

Do Muslim Women Need Saving? By Abu-Lughod

Posted on October 17, 2019

Feminism

In “Do Muslim Women Need Saving?” Abu-Lughod refers to the user that some States have made of certain types of feminism to justify wars. For example, the United States justified its intervention in Afghanistan by arguing for the liberation of Afghan women. Abu-Lughod questions the idea that women (Muslims in this case) need to be saved. Instead of being female victims who need others to save them, one could look at Muslim women as subjects who have something to say and contribute to the perspective of the saviours. On the other hand, those instances that stand as saviours because they believe that their cultural structures are more egalitarian and fair should also question their share of responsibility and be open to the change of perspective that contact with a different culture can entail. Abu-Lughod also carries out in this article an interesting feminist analysis of the burqa and the multiple meanings that the veil has in the Muslim world (Abu-Lughod, 2002).

The cornerstone of Lila Abu-Lughod’s proposal is the critical examination of the concept of culture that anthropology has used, in particular, ethnographies, to discover the hermeneutical limitations and political consequences that the use of this concept has trafficked. Understanding anthropology as the study of culture or cultures shows the shake-up that Abu-Lughod’s criticism implies and the importance of reflecting on his works. For the anthropologist, it is necessary to “write against culture.” This causes a feeling of strangeness for different researchers (Horsford, 2012). Ask: write about culture. It is to emphasize that critical version. It is not about answering affirmatively or negatively; it is about understanding the concerns of Abu-Lughod.

Concerning the previous questions and their implications for the selected authors, two hypotheses are proposed. In the first case, it is estimated that the feminist and hellfire experience of Abu-Lughod responds to an epistemological need of anthropology to assume itself as a science; in this sense, the discovery of Abu-Lughod’s anthropological self-broken is not fully understood. To his political idea of culture or thanks to his typicality as a researcher, but it is possible because anthropology has precisely created a discourse of differences. In short, the discourse of differences and the epistemological demands create a sensation for the researcher. When trying to distinguish winks of signals based on what their informants say about them, they do not pay enough attention to the fact that their sources are constituted from a base that, in this work, is called the confidence of the other’s word. An account of how this experience is faced will determine whether the semiotic concept of cultural constructs justifies differences. Finally, we invite you to perceive that something called familiarity hides between both analyzes and that this something has a decisive effect on the subject-

object relationship (Abu-Lughod, 2002).

Anthropological Fieldwork and Relationships

Consider another fragment of the text above. Here was finally the wife. My husband had arrived before me, following the trail of the American writer who, in 1978, had published a popular life story about the young people of the village. (...) My husband had located a few people through a friend of ours from Cairo, a folklorist who wrote a dissertation about the funeral laments of Upper Egypt. It exposes so much in the past appointment as in this one that interactions strongly mark the anthropological work. Once again, it highlights in the quote that the members of the village recognized and identified them, that is, they were not unknown. Also, he makes an effort to comment on how they ended up in the workplace.

An anthropologist and her husband know writing that motivates him to inquire about the village; they know an Egyptian student who does a postgraduate in North America; she, in turn – this is not in the quotation, but in the commented text knows a woman who lives in the village; finally, the village seems not to be alien to the French, Canadian and North American students, moreover, shows interest in Abu-Lughod talk about American life (Alexander, 2012). He did not have Abu-Lughod to deal with in his fieldwork with a set that would be completely strange to him; his first effort was to detect which type of contacts would facilitate him to carry out his work. That these contacts brought her closer to a villager, that they were possible, that she had them at hand to be exploited, shows that, at least in the case of Abu-Lughod and her husband, they were already, without knowing it, indirectly in contact with the Egyptian villagers.

In other words, an anthropologist (like any other scholar or not) has some possible relationships with their objects of study without you knowing them clearly unless you dedicate yourself to detecting those relationships because, in some way, the isolation among the different human groups has diminished (Abu-Lughod, 2002). From the moment in which isolation decreases, and contact begins in all its possible aspects, there may be conditions that facilitate the generation of new contacts. Networks of interactions between people appear so that by following the appropriate interaction route, an indirect connection can be drawn between a person at one point of the network and another at another point. What does this have to do with anthropology? The “confession” that she participates in a network where, at another point, there is some possible object of study (Alarcon, 1995).

Virtually, there is closeness, there is access, there is prior contact before a physical, and a direct relationship is established with your informant. The anthropological work would make clear the proximity, which in turn is justified by the imminent contact between people. This leads us to think that, unlike the anthropologist who believes, he carries out his fieldwork in some exotic, unknown, isolated site and that, thanks to his work, the unknowable becomes knowable -aspects that highlight the difference; what is foreign-, the current anthropological work does not indicate approaching the alien and strongly delimited but to realize that what seems so foreign and extreme is not. As has been

said, in some way there is a previous interaction to the anthropological work (Abu-Lughod, 2002). In this way, it can be explained, to some extent, that Abu-Lughod was recognized as he entered the village. The knowable becomes even more knowable. These interaction networks facilitate recognition and identification before face-to-face contact or fieldwork. It should also be noted that this is not the case in all cases; some groups may not yet be part of the interaction network of which we are all part, so the proposal mentioned here would not be relevant for those groups (Pierce, 1982).

Researcher Position and Fieldwork Strategy

She expresses her effort to “differentiate” herself from the other investigators of unwarranted behaviour and morality. In the end, they reach a distinction. The raid and television were the passes that allowed them to get to the place they wanted to carry out their jobs. Both experiences seem to be initiations that grant previous states necessary for the optimal work intended. At first, Abu-Lughod has a strategy to achieve such recognition, but it does not work for him. She plays for the sympathy that may generate their “semi-Palestinian identity.” It exploits its orientality to become a favourable location concerning its oriental objects of study. Something like showing, in some way, part of them (Cherrie Moraga, 1983).

This new data sheds light on the intended location that yearned for recognition. It is about a certain deal between the self and the other in the fieldwork. It is not so much a participant observation but to gain a certain status that makes the informants contribute their speeches in the most transparent way for the ethnographic enterprise; that is a status where the anthropologist trusts that the message given by his informants is the most truthful possible. Note that a type of experience that grants some recognition is taken as an epistemological tool. The anthropologist requires that the information acquired be reliable; to achieve this, he must have access to a special mode of interaction and communication.

Feminist and Halfie Critique

The typicality of Lila Abu-Lughod in the academy is due to two qualities that enrich her personality. On the one hand, it is the militant feminist, so it does not seem strange that academic discourses cover up rhetoric that justifies gender hierarchies. However, not only of gender but also of the imposition of a type of rationality, the Western one. In both situations, the same logic operates; it is the contrast. On the other hand, she is hellfire; that is, she is a researcher who cannot be categorically separated from her object of study since she is of American and Palestinian descent. She studies Muslim groups for North American institutes, and she is partly Palestinian. Two qualities that have led her to inquire about the role of the self and the other in the works of anthropology (Abu-Lughod, 2002).

On the side of feminist militancy, the discussion is fed by different studies that have in their sights the

struggle for power. The political cannot be detached from the analysis invited by Abu-Lughod. However, it is an analysis that goes beyond the gender discussion. For feminists, the construction of the feminine self has been thought in contrast to the masculine self, not only to achieve a space of expression and action but also to gain independence and equality. The feminist project acts so that women gain self-awareness and rediscover their selves so that they can reclaim areas that men have taken from them -although the female voice that was claimed was that of the white woman of the West (Cherrie Moraga, 1983).

In the same way, on the side of the helices, the pressures of the academy reveal political pretensions, but in this case, they are covered by epistemological demands. The hellfire must demonstrate a strong professional ethic that ensures objective work. The pretension of feminists and the pressure on helices researchers to play with the same logic, which was affirmed, was the contrast. Contrast has the virtue of creating the illusion of the concrete. A contrast operates as a tool to check certain characteristics about something unique and differentiated; to verify the characteristics is to legitimize their authenticity. What is contrasted is authentic, clear and distinguishable; principles that scientific concepts should express. However, the contrast cannot escape opposition; that is, it operates in differentiation. The authentic and unique is only possible as differentiated. There is no contrast of a single term; it always implies at least two, where the own characteristics are perceived as such in that they differ from another object. Contrast creates the I-other distinction, the identity built into the difference. The ego-other distinction based on contrast is nothing more than a rational exercise that the feminist project uses and the pressures on the selfies, for nothing is given, neither concrete nor ontological. However, when it is believed that this is the case, concretion is placed at the service of power.

Works Cited

Pierce, J. (1982). This Bridge Called My Back: Writings By Radical Women of Color by Cherrie Moraga; Gloria Anzaldua. Berkeley Journal of Sociology.

Alarcon, N. (1995). The Theoretical Subject(s) of This Bridge Called My Back and Anglo-American Feminism. *The Postmodern Turn*, (23), (1995), p 140-152. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/60036570/abstract/embedded/MK5KL0WH0BIBLA1W?source=fedsrch>

Alexander, M. J. (2012). Remembering this bridge called my back, reminding ourselves. In *Feminist Solidarity at the Crossroads: Intersectional Women's Studies for Transracial Alliance* (pp. 72-82). <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203145050>

Horsford, S. D. (2012). This bridge called My Leadership: An Essay on Black Women as Bridge Leaders in Education. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 25(1), 11-22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2011.647726>

Cherrie Moraga, Gloria Anzaldua, T. C. B. (1983). Also, When You Leave, \ Take Your Pictures With You Racism in the Women's Movement. In This Bridge Called My Back: Writings By Radical Women of Color (pp. 61-75).

Adichie, C. (2009). The Danger of a Single Story.

Abu-Lughod, L. (2002). Do Muslim Women Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others. *American Anthropologist*, 104(3), 783-790.

<https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.2002.104.3.783>