no overcoming one's evolutionary history. Evolution can only act immanently on the phenotypes a creature already possesses. Mammals are not going to spontaneously spawn gills. These larger brains created new "problems" that attracted creative new solutions. As land mammals, they were equipped with hearing and voices, but this only worked within the medium of air. Developing echo location provided a solution to the problem of communication in the medium of water. To summarize: through their unique evolutionary history, dolphins are distinctively able to use tools, transmit behaviors and culture through learning to their offspring, and also are able to do socially complex and cooperative projects together. These are all hallmarks of intelligence.

These hallmarks are all signs of intelligence that humans possess but that manifest in different, unpredictable modes for the aquatic mammal. I go this deeply into the evolutionary history of dolphins to demonstrate that there are alternate evolutionary routes to sophisticated intelligence. Predicting this route to intelligence in advance was not possible from the view of the immortal biologists who were immanently following along with the evolution of animals. There is a lot of contingency involved in evolution but also history.[22] What was needed to track this route to intelligence was time but also a sheer plenitude of different forms of animals with slightly different solutions to the problems that water posed to land mammals. Most of these different aquatic mammal forms, with their slight differences were not viable to continue their line and were "evolutionary dead-ends." *Yet* there were some that were viable and continued to become more and more different in morphology and behavior. All of this would have been ignored by our first immortal biologist. In fact, humans being the most intelligent creatures on earth was never inevitable. For the last 34 out of 35 million years of life, it was actually cetaceans that were the smartest organisms on earth and they continue to be more intelligent than humans' closest evolutionary relatives, the great apes and chimpanzees.

In the same way, I argue that teleological feminists have a certain idea both of what the normative ends of feminism *and* what progression toward that goal *already* look like. The anti-teleologist asks for some epistemic humility and to let women in the *dawa* movement slowly create an Islamic feminist future of their own, within their own "medium" of norms and socialization. Just as with "problems" in evolution, as

Serene Khader shows us with her argument against "justice monism," the solution to feminist futures is underdetermined such that there are potentially multiple forms justice can take. But I want to go further and claim that, like evolution, we cannot see these multiple solutions in advance and must, like the second immortal biologist, just follow the creative path that these women might take. This feminist future might take on a completely different mode, something maybe unrecognizable as "feminist" by our contemporary ideas of the feminist future. Yet it should be the responsibility of us as theorists to *make* the conceptual tools to understand these new modes of being and their feminist potential. Like evolution, what these women need is time and various Muslim womens' groups proliferating their own small communities with their own differing micro-norms. Like the dolphins having to use their former mammalian physiology to creatively find their niche in the water, so too do different histories of societies supply us with different historical wellsprings to draw from for creative solutions. Muslim societies not having a gender gap in STEM fields while Western societies have one shows the normative power of drawing from an alternate history than the Global North. Islamic societies can give us new and different historical resources towards equality but also a new way to approach equality, without resisting traditional norms.

Beyond this, the anti-teleological feminist can point to two things in their favor. The first is the history of feminism so far. One way of looking at this history is as waves of feminist theorists putting forward their definitions of oppression and how it must be opposed, followed by other feminists arguing that these definitions of oppression do not include them and their different goals. Women of different classes and races began this pushback but more recently even feminist work that included this kind of intersectionality has not taken account of women with disabilities[23] and trans philosophers' arguments that the goal of feminism should not be gender abolition.[24] Looking back, retrospectively, one might say this is a line of progression that is slowly expanding its circle of inclusion toward everybody. Yet this sense of inevitability is an illusion.

The second thing the anti-teleologist can point to is Mahmood's argument that completely ignoring anything that does not currently count as "progress" or "resistance" denies us the analytical tools to even track the history and alternate routes toward a different feminist future. Anti-teleological empirical work is few and far between because of the lack of conceptual space for movements that do not conform to the modality of resisting oppression.

We can see one example of anti-teleological work inspired by Mahmood's *Politics of piety* in Lila Abu-Lughod's 2013 book *Do Muslim women need saving?* In a chapter titled "An anthropologist in the territory of rights," Abu-Lughod challenges whether new transnational Islamic feminist movements such as Musawah (meaning equality in Arabic) can actually help Egyptian women when they continue to employ the discourse of universal human rights. Abu-Lughod goes beyond the classic post-colonial criticism that these movements are thinly disguised instruments of imperialism and white colonial feminism (2013, 202). Abu-Lughod describes attending meetings of these groups and witnessing spirited discussion by Islamic feminists who were hardworking, creative, committed, and impressively learned individuals (2013, 199). Yet as Abu-Lughod points out, the outcomes of this well-meaning work to help Muslim women fell back into worn-out Western tropes of FGM, stoning, honor killings, and forced marriages (2013, 185).

Abu-Lughod diagnoses the problem as a methodological and conceptual one. The activists in these groups come from a certain elite cosmopolitan social location. The conceptual bedrock these activists shared were the basic, preconstructed conceptual

grammar of universal human rights. Here the singular problem confronting *all* Muslim women is patriarchal oppression and the guiding concepts are choice, freedom, and consent. Gone is the feminism of Okin that attempts to deculturalize Muslim women —Islamic feminists instead turn to enlightened reinterpretations of the Qur'an and legal reforms of the Shari'a. But because these strategies are constructed *before* learning about the life-worlds of the women they are attempting to help, these solutions get trapped in ruts that fall back on blaming culture but, more importantly, do not help in the best way possible.

Abu-Lughod brings 40 years of ethnographic experience to argue both that it is hard to hear new ways of framing the problems of specific Muslim women through the noise of familiar stories (2013, 202) but also that such a strong view of women in the Middle East existed without theorists knowing the texture of "life as lived" by these women (2013, 6). In the chapter she argues that instead we must start by going deeply into the specifics. This makes it hard to be satisfied with the current conceptual tools when applied to the Bedouin women of Egypt (Abu-Lughod 2013, 17). First, the problem with the solution of retranslation and reinterpretation is that authority of religious claims is local and a new generation of women is *already* attending religious schools and using this knowledge. But not in the way that an organization named Musawah might condone. Secondly, Abu-Lughod convincingly shows that the problems of domestic violence among the Bedouin that she studies do not trace back to Islamic patriarchy but instead the tensions of globalized Western tourism in Egypt and also the intimacies of family ties (2013, 197). Without going into these communities before constructing one's concepts, all of this is missed, and these organizations are not actually able to help these women.

The plea here is for the conceptual space within feminism for this kind of way of thinking to viably be called a feminist project. Only then can the empirical and conceptual tools of analysis be honed to detect these clandestine movements. I call the *dawa* movement clandestine because without Mahmood's anti-teleological, ethnographic eye, this movement would have been invisible. Conceptual tools that look only for resistance do not carve reality close to the bone. The framing of resistance becomes an analytical foreclosure that Mahmood argues implicitly condones a silence around other ways of talking about agency (2005, 206).

A reparative reading of the *dawa* movement

Theoretical attempts to explain the resurgent popularity of the veil in Egypt since the 1980s demonstrate the practical effects of conceptual foreclosure. Scholars were clearly surprised by "modern Egyptian women" returning to this practice after a few generations of abandoning it. Feminist analysis reached for two theories that could be used to render these practices as being forced upon women, but that they were resisting it in some small way. The first was a functionalist explanation where women who wear the veil are bargaining with patriarchy. These women are granted more freedom of movement and protection against sexual harassment in exchange for wearing something they would truly never otherwise wear. The other theory was that wearing the veil was a post-colonial resistance to the worse norm of colonialism, capitalism, and sexual commodification of women's bodies imported by the West and their media (Mahmood 2005, 215 n. 33). Importantly, Mahmood is not disputing the truth of these arguments for many women in Egypt. Instead, she is arguing that we are not getting the full picture.

Mahmood accuses those who only stick to this one way of thinking about norms of a lack of curiosity (Mahmood 2005, 206). She describes what the effect of contact with our subjects of study should have on our theories. That "we might come to learn things that we did not already know before we undertook the engagement … my suggestion is that we leave open the possibility that our political and analytical certainties might be transformed in the process of exploring nonliberal movements" (Mahmood 2005, 209). This is not just a simple call for greater self-reflexivity, but it is a critique of how empirical work should shape our theories. If we are surprised by reality, like scholars were about modern women's return to the veil, this might be a time to go back and question the adequacy of *our* theories. Empirical work is not just a constraint on our theories. Instead, it should be a productive site of self-transformation in order to start shaping better theories that adapt to the particularities of the subjects we study. This demonstrates the importance of surprise and curiosity. Surprise should question our faith in what we assume are settled and taken-for-granted concepts and curiosity should drive us to investigate further.

As a conclusion to this paper, I argue that a character virtue of any feminist thinker is the ability to be open to the ongoing incompleteness of knowing what could be feminist. The corollary of this virtue is a feminist vice of dismissing the authority of marginalized women to have a say in what is feminist. This is a pushback on the assumption that we already know what a feminist future is like and that all that is left is realizing it. This is an epistemically arrogant, teleological version of feminism. It, as Kimberly Hutchings argues, "discount[s] feminist pluralism in the light of a projected unanimity on the question of what it means for women to be free" (2013, 22).

Abbas' argument that feminist work must always be teleological, or else there might be the worry that one is justifying the status quo and current injustice is what Eve Sedgwick labels a "paranoid reading" of feminist goals. Sedgwick articulates many features of paranoid readings of feminism, but I will just concentrate on two of these that I think apply to the critics of Mahmood. The first is an aversion to the unanticipated and the second is that it closes off conceptual space for anything other than oppositional projects.

Feminist projects that tolerate *only* resistance amidst a world of great injustice and patriarchy can never be paranoid enough (Wiegman 2014, 10). Bad norms are everywhere. Because oppressive norms are pervasive, complicity to these norms undermines positive projects of new norm formation. As I have just argued, one can view the history of feminist philosophy as a series of positive projects that continuously failed to be inclusive enough and were revealed as oppressive. A paranoid way of responding to our theories later being revealed as oppressive is to be anticipatory and vigilant in trying to avoid the fate of previous progressive theories. But because of the ubiquity of possible complicity, critical work becomes an "elegant diagram of spiralling escapes and recaptures" (Sedgwick 2003, 132). The strategy of paranoia and hypervigilance becomes the task of "disciplinary future-proofing" (Jagose 2015, 34) current feminist theory. The work that paranoia does is bootstrap feminism normatively into a better future not through any positive project but through avoiding any "bad surprises" (Sedgwick 2003, 130) by anticipating critique.

We can see this problem with regards to French feminism and the Muslim veil. Opposition to the veil and failing to listen to veiled women can be understood if we see certain French feminists as following a paranoid reading of the goals of feminism. For these feminists, feminism as a theory has already theorized what oppression looks like (traditional, religious, etc.). Veiling seems a paradigmatic way that patriarchal

oppression would manifest itself, since religious patriarchy is a way in the past that oppression was manifested. So, we do not need to learn anything new about these veiled women. But this lack of wonder forces these veiled women into a dilemma that they can never both be a Muslim who veils and speak *as* a feminist (Al-Saji 2010, 880). This gives the teleological feminist a strange ownership and sovereignty over the definition of feminism. This kind of claim seems epistemically and normatively bad to the point that we might say that it is a kind of "hermeneutical injustice." This robs these veiled women who *know* they are feminists of the conceptual vocabulary to articulate it. As Mahmood argues, to even be effective in the normative work of opposition that teleological feminists aim for, we must "consider that perhaps we do not always know what we oppose and that a political vision at times has to admit its own finitude to even comprehend what it has sought to oppose" (Mahmood 2005, 209).

Sedgwick also argues that this kind of paranoia stultifies other ways of feminist theorizing. Because of the paranoid, hypervigilance of avoiding falling into complicity with the world's oppressiveness, the stakes of deviating from this "hermeneutics of suspicion" becomes very high. As Abbas explicitly argues, deviation risks the entire feminist future if the feminist present abandons its progressive debt to the feminist struggles of the past. Here the paranoid reading becomes understood "as a mandatory injunction rather than a possibility among other possibilities" (Sedgwick 2003, 125).

The conceptual space occluded by paranoid feminist theory is what Sedgwick calls "reparative" readings of feminist futures. Recently there have been feminist attempts to open up this conceptual space. One example is trying to differentiate between "normalization," the disciplinary power enforcing norms, and "normativity," the process where alternative norms of flourishing get taken up (Shotwell 2012). If we want alternative ways of being and flourishing to proliferate, there must be an opening up of conceptual space so that as philosophers we can be attentive to diverse positive orientations and projects beyond negation, opposition, and resistance (Singh 2015, 11). Not enforcing a purity against norms that aren't "progressive" is important to forming the conditions of possibility for collective work that cements new norms and new orthodoxies. But doing this *always courts risk*. As Carolyn Pedwell concludes from Sedgwick's work, "it is precisely in learning how to inhabit (rather than transcend) ambivalence, conflict and complexity that we might move from simply diagnosing 'bad habits' to the difficult and productive work of creating new tendencies—ones that might take us to a different (and more affirmative) intellectual and socio-political place" (2016, 110). There should be a trust that oppressed women will find the communities of practice to develop the skills to creatively find affordances unthought by armchair theorists like us. For many feminists, this might not be a satisfactory account. But to paraphrase Alison Jaggar, to confront oppression without choosing colonial interference is not necessarily choosing callous indifference (2005, 57).

We began with three kinds of criticisms of Saba Mahmood's project in *the Politics of piety*. The first was a reaction to her methodological critique that feminist work often looks only for resistance to patriarchy which obfuscates what other work these women's practices might also be doing. In response, the question becomes, what would feminism even look like without normative critique? The second criticism is that Mahmood's work tends to legitimize a religiously conservative way of life over women's rights. The third criticism looks at this work as dismantling generations of past feminist work. As Alia Al-Saji argues about what the Muslim veil symbolizes, "Muslims are understood to be trapped in the past. Women wearing the *hijab* are thought to be a visible symbol of a lack of progress" (2019). Mahmood is trading the non-oppressive

feminist future for the status quo, not even for a robust concept of autonomy, but a concept of agency that threatens to hold feminism anchored to oppression.

I have tried to respond by couching Mahmood's work in a lineage of decolonial, Islamic, and new materialist feminist thinkers. I've emphasized that my argument is not that this kind of work is the *only* way to do feminism. Mahmood herself emphasizes that the very existence of this *dawa* movement relies on past feminist work to gain mass literacy, urban mobility, and education for women in Egypt (Mahmood 2005, 54). Yet it is worth arguing that there are problems in making the future orientation for all feminism based on a *present* teleology of what the feminist future is supposed to look like. Decolonial and new materialist feminist work emphasizes the multiplicity of visions for a feminist future as well as the contingency and genuine newness of those futures. This newness is such that we can never know enough in advance to foreclose the women's *dawa* movement from this feminist future.

To conclude, while I have pointed out the vices of a "paranoid" reading of these *dawa* women, I think it is worth seeing virtuous characteristics of a reparative reading of the *dawa* movement. Leila Ahmed's work on the resurgence of the Muslim veil in Egypt, *Women and gender in Islam* in 1992, was a landmark case of how to think beyond both colonialist narratives of Muslim women yet also be an unapologetically feminist text. After 20 more years of ethnographic work, Ahmed came out with *A quiet revolution: The veil's resurgence from the Middle East to America*. This book continued her work following the women who began the resurgence of the veil in the 1990s. But now this became an intergenerational ethnographic work on their female children who have also taken up practices of veiling. Importantly it came out in 2011, just before the revolution at Tahrir Square. In the conclusion to the book, Ahmed looks back throughout her 20 years of study and acknowledges that the Islamist resurgence and practice of the veil in Egypt initially alarmed her (2011, 303). It remains true that the younger generation of women she studies continue to be staunch believers in God-given gender hierarchy. Yet, Ahmed argues that over the intervening 20 years, it is these very women who having picked up new capacities and skills from their *dawa* circles and are now the vanguards in activism (2011, 303). We know in retrospect how prophetic her observations would become as religious, young women who veiled were involved in the revolution in Tahrir Square. Here we see Ahmed's virtues of epistemic humility but also her capacity to continue to be surprised by her subjects and her willingness to change her theories in response to this surprise.

After the initial revolution in Tahrir Square, Saba Mahmood came out with a new preface to *The politics of piety* where she showed that there was no contradiction in her theory that the women in the *dawa* movement sought to "inhabit" dominant norms but were still integral to the movements that led to Tahrir Square. Yet this explanation does not feel satisfactory. Mahmood claims that these norms that are inhabited are static, but I don't think she takes seriously enough her own claims that these women are virtuosos of piety. It is endogenous to virtuosity that they can both inhabit a norm but also, within that norm, move that norm to unthought places. In Pnina Werbner's own empirical work on female leadership among the *dawa* movement, she notices and argues that, taking seriously the self-transformative work these women have done on themselves, they are not only now *de facto* leaders in their community, but have, while staying within Islamic norms, embraced and fought for the authority to lead their community (2018, 87). I have established that, for a thinker like Mahmood, her work prescriptively emphasizes the surprising, contingent, and genuinely new ways these movements can immanently morph. I think it is fitting that this *dawa* movement,

given the time to build their capacities in their own way, has gone to places even beyond Mahmood's theorizing.

Notes

1 She traces her work through three lineages of feminist projects. The first was in response to white middle-class feminism that assumed it was a universal feminist goal to dismantle the family. The reply from Indigenous and Black feminists was that freedom for them was not being unshackled from kinship ties. After the history of genocide and slavery, freedom was the ability to finally form families. The second is feminist theories of care that launched the critique of liberal notions of autonomy. Finally, she links herself to the kind of poststructuralist theory that attempted to decenter the transcendental subject (Mahmood 2005, 13).

2 In her book, *A decolonial feminism*, Françoise Vergès states that "decolonial feminism accepts the existence of other feminisms; it does not wish to become the theory, but to facilitate transborder and international alliances" (Vergès 2021, viii).

3 In the concluding paragraph to her book, *The decolonial imaginary*, Pérez suggests that, "history itself has encoded upon it a tool for a liberatory consciousness. Marx [who was influenced by Hegel] was probably the first theorist-philosopher to teach this lesson to Chicana/o historians. It has taken Foucault, however, to warn us that power/knowledge disrupts the classic terrain of binaries. We can no longer resort to simple binaries" (1999, 160).

4 For Hegel, this negative movement was a descriptive, metaphysical fact underlying both nature and culture, but I will just concentrate on his normative arguments for why it is a good thing that determinate opposition has this conserving effect.

5 We can see this problem in a less contentious, non-political context in Hubert Dreyfus' response to philosophy's overintellectualization of skillful action (see Dreyfus 2013 for an example of his non-cognitive position on skillful action). Dreyfus opposes the rationalistic, excessively deliberative picture that analytic philosophy assumes of the human and instead tries to reclaim and valorize the role of the body in everyday action. John Sutton makes the point that, in doing this oppositional move, Dreyfus' strong anti-intellectualism merely flips the claims that strong intellectualists make by saying that there is *nothing* cognitive about the "flow" or "absorbed coping" of skilled, expert action (Sutton et al. 2011, 92). But in only flipping the claim, Dreyfus conserves the framework of the problem that was supposed to be overcome. In putting a wedge between thinking and acting by evacuating the psychological from the realm of embodied activity, he unknowingly preserves the distinction between the mind and the body. By keeping this framework, that the body is completely uncognitive, it gives us no clue how propositional deliberation gets the non-propositional motoric body to act. This problem is called the interface problem. See Butterfill and Sinigaglia 2014.

6 This has been an underexplored aspect of Mahmood's work, with Stephanie Clare (2009) being the only person to make the connection of Mahmood with new materialist feminism and Bergson. While Clare looks at the topic of individual bodily becoming in Mahmood, I think through the becoming of the *dawa* movement as a group.

7 For instance, Brandon Terry uses the concept of "problem-space" to show that Martin Luther King Jr.'s later work changed dramatically after the signing of the Civil Rights Act in 1964. The conceptual and rhetorical strategies that had been so successful prior to 1964 were rendered inapt by King's engagement with the "Black Power" problem-space as well as the different material conditions of desegregating Northern states and so King turned to more coercive yet still non-violent tactics (Terry 2018).

8 Modern manifestations of this include Laura Bush decrying the Taliban's enforcement of wearing the burqa and repression of nail polish (2001). This again rings hollow when domestically these women campaign against women's autonomy. This shows that colonial feminism is a continuation of centuries of colonialist strategy.

9 This continues to be a problem for theory as Saba Fatima shows, with the example of White men grabbing women's hijabs, that sexual assaults can only be registered as part of #MeToo when it is among Muslims, but not when a White male does it to a Brown woman (2021)

10 Abu-Lughod lays bare the ideology behind this kind of assumption when she argues, "Did we expect that once 'free' from the Taliban they would go 'back' to belly shirts and blue jeans, or dust off their Chanel suits? … If liberated from the enforced wearing of burqas, most of these women would choose some other form of modest headcovering, like all those living nearby who were not under the Taliban" (2002, 785–86).

11 https://engineering.purdue.edu/ENE/News/the-stem-paradox-why-are-muslimmajority-countries-producing-so-many-female-engineers

12 An example is from a lullaby sung to young girls in Tunisia in the 1950s of the pride of a mother if her girl becomes an engineer.

13 Amina Wadud for instance refuses to call herself a feminist and instead creates a new conceptual space for the work she pursues by calling her work a "gender jihad" (Seedat 2013, 38).

14 Abu-Lughod looks forward to a less closed off feminism where "one is not forced to apologize when local projects do not appear to conform to a particular definition of feminism. Nor need one try to explain away—with arguments about expediency, safe topics, or marketing—stances that seem to go against a liberal or socialist feminist thrust. One need not be so eager to enlist historical individuals as heroines and icons of modernity, making their complex lives signify the story of progress" (1998, 23).

15 Mernissi shares an incident at a conference in Malaysia in 1984 where, she relates the story of Sukayna. Sukayna was both the great-granddaughter of Prophet Muhammad and considered a *barza* woman (someone considered of sound judgement) who rejected wearing the hijab, debated with powerful men, and married multiple men without pledging obedience to them. An editor of an Islamic journal tried to snatch her microphone away from her, yelling at her that Sukayna died at age 6 in Karbala and demanded her furnish a list of sources. She gave him the list on the spot. "That verbal aggression that I was subjected to and that attempt to obliterate the memory of Sukayna by a modern Muslim man who only accepts his wife as veiled, crushed, and silent remains for me an incident that symbolizes the whole matter of the relationship of the Muslim man to time—of amnesia as memory, of the past as warping the possibilities of the present" (Mernissi 1991, 194)

16 In a humorous ethnographic anecdote, Abu-Lughod conveys concretely this loss. A traditional Bedouin man had "three wives, all good Bedouins. His house was a mess, his clothes were wrinkled, and not one of these women would budge when he called. Her son, on the other hand, had just married an Egyptian girl and he was living well these days. His bride, she reported, put on nice clothes whenever he came home, brought him special foods, and even ironed his handkerchiefs" (Abu-Lughod 1990, 50).

17 Abu-Lughod herself glowingly cites Mahmood's work multiple times to help her think through the problem of "Do Muslim women really need saving" (2002)

18 We see this all the time with new techniques within communities of practice. For example, once the Fosbury flop was taken up as a technique by all long jumpers, Olympic records quickly fell and now even novices can master this technique.

19 I take the information for this next part from Lori Marino's work on cetacean and dolphin intelligence. A beautiful summary of this lifetime's worth of work can be found in this presentation: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y-x9NgnZrdI

20 Bergson explains the "creativity" of evolution through its unified duration by comparing it to the durative process of the painter: "But, to the artist who creates a picture by drawing it from the depths of his soul, time is no longer an accessory; it is not an interval that may be lengthened or shortened without the content being altered. The duration of his work is part and parcel of his work. To contract or to dilate it would be to modify both the psychical evolution that fills it and the invention which is its goal. The time taken up by the invention, is one with the invention itself. It is the progress of a thought which is changing in the degree and measure that it is taking form. It is a vital process, something like the ripening of an idea. The painter is before his canvas, the colors are on the palette, the model is sitting—all this we see, and also we know the painter's style: do we foresee what will appear on the canvas? We possess the elements of the problem; we know in an abstract way, how it will be solved, for the portrait will surely resemble the model and will surely resemble also the artist; but the concrete solution brings with it that unforeseeable nothing which is everything in a work of art. And it is this nothing that takes time." (1944, 370).

21 https://www.livescience.com/59188-difference-between-shark-and-whale-tails.html

22 To see the role of contingency in evolution see Gould and Lewontin's famous article about spandrels (1979). To see this contingent view of evolution applied to history see John Beatty and Isabel Carrera (2011).

23 See the introduction of Alison Kafer's (2013) *Feminist, queer, crip* for an argument that feminists have traditionally excluded disability from their imaginings of utopian feminist futures.
24 Take, e.g., Matthew Cull's "Against abolition" (2019) and E. M. Hernandez's "Gender-affirmation and loving attention" (2021).

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Muhammad Velji works as a visiting assistant professor at Wesleyan University. He has a PhD from McGill University, a Masters from Carleton University, and did his BA at the University of Toronto. His work focuses on political philosophy, feminist philosophy, and the philosophy of race and colonialism. His dissertation sought to decolonize feminist conceptions of autonomy using the empirical engine of anthropological work on Muslim women who wear the veil. His future work focuses on thinking differently about social change by investigating the connection between self-transformation and political structural change through the work of the Black feminist prison abolitionist movement.