(Re)Writing the other/self: 
Autoethnography in the Transcultural Arena of Representation

by

Samah Sabra

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Abstract:

In *Imperial Eyes* Mary Louise Pratt (1992: 7, emphasis original) defines autoethnography as “instances in which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that *engage with* the colonizer’s own terms ... in response to or in dialogue with ... metropolitan representations.” Although Pratt’s conceptualization of autoethnography has much to offer post-colonial studies, it has received little attention in the field. In this thesis, I interrogate Pratt’s notion of autoethnography as a theoretical tool for understanding the self-representations of subordinate peoples within transcultural terrains of signification. I argue that autoethnography is a concept that allows us to move beyond some theoretical dualisms, and to recognize the (necessary) coexistence of subordinate peoples’ simultaneous accommodation of and resistance to dominant representations of themselves. I suggest that even when autoethnographic expressions seem to rely on or to reproduce dominant knowledges, their very existence as speech acts implicitly resists dominant discourses which objectify members of oppressed populations and re-create them as Native Informants. I use Pratt’s concept to analyze two books by Islamic feminist sociologist Fatima Mernissi. Mernissi’s *Dreams of Trespass* and *Scheherazade Goes West* illustrate the simultaneity of accommodation and disruption evident in autoethnographic communication. Across the two books, Mernissi shows herself renegotiating the discourses which discipline her (and her speech). She switches back and forth between the positions of reader and author, demonstrates the *reciprocity* of the disciplinary gaze (she looks back at her dominants, reading their own reading of her representation of her social group), and provides a model of autoethnographic dialogue.
Preface (Or, let the reader beware):

My interest in autoethnography arose from two related desires. First, I have always been interested in how Other(s) are imagined (read created) by their dominants and the (im)possibility of accurate representation. Second, for a long time now, I have also been interested in self-representation within the limitations and possibilities provided by power relations. These are not separate interests for me, and autoethnography¹ seemed to provide a way of thinking through the relationships among them.

As a Muslim-Arab-Canadian woman (with a very ambivalent relationship to the label of immigrant) I have often had to engage in representing myself not only to “real Canadians,” but also to “real Arabs.” Consequently, I learned at a very young age to be suspicious of exclusionary discourses of authenticity. Perpetually straddling the borders between insider and outsider, Eastern and Western, authentic and tainted, I find these categories (and the lines separating them) forever elusive, fluid, and shifting.

I have used maps, borders, and categories of identity strategically, in order to assert my voice, but they have never been “things” with any real, or stable meaning. Often, however, the same categories were used by others in ways that silenced me: if I could not fit into a neat ontological category, then I could have no “real” subject position from which to speak. Over the years, I have insisted on my subjective agency; even if my hybrid subject(ive) position made me seem suspect, or when my subject position was denied a voice, I needed my agency to be recognized.

In a sense, then, autoethnography is something I have often done, and my interest in studying the concept arose out of the simultaneous desire/need to insist on the

¹ “Instances in which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that engage with the colonizer’s own terms ... in response to or in dialogue with ... metropolitan representations” (Pratt 1992: 7).
impossibility of representing the Other (in this case me), and to understand or
reconceptualize seemingly concessional self-representations as strategic (and even
resistant) engagements with socially accepted ontological “truths” about subordinate
groups. Presently, these two desires have culminated in my yearning to understand and
theorize my own subject(ive) position, likely shared by many (post)colonial immigrants.

When I first approached my supervisor, Dr. David Butz, about this project, I
explained that what had most struck me about the concept of autoethnography was that it
seemed to speak so directly to how I have experienced my own life; I explained that I am
a “personified contact zone.” My MA thesis is an attempt to comprehend and (re)theorize
Mary Louise Pratt’s notion of autoethnography in order to understand the many nuances
of the concept and to insist on its importance within (post)colonial studies. This research
is a preliminary investigation of the possibilities and limitations of the notion of
autoethnography. It is also the beginning of my own autoethnography. I write this thesis
as a Muslim Arab Canadian immigrant student in order to represent a concept I have
embodied in my everyday life for at least the past 16 years.

I say all this as a preface to ask my readers to approach this work with an
autoethnographic bent: to look for my resistances and recognize my agency even when I
seem to be most accommodating. I ask my reader to approach my work in the same way
that I will be approaching the work of Fatima Mernissi. This means I am straddling yet
another border in writing this particular thesis in this particular way: I am both an
autoethnographic reader and an autoethnographic author. I apply the concept of
autoethnography to the writing of Fatima Mernissi while using autoethnography as a tool
to elaborate further some of the representational practices she engages. All of this also
means that my audience is engaged in reading two layers of autoethnography: Memissi’s and mine. What I am asking, therefore, is that my readers read in a certain way and resist placing either Memissi or myself into the ontological category of “native informant,” or taking either one of us as “representatives” of our group(s).

While Fatima Memissi and I are both Arab Muslim women, our experiences are clearly quite different. The differences do not just result from differences in age, past geographic location, disciplinary backgrounds, or current places of residence. I am an interdisciplinary graduate student, in my mid-twenties, a Muslim Lebanese-Palestinian immigrant, and now a Canadian citizen residing in Southwestern Ontario, in Canada. Memissi is an Islamic2 feminist sociologist, well-established in her field. She is a Muslim Moroccan in her fifties, educated in Political Science at the Sorbonne (in Paris), and currently residing in Rabat, Morocco. The differences between us result from all of these things (and others) at once. Muslims, Arabs, and women are not singular monolithic ontological categories, but are discursively constituted at multiple sites. I do not wish to provide simple, clear meanings for these categories, but to complicate any perceived simplicity.

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2 Islamic is a term that usually refers to official, doctrinal, or legal principles, documents, or people. Memissi’s feminism is an Islamic feminism (and she identifies it in that way). On the other hand, the term Muslim is alternately used as a noun (I am a Muslim) or as an adjective (I am a Muslim woman). While Memissi’s feminism is an Islamic feminism (a feminism she often bases in Islamic history and principles), she herself is a Muslim.
Chapter 1: Relationally Situated

My thesis is borne out of an interest in Mary Louise Pratt’s concept of autoethnography, “instances in which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that engage with the colonizer’s own terms ... in response to or in dialogue with ... metropolitan representations” (1992: 7, emphasis in original). I am interested in the epistemological implications and challenges offered by Pratt’s concept on several levels. Within transcultural terrains of signification, Pratt’s conceptualization of autoethnography has implications for dominant representations of members of oppressed populations, for the (strategic) self-representations of subordinate peoples, and for the reception of such self-representations by members of privileged groups. She conceptualizes autoethnography in ways that challenge simplistic receptions or categorizations of the hybridized speech acts of members of subordinate populations. According to Pratt, autoethnographies are both resistant and accommodative (often necessarily so), and I would suggest that they may be political “weapons of the weak” (Scott, 1985). Autoethnographies may be thought of as expressions of resistance aimed at intervening in dominant representations of subordinated peoples.

Before I enter into a discussion Pratt’s conceptualization of autoethnography, it may be useful to distinguish briefly her use of the term from another, more common understanding of the term as a research practice that involves the "turning of the ethnographic gaze inward on the self (auto), while maintaining the outward gaze of ethnography, looking at the larger context wherein self experiences occur" (Denzin 1997: 227). The term was first used in this capacity in 1979 by David Hayano “to refer to
anthropological studies by individuals of their own culture” (Smith 2005: 4), with the researchers often being called “native ethnographers.”

Since then, the concept has often been used to delineate research in which the self is both researcher and research subject, as in the work of Carolyn Ellis, for example, in her writings on chronic illness. For Ellis (1999: 673),

autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness. Back and forth autoethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic wide angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations.

Within this understanding, autoethnography is a particular kind of research: it is a practice that uses the relations between the researcher’s self and her/his research setting in order to add layers of meaning to the research process (Besio and Butz 2004; Butz and Besio 2004; Denzin 1997; Ellis 1999; Spry 2001). As I have said, this is a more common use of the term autoethnography within social science literature. ³

In this thesis, I draw on Mary Louise Pratt’s conceptualization of autoethnography in her 1992 book, Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation. Although Pratt outlines what she means by autoethnography in the introduction to Imperial Eyes, and has returned to the concept in later articles, her conceptualization has received little attention

³ There are clearly many overlaps between the two uses of the term: both involve a certain amount of reflexivity and focus on meaning-making as a contextual process. In both cases, the autoethnographic author is representing something in relation to which s/he is an “insider” and their discussion of their personal experiences entails some commentary on the larger social/cultural contexts of those experiences. In the case of researchers, their status as researchers positions them at the borders between insider and outsider. They write to an academic audience as academic insiders (because they are researchers) and outsiders (because there are “natives”). Simultaneously, autoethnographic researchers write about their “social group” as insiders (members of the group) and outsiders (academics). Their social location gives them a different perspective, and may bring something insightful to the research process. In the case of Mary Louise Pratt’s autoethnography, the author is not (necessarily) a researcher, but by writing to their dominants and entering into dominant realms of discourse, they also straddle a border between dominant (because of their access to transcultural realms of meaning-making) and subordinate (because of their social location within power relations).
(even from Pratt herself). In what follows, I would like to add to the body of literature which addresses Pratt’s use of the notion. As Pratt (1992, 1994, 1999) conceives them, autoethnographies (a) are produced within the confines of unequal power relations in what she calls “contact zones,”⁴ (b) aim at resisting (the effects of) those very relations in ways that are nevertheless accommodative, and (c) are addressed to members of the dominant group (at the metropolis) as well as members of the autoethnographer’s own group. Pratt suggests that the concept is particularly useful when approaching texts produced within the confines (and I would add possibilities) of “the intricate transcultural pragmatics of communication under conquest” (1994: 24).

David Butz and Ken MacDonald (2001: 184) argue that Pratt’s theorization of autoethnography emphasizes “that speech produced within a colonial discursive field is always constituted therein and never in some other space of authenticity.” As Pratt defines it, autoethnography entails an interesting challenge to the constructed binary dualism between authentically pure products of culture and ones considered inauthentic, “acculturated,” impure, or assimilated. According to Pratt, autoethnographic expressions draw on both dominant and subordinate cultural practices or codes. She argues that autoethnographies

are not ... what are usually thought of as autochthonous or ‘authentic’ forms of self-representation. Rather, they involve selective collaboration with and

⁴ Pratt (1992: 4, emphasis added) defines contact zones as “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination – like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today.” Although “contact” seems to neutralize/deemphasize the violence of colonization, Pratt recognizes the asymmetry of the power relations constituting this space. “Contact zones” is an attempt, on her part, to acknowledge “the spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated” (1992, 7, emphasis added). Pratt’s definition thus emphasizes the subjectivity and agency of colonized populations. She uses “contact zone” over “colonial frontier” to foreground the presence and experience of “natives” often written out of colonialist historical accounts or represented only as the objects of colonial encounters. In Pratt’s formulation, local populations are no longer merely “the colonized” (read objects), but are recognized as “those who experience colonization” (read subjects).
appropriation from the idioms of the … conqueror. These are merged or infiltrated to varying degrees with indigenous idioms to create self-representations intended to intervene in metropolitan modes of understanding. (28, emphasis in original)

Pratt's conceptualization of autoethnography thus seems to entail some degree of responsibility (on the reception end) to resist the search for a recognizably “authentic Native” (perhaps even to abandon or reject notions of cultural authenticity).

My claim that autoethnography rejects the notion of cultural authenticity speaks to a particular use of the term “authentic.” I am not criticizing the possibility of authentic feeling, experience, or action, per se. Rather, I criticize understandings of cultural authenticity or purity as a theoretical or ontological possibility. Such understandings often create rigid and exclusive definitions of particular people/practices/cultural codes as authentic or inauthentic according to simple, singular conceptualizations of a set culture. The main issue I take with these expectations of authenticity is that they often become categorical impositions which exclude people from specific subject(ive) positions, deny their experiences, and discount the processes involved in negotiating and narrating cultural identities or practices. For example, the notion that “authentically” Muslim women are veiled, and that those who are unveiled are Westernized (i.e. inauthentic), is often used in ways that recreate a particular, exclusive Muslim female voice as authentically representative of Muslim women. In this way, it functions as a homogenizing discourse that relies on and recreates ontological categories of identity, often to the exclusion of many Muslim women’s social locations and self-understandings.

Moreover, distinctions “between an authorized authentic Native and the unauthorized inauthentic [presuppose] some outside agent capable of making [the distinctions]” (Butz and MacDonald 2001: 188). The search for authenticity relies on and
reproduces the power of those authorized to define social locations or voices as more or less authentic or representative. Notions of authenticity deny the heterogeneity of social groups. To define a particular identity or social location as authentic, and therefore representative is to disavow the fluidity and continuous (re)negotiations of cultural categories. Discourses of authenticity may thus deny the coevalness (Fabian 1983: 35) of colonized peoples who must continue to replicate the exact practices of their cultural predecessors as represented by these discourses, or as they were when “discovered” (read defined) by the colonizer (Butz and MacDonald 2001, Mills 2004, Mitchell 1995).

Within such an understanding, only the dominant colonizer is permitted to undergo cultural change and to renegotiate and reinvent their cultural practices; similar negotiations of cultural codes and practices by subaltern populations are taken as evidence of cultural impurity. Pratt defines autoethnography in opposition to expectations of cultural purity.

Persistently reminding her readers that autoethnographic texts emerge out of a field of transcultural power relations, Pratt (1994: 45) warns that to receive a given autoethnography “either in terms of assimilation and co-optation, or in terms of purity, authenticity, or naivety, [is to suppress] its dialogic, transcultural dimensions.” Pratt (1994: 30) thus emphasizes the importance of the “reception end” of autoethnography.

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5 I do not mean to imply here that only members of dominant groups draw on discourses of authenticity. The point is, however, that these discourses tend to rely on a binary distinction (often between Western/modern and traditional), where to be authentic or traditional is to be frozen in time. Ultimately, authenticity “has itself been formed within the history of the modernizing project and therefore incorporates aspects of the Orientalist tradition” (Abu-Lughod and Mitchell 1993: 83)

6 Following Fernando Ortiz (1995 [1947]: 97-98), Pratt uses the terms transcultural and transculturation instead of the more ethnocentric acculturation. Ortiz (1947: 98) uses transculturation to refer to “extremely complex transmutations of culture.” In choosing to use transculturation, Pratt recognizes a) European cultures as cultures (as opposed to neutral non-cultures) and b) the bidirectional nature of the (highly asymmetrical) encounter between colonizer and colonized (as opposed to approaching the encounter in ways that validate only European subjectivities).
(what happens between the audience and the text), arguing that in "the absence of structures of reception," an autoethnographic expression becomes "an impossible speech act" – it is an ineffective or pointless utterance if no one hears or can decipher it.

The concept of autoethnography thus seems to be a good point of analysis of the effects and negotiations of power relations, particularly within colonial and (post)colonial\(^7\) settings. Pratt (1994: 26) uses the concept "to consider ... questions of how culture is negotiated in situations of conquest and occupation." She argues that within the realm of colonial encounter,

social and cultural formations enter into long-term, often permanent states of crisis that cannot be resolved by either conqueror or conquered. Rather, the relations of conquered/conqueror, invader/invadee, past hegemony/present hegemony become the medium in which and out of which culture, language, society and consciousness get constructed. The constructing itself ... involves continuous negotiations among radically heterogeneous groups making up the imperial power structure, among radically heterogeneous systems of meaning put into contact by the colonial encounter, and within the relations of radical inequality enforced by imperial violence. (Pratt 1994: 26, emphasis added)

Emerging out of these relations, "autoethnographic expressions suggest a particular kind of cultural self-consciousness, an awareness of one's life-ways or customs as they have been singled out by the metropolis, be it for objectification in knowledge, for suppression or for extermination" (44, emphasis in original). Thus, autoethnographic texts highlight

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\(^7\) I want to say something of my use of the term (post)colonial, a term many authors have questioned or attempted to fine-tune (Barker, Hulme, and Iverson 1994; Coombes 1994; Gregory 1995, 2001; Loomba 1998; Shohat 1991). The brackets around (post) are meant to indicate that I do not use (post)colonial to suggest that we are at some crucial historical moment that is "after" colonialism. Colonialism is not over, and even in situations where formal colonial relations have ended, the impacts of those relations continue into the present. As Derek Gregory (2001) suggests, to imply an "after" to colonialism is to run "the risk of concealing the ways in which colonial norms and forms extend into the present" (84-85). Gregory goes on to suggest that "[t]he most productive response to these concerns may be to trace the curve of the postcolonial from the inaugural moment of the colonial encounter" (85, emphasis in original). In terms of specific historical moments, I will be following Gregory's lead: whenever I use the terms (post)colonial or (post)coloniality, I am speaking about the period after colonialism began – a period which clearly extends into the present. I do so to point out that colonialism and its effects are not really over.
subordinate populations' awareness of dominant knowledge about them, and by
extension, they underscore subordinate peoples' access to dominant knowledge.

Pratt (45, emphasis added) concludes that autoethnography "involves an assertion
not of self-as-other, but of self-as-another’s-other, and of self-as-more-than-the-other’s-
other." Autoethnographic texts therefore seem to point out subordinate populations’
awareness of dominant knowledges (since the autoethnographer must first be familiar
with these in order to engage them) despite their exclusion (as subjects) from dominant
knowledge production. Autoethnographic texts disrupt the illusion of totalizing power
relations, the binary distinction between dominant (subjects) and subordinate (objects),
and rely on the very structures that have excluded oppressed peoples (as subjects) from
the transcultural arena of representation in order to challenge dominant knowledge about
(and representations of) them. The effectiveness of these challenges, however, may be
dissolved if there is no way to receive them, a point highlighted by Pratt's formulation
that autoethnographies need "to be read and to be readable" (Pratt 1992: 4). On the
production end, autoethnography's accommodation of dominant knowledges increases its
readability by members of dominant populations. If and how they are read, however, are
matters of consideration on the reception end of autoethnographic communications.

By adding to a limited body of literature on autoethnography, I hope that my
present work will play some small role in opening up possibilities for "structures of
reception." I have two main purposes in undertaking this research. First, I want to
propose the usefulness of autoethnography as a theoretical tool for understanding the
communicative expressions of subordinated peoples. Second, I would also like to suggest
possibilities for using the concept (on both the production end as well as the reception
end) in ways that intervene in and resist "the continuing effects of colonial discourses and structures of domination on contemporary cultures and societies" (Butz and Besio 2004: 350). David Butz and Kathryn Besio (2004) suggest that the recognition of the lingering effects of colonialism brings with it two responsibilities: "to identify and analyze the lingering effects of colonialism, and to contribute to processes that dismantle those effects" (350). I will be arguing that approaching the speech acts of members of subordinate groups as autoethnographic endeavors may be one way of proceeding towards these responsibilities/goals.

Before I map out the specifics of my argument, I briefly want to introduce the two texts I use as illustrative examples of the possibilities entailed in autoethnographic expression and reception. The two texts with which I am working, both written by Fatima Mernissi (a Moroccan Islamic feminist sociologist), are Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood (1994) and Scheherazade Goes West: Different Cultures, Different Harems (2001). These are written out of a (post)colonial field of power relations and engage particular gendered and sexualized colonialist representations of Muslim/Arab women (specifically, representations that construct secluded, helpless Muslim women imprisoned in harems by despotic Muslim men).

It is worthwhile to analyze Dreams of Trespass and Scheherazade Goes West together because the second book is written in response to what Mernissi perceives as (European and North American) receptions of the first book (i.e., metropolitan readers' receptions). I work with both texts in order to analyze Mernissi’s continuous engagement with representations of Muslim/Arab women, and I follow Mernissi as she takes up the
idiom of harem life/female seclusion with which Islam has often been associated in Orientalist academic and non-academic literature, paintings, travel writing, and films. I have chosen to work with these two texts because they reflect particularly well the relationship(s) between discourse and power by focusing on the role of discursive cultural representations (and representations of cultures) in justifying, creating, and/or reflecting power relations. The two texts also constitute and portray an attempt to use the power of narration to intervene in power relations.

Working with both of Mernissi’s texts enables an analysis of the dialogic process of her engagement with North American and European knowledges which results in the expansion of her original project. Mernissi’s first book engages certain representations of Muslim and Arab women as passive objects controlled by Muslim men, with a particular interest in what may be understood as academic representations. Although she directly addresses Muslim/Arab cultural codes, practices, and texts, she is more indirect in addressing European or North American cultural codes, practices and textual representations of gender. It is only in her conversations with European men about the term “harem” (depicted in the second book) that Mernissi begins to interrogate the effects of such things as French paintings or American films (as well as what may be broadly categorized as Western patriarchal conceptions of the feminine) on the ways in which Euro-Americans imagine Muslim women. The expansion of Mernissi’s project into Scheherazade Goes West highlights the interconnections between what are often

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8 My use of the term idiom here may seem a little strange, so I want to explain why I have specifically used this word. In their everyday sense, idioms are either colloquial expressions (which do not translate literally), or they are understood as styles, or particular modes of speaking or vocabulary associated with a specific language (or the speakers of that language). It may be more pertinent, therefore, to say that ethnography or travel writing are particular idioms used in speaking about or interpreting “indigenous cultures.” I use idiom in speaking about harems or veiling to underscore their becoming so thoroughly associated with Muslim and Arabic women’s oppression so as to become idiomatic references, which evoke images of barbaric/despotical Islamic patriarchy and demure/oppressed Muslim women.
understood as different spheres of knowledge. It also reflects an autoethnographic dialogue, where responses to the first book become tools for further autoethnography.

Mernissi’s *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood* (1994), is written in the style of a memoir discussing her experience of growing up in a domestic harem in Fez, Morocco in the 1940s. In the memoir, she explores the power relations inherent in patriarchy, colonialism, and consumerism. She discusses the constraints and possibilities that emerge from each relation, particularly with respect to women’s lives. The memoir takes the form of a “quest” for knowledge and involves multiple discoveries of powerful Islamic female figures (who have shaped Mernissi’s feminism). These figures include female relatives as well as celebrated Arabic and Muslim women whose lives are narrated to the young Mernissi by female relatives. Mernissi seems to suggest throughout the book that Western scholars who have represented Arab and Muslim women have misread much of what they saw. Indeed, rather than harem women emerging as “frogs in a well” (Jeffery 1979), Mernissi speaks of them as birds of flight.

The general body of the text involves Mernissi, as a child narrator, questioning what the term “harem” means, the specific meaning of a Moroccan domestic harem, how it is experienced by the women living within it, and how the outside world (including the colonizer) looks from inside the harem. Mernissi complicates the notion of the harem, using it to discuss the imposition of (both physical and discursive) boundaries that people must learn to trespass. The harem thus emerges not as a confining space that is the sole experience of women, but as something experienced by any of us when we are bound by rigid categorizations. At the same time, the harem becomes a private space of female subjectivity and resistance. Narratives about harems are told, not only by Mernissi as the
child-narrator, but also by the women in Mernissi's life, who use the space of their harem to impart lessons about how to trespass and resist being bound in. Mernissi's depiction of familial harem life avoids the extremes of dismissing the institution as a totalizing prison and of romanticizing it as a lost space of female power.

The second book, *Scheherazade Goes West* (2001), begins with Mernissi describing her European and North American book tours for *Dreams of Trespass* (1994). We are told that every North American or Western European male journalist "started his interview by asking, like a magic formula, 'So, were you really born in a harem?'" (2001: 12). Mernissi (12, emphasis added) says that "the look accompanying the inquiry signaled that my interviewer did not want me to evade the question — as if there were some shameful secret involved." Mernissi concludes that although she had spent the entirety of *Dreams of Trespass* discussing what it means to speak of a harem, the contradictions involved in the use of the term, and the ambivalence felt towards it as a familial institution, her voice has evidently not been heard by these journalists.

Mernissi thus writes *Scheherazade Goes West* to deal specifically with the representations of harems and Arab/Muslim women to which her European and North American interlocutors refer when questioned about what they understand the word to mean. The representations to which these men refer arise from popular songs, paintings, stories, and movies which project the harem as a hyper(hetero)sexual space where women lounge around as passive naked bodies whose sole purpose is the sexual gratification of men. Mernissi presents alternative conceptualizations of harems and female subjectivity, but she begins by using the specific cultural symbols and idioms which are familiar to her "Western" readers — such as Hollywood movies, or renaissance
paintings. In so doing, Mernissi simultaneously accommodates and disrupts the dominant structures of knowledge within the field of (post)colonial power relations. In other words, Mernissi becomes an autoethnographer, undertaking a form of accommodative resistance.

I analyze these two texts in order to explore the usefulness of autoethnography as a concept for understanding self-representations within, and interventions in, fields of power relations. At the most basic level, Mernissi’s texts are autoethnographic because they involve a representation of herself as “another’s-other” and as “more-than-the-other’s-other”. Undertaking to represent oneself is not necessarily about objective accuracy, but about claims to subjective agency; representations are not necessarily about “truth,” but are sites of contestation and processes of power struggles. As such, self-representation, like representation of others, has vested interests; it is about more than just “information” about the object world. Similarly, my engagement with autoethnography and with Mernissi’s texts is not about finding the “true” intent of an author, but about the very process of representation, what it may suggest about agency and subjectivity, and the dialogic challenge autoethnographic texts may pose to those of us on the reception end.

My objective in the present chapter has been to introduce the aims of my thesis and the specific texts I analyze as part of these aims. In Chapter Two I locate my project theoretically by mapping out my understanding of the interrelations of subjectivity, knowledge, representation, and power, all key components in my understanding of autoethnography. If autoethnography (as a form of self-representation) engages with dominant understandings about subordinate populations, then the process of representation and its implications for power relations are important, and may be
highlighted when autoethnography is conceived as a way of intervening in discourse. At the same time, I will also be mapping out the structures of knowledge that I think have often stood in the way of receiving a text as autoethnographic — and often, of receiving the texts of subordinate peoples, in general.

Chapter Two, then, focuses on dominant discourses which deny the subjective agency of subordinate peoples, and create social categories/identities by differentiating them from one another, thereby reinforcing (and being reinforced by) representations of subordinate peoples as the objects of dominant knowledge. I will argue that subordinate peoples are constituted as such through discursive processes of exclusion. These processes of exclusion create a dominant subject (whose participation in knowledge is both authorized and authoritative) as the Master subject by circumscribing the acceptable limits of dominant knowledge. I also argue, however, that these terrains of signification, by defining subordinate peoples, provide them with an entry point into dominant realms of knowledge. Autoethnographers perform the identity categories created for them within the dominant realm, but they do so in disruptive ways that exploit the fissures and flaws of the dominant nexus of power/knowledge.

In Chapter Three I narrow my field of focus to discuss more specifically the terms of transcultural representation and the dominant terrains of signification, in which would-be (post)colonial autoethnographers are (re)defined as objects of study, and denied the possibility of subjective agency within dominant understandings of them. I focus on (post)coloniality both because Pratt defines her concept out of this setting and because Mernissi’s texts are best understood within this context since she is writing out of Morocco (previously a French and Spanish colony). In Chapter Three, then, I am
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especially interested in who emerges as the Master Subject within a (post)colonial setting, and how this influences (the possibilities of) receptions of autoethnographic expressions. Discursive formations are used in justifying and reproducing power relations, including those involving colonial rule. I outline more specifically the colonialist discursive formations that enter into the constitution of the colonized, and I go on to examine the ways autoethnographic texts may resist dominant colonialist discursive formations that deny the active agency and subjectivity of the colonized. The main argument in the chapter is that the tropes used to represent subordinate peoples to the metropolis (i.e., the dominant tropes within the transcultural arena) are sanctified by dominant discourses and they are what autoethnographers have to work with if they are to enter dominant realms of meaning-making. I focus specifically on the aspects of Orientalism, as described by Edward Said, that are crucial to the formation of dominant realms of knowledge, and which autoethnographic representations may challenge.

In Chapter Four, my main aim is to contextualize Fatima Mernissi’s texts within the sexualizing and eroticizing discourses evident in representations of Islamic gender relations and of Muslim women (as a singular monolithic category) (Abu-Lughod 1998; Ahmed 1982, 1992; Blunt and Rose 1994; Elie 2004; Gregory 1995, 2000; Lazreg 1988; Lewis 1996; Mills 2001; Shohat 1990; Waines 1982). The intersections of gendered and colonial power relations are important for contextualizing Mernissi’s self-representations, which must be read within and against the discursive formation of Arab and Muslim women within the transcultural arena of representation. More specifically, Mernissi’s texts can be read in relation to the dominant tropes of “female seclusion,” the fundamental patriarchy of Muslim men, and the oppression of Muslim women by Muslim
men. These tropes have all been integral to the constitution of Islam (sometimes conflated with the Middle East or with "Arabia") within the transcultural arena, and they are exemplified in a central obsessive focus on "the harem."

Often, these discourses rely on and recreate a binary opposition between (modern Western) self and (primitive Islamic) other, resulting in the reconstruction of Islam and the West (both of which are complex, heterogeneous entities) as singular, monolithic, homogeneous singularities. I argue that such colonialist, patronizing, masculinist discourses form the imaginative spaces available to think through/about Arab and Muslim women within transcultural terrains of signification. Arab and Muslim women are thus constituted by these discourses as passive victims of despotic Muslim men, and feminism is constructed as an "advanced Western" imposition fundamentally opposed to Islamic "tradition." Dominant discourses limit what counts as knowledge about Muslim women, but Memissi uses them as a way to gain entry into the dominant realms of knowledge production.

Chapters Five and Six provide an illustration of the usefulness of an autoethnographic reading sensibility. Chapter Five focuses on authorizing (autoethnographic) texts through dominant discourses, as evident in Memissi's *Dreams of Trespass*. The text draws on dominant knowledges about and representations of gender relations within the so-called Muslim world, providing readers with familiar images which reflect the discursive constitution of Muslim women. Nevertheless, Memissi's use of these images contains disruptive elements and calls attention to the fissures within dominant discourses. I argue that *Dreams of Trespass* may be read as a transcultural representation which engages the dominant discursive constructions of Islam and
feminism as diametrically opposed. Mernissi (re)presents for her reader the multiplicity of discourses constituting power relations between male-female, colonizer-colonized, public-private, and modern-traditional.

Having identified elements in the text which challenge dominant transcultural representations, I turn to the importance of reading with an autoethnographic sensibility in Chapter Six. I begin the chapter with a particular analysis of *Dreams of Trespass* which seems to reveal a search for a Native Informant, and for confirmation of preexistent discourses. I argue that such a reading, which relies on “an epistemology of received categories of identity” (Passaro 1997: 161), reproduces colonialist structures of knowledge, and (re)colonizes subordinate knowledges and speech. I also argue, however, that such co-optation of autoethnographic speech into dominant structures of knowledge is one of the dangers associated with the ambiguity of autoethnographic communication, in general. Autoethnographies rely on the ambivalence of colonialist discourses in order to disguise their resistances by cloaking them in dominant discourses. Consequently, the ambiguity of autoethnographic resistance provides room for readers to return to inherited knowledges, and therefore, to dissipate the resistant potentials of autoethnographic texts.

Mernissi’s *Scheherazade Goes West*, seems to respond to readings of her previous text (*Dreams of Trespass*), which rely on dominant representations of Islam and Muslim women, and which miss the challenges she poses to these. Entering more directly into dialogue with dominant representations, Mernissi opens up a process/dialogue through autoethnographic representation, which highlights the importance of the interaction between autoethnographic author, text, and reader. Mernissi’s texts thus emerge as part of a process of decolonizing knowledge in general, and I hope that my analysis of them also
calls attention to autoethnography’s possibilities for decolonizing our reading practices of (post)colonial texts. My engagement with the concept of autoethnography thus helps me to understand the utterances (be they speeches, written work, paintings, music, etc.) of those in a subordinate position. Utterances which seem to accommodate existing power relations, but which also have the potential to disrupt them, are of particular interest to me, especially for how they may help us to unlearn our often taken-for-granted positions and structures of knowledge.
First Intermission

Physical borders, the ones I can see, usually don't bother me much. I know they are there as I approach them and I generally tend to know whether they function to keep me out or to keep me in. So I can usually decide ahead of time HOW to approach them, which self to present. It's the invisible ones I dread... the private ones that are made public when other people pronounce them and suddenly jolt me into an awareness of their existence.

* * * * *

When we moved to Canada, I wanted Canadian-ness... I had never desired anything so much. I wanted to be a citizen, to belong, to stop existing AS a border. Citizenship was a status that I was certain would bring with it a sense of inclusion. I have since had an at best ambiguously, and at worst turbulently, unstable relationship with the "state" of citizenship. My understanding of citizenship changed drastically when I took up the veil. By then I had become an official Canadian citizen, but by covering my hair, I uncovered my Otherness and discovered difference. What I had considered a private decision was redefined as a public declaration by my own and other people's interpretations of my then veiled body. When I took off the veil, the categories of citizenship to which I belonged once again shifted.

* * * * *

I should first warn you that the stories, incidents, and experiences that comprise my sense of self do not form a linear narrative, partly because I have experienced them and partly because I remember them in disjointed and discontinuous ways.

So I start my story for you three years after I had taken off the veil, but I will later pull you back into my memories... I am walking down the street with my brother in Hamilton, Ontario in September of 2001. Although I cannot recall the exact date, I can tell you that it was shortly after the 11th... As my brother and I walk down the street, a few people cross to the other side... I think nothing of this, barely even notice it, in fact.

I remember it sharply a few days later when my brother tells me that as he had left the bar the previous evening a person entering the bar had called him a terrorist... I ask what he said to this person and he says "nothing". When I ask why, he tells me I wouldn't understand.

When I tell my brother that I hadn't had anything like that happen to me since 9/11, his response burns my ears: "Of course not! You're white!" I am stunned. I am unsure if my shock is due to his actual pronouncement, to my mother's agreeing nods, or to my sudden recognition that he is right.

Since unveiling, I had unhesitatingly embraced privilege... I had become a "real" Canadian citizen... I had lost touch with myself as border zone, with my Other self.
Chapter Two
Discursive Tools of Oppression: Recreating Invasions as Borders and Frontiers

As I said in the introduction, one of my interests is in the possibility and necessity of receiving autoethnographic endeavors as such. I am especially concerned with how approaching a text with an autoethnographic sensibility may call into question the foundational premises of accepted dominant knowledge about subordinate populations. In calling someone an autoethnographer, I want to emphasize their active agency and to challenge the tendency of those in dominant positions within power relations not to recognize the knowledges of those who have been Othered. I will argue that misrecognizing the agencies and knowledges of Othered peoples has partially been a byproduct of the creation of a Master subject – a category from which subordinate peoples have been excluded. Those who fall into the category of the Master subject have often participated in creating knowledge about subordinate peoples through representations which reinforce existing power relations and deny subordinate populations’ participation in the transcultural realm of meaning-making.

In this chapter, I lay out some of the theoretical foundations for my project and map out structures of knowledge that have often stood in the way of receiving a given text as autoethnographic – and often, of receiving the texts of subordinate peoples in general. If, as Pratt suggests, there has been an absence of structures of reception for autoethnographic endeavors, it is important to understand why and how this occurs. I argue in this chapter, that the absence of structures of reception has been facilitated by discourses which deny the subjective agency of subordinate peoples and create rigidly defined social categories/identities. Dominant representations of subordinate peoples have often reinforced these discourses – and they have been reinforced by them. I will
discuss dominant representations of subordinate peoples, particularly within a (post)colonial context, in the following chapter. Here, I map out my understanding of the relationships among subjectivity, knowledge, representation, and power, because these are key components of my understanding of autoethnography.

The main theoretical perspective that informs my conceptualization of autoethnography may be broadly categorized as post-structuralist. Post-structuralism seems to encompass a variety of different ideas/authors, and it is often conflated with postmodernism (i.e. the two terms are often used interchangeably). Post-structuralism and postmodernism have been the topics of much debate, and those who fall under their umbrella cannot avoid entering into debates with those who dismiss their (often very serious and political) work on the basis that it is “mere discourse” (Butler 1992, Dear 1988, Denzin and Lincoln 1998, Marcus 1998, Rabinow 1986). Post-structuralist thinkers often feel the need to defend themselves against such charges, and to explain that/why, as Judith Butler (1990, 1992, 1993) puts it, “discourse matters.”

In the Dictionary of Human Geography, postmodernism is “characterized by skepticism towards the grand claims and grand theory of the modern era, and their privileged vantage point, stressing in its place an openness to a range of voices in social enquiry, artistic experimentation and political empowerment” (Ley, 1994: 466). Despite offering this definition, David Ley still addresses the difficulty in giving any one definition of postmodernism, a difficulty which arises from its varying uses both across disciplines and across authors. Ley follows Michael Dear’s (1986) classification of postmodernism into three components: style, epoch, and method (Dear 1986, 1988; Dear and Wassmansdorf 1993).
According to Dear, postmodern style is evident in architectural design and art, and is basically unrelated to the philosophical debates that surround postmodernism. Ley (1994) challenges Dear's criticism of postmodern style as superficial, arguing instead that "style is centrally implicated in the constitution of meaning and identity... Style may be either supportive of dominant ideologies, or offer a 'ritual of resistance' which [is] socially and politically oppositional to them" (466). For Dear (1986, 1988), the notion of a postmodern era or epoch involves some sense that there has been radical change in the world and that we have entered some new epoch or broken with "modernity."9 Ley (1994) adds that the strongest arguments in favour of postmodernism as an era/epoch have come from materialists "who see 'the postmodern condition' as caught up in, and ultimately propelled by, historic shifts in global capitalism" (467). Ley goes on to explain that a major critique of these arguments is that they are totalizing, rely on a metanarrative of history, and tend to exclude "the experience and struggles of the other, the voices of marginalized social groups, and particularly the voices of women" (467).

The third classification, what Dear calls postmodern method, is of most interest to me; based on Dear's classifications, post-structuralism may be understood as the method associated with postmodernism. Although this is most often cited as deconstruction, deconstruction does not preclude using other methods in one's research.10 Deconstruction is often strongly linked to poststructuralism, likely due to their common association with French philosophy since the 1960s, especially with the works of Foucault, Derrida,

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9 In speaking of eras, or epochs, I generally tend to agree with Donna Haraway's refutation of the notion of a postmodern epoch. In The Promise of Monsters (2004c), Haraway insists on the use of the term amodernity, as opposed to post-modernity or meta-modernity. Following Bruno Latour, she argues that "the belief in something called the modern is itself a mistake. Instead, the amodern refers to a view of history that insists on the absence of beginnings, enlightenments, and endings: the world has always been in the middle of things" (Haraway 2004c: 77).

10 I will be returning to deconstruction shortly because I think that autoethnographic expressions may have the potential to deconstruct dominant knowledge.
Kristeva, Lacan, Deleuze, or Irigaray (Butler 1992, Kockelmans 1999, G. Pratt 1994, Marcus 1998), whose work often engaged with and critiqued structuralist theoretical paradigms. According to Geraldine Pratt (1994: 468), poststructuralist thinkers often draw on two main structuralist ideas: Saussurian linguistics and Althusser’s critique of the subject. Pratt (468) tells us that “poststructuralists … absorbed the antihumanist critique of a unified, knowing and rational subject, instead interpreting subjectivity as continually in process, as a site of disunity, conflict and contradictions, and hence potential political change.” Although this is in keeping with Althusser’s critique, where he emphasizes the role of ideology in producing subjectivity, poststructuralists tend to rely more heavily on notions of discourse.

According to Althusser, the subject is a subjected being, interpellated through ideology – more specifically, through ideological state apparatuses which function alongside repressive state apparatuses. Poststructuralism breaks with this part of the analysis because Althusser understood his critique to be “a scientific exposé [while poststructuralists] … maintain that there is no extra discursive ‘real’ outside of cultural systems” (G. Pratt 1994: 468). Althusser privileges the researcher, placing her/him in a position from which to recognize false consciousness as false and to see “the real.”

Poststructuralist analysis, on the other hand, refutes the notion of an essential truth to be

In the Dictionary of Human Geography Derek Gregory suggests that current understandings of ideology, with certain negative connotations, have their origins in Marx. Gregory (1994: 272) suggests that “most writers use ‘ideology’ in one of two conventional senses.” The first is as a “generalized system of ideas” (272), which reflects a certain epoch, and the second is as a “distorted system of ideas” (272). The first reflects notions of hegemony while the second reflects ideas of false consciousness. Gregory offers Thompson’s definition of ideology as “a system of signification which facilitates the pursuit of particular interests’ and sustains specific ‘relations of domination’” (272). While there are several different ways that writers use the term ‘ideology’, in what follows, as I distinguish discourse and ideology, I will be drawing on the two common uses of it mentioned above: ideology as “(a) the lattice of ideas which permeate the social order, constituting the collective consciousness of an epoch’ and (b), a consciousness which is in some ways ‘false’ [and] which fails to grasp the real conditions of human existence’ (Thompson as quoted in Gregory 1994: 272). For a longer, more comprehensive discussion of the term ideology and the changes it has undergone since the eighteenth century, refer to Gregory (1994).
uncovered by the researcher, who after all exists within the discursive realm of the world, and whose work (like any other interpretation) is produced within its confines.

The second aspect of structuralism on which post-structuralists draw is Saussure’s idea that “meaning is produced within rather than reflected in language” (G. Pratt 1994, 468). This basically means that language gives meaning to things, thus constructing our social reality. Saussure argues that language is a system of meaning composed of linguistic signs, each of which may be broken down into a signifier (what we perceive or the specific term we use) and a signified (what we understand the term to mean). These signs are differentiated from one another, and come to have a certain shared meaning, so that “‘beneath’ all cultural practices [are] sign-systems that [afford] to meaning a certain stability” (Braun and Wainwright 2001: 47). Derrida agrees with Saussure that meaning is produced through language, but he pushes the limits further than does his predecessor.

For Derrida, since we can only think and interpret our world through language, we can only ever approximate reality. In other words, no ontology is ever complete: we may signify the referent (i.e. what is really there), but we can never really know it. Where Saussure prioritizes difference, suggesting that we can know the world through language (which we use to differentiate between things), Derrida adds that language also forever defers meaning (Derrida 1976, 1982). Ultimately, deconstruction may be thought of as “a demonstration of the incompleteness or incoherence of a philosophical position [which uses] concepts and principles of argument whose meaning and use is legitimated only by that philosophical position” (Wheeler 1999: 209). Deconstruction is often wrongly interpreted as doing away with theories and ideas, or as “an excision of criticized

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12 Derrida calls this différence: the way in which language is used to differentiate one thing from another, but also forever defers the possibility of a final meaning, defers the possibility of a closure of knowledge.
doctrines” (210). Again, this is not quite what the practice involves; “deconstruction is not an exposure of error, not other people’s error. The ... most serious critique in deconstruction is ... of something extremely useful, something without which we cannot do anything” (Spivak quoted in Butler 1992: 27). One is asked to deconstruct the foundations of one’s ideas, not to do away with them, but to recognize their limits and exclusions, and to be willing to revise them constantly.

According to Judith Butler (1992),

if there is a point, and a fine point, to ... post-structuralism, it is that power pervades the very conceptual apparatus that seeks to negotiate its terms, including the subject position of the critic; and further that this implication of the terms of criticism in the field of power is not the advent of a nihilistic relativism incapable of furnishing norms, but, rather, the very precondition of a politically engaged critique. ... [Our] task is to interrogate what the theoretical move that establishes foundations authorizes, and what precisely it excludes and forecloses (6-7, emphasis in original).

The point thus seems to be that we cannot accept any theoretical or philosophical treatise so blindly that it is beyond criticism. Basically, we need to recognize that even when our intention is to work towards some sense of inclusion, our work may be (and often is) exclusionary; we need to be willing not only to recognize these exclusions when they appear before us, but to look for them ourselves.

A major poststructuralist insight is that it is impossible to provide an all-encompassing framework that takes into account every element of the world and people’s differing experiences of it. Specific bodies of theory are often built on certain (exclusionary, even if unintentionally so) foundational premises arising from the specific locations and interactions of their main contributors. As Butler (1992: 7) argues, such “foundations function as the unquestioned and the unquestionable within any theory,” but they are “constituted through exclusions which, taken into account, expose the
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foundational premise as a contingent and contestable presumption.” Butler thus rejects any possibility of a universal theory applicable to all things, times, places, or experiences.

Again, the point here is not to do away with foundations, but to embrace uncertainties and to be willing to engage critiques of the very foundations that make our work possible. Those who theorize certain aspects of the social world, and seem to get things right, do so for a very particular time/place/group; their work, no matter how good, cannot be universal, and should not be universalized. We are ultimately called on by Butler always to be willing to rethink and call into question the very ideas that make our explanations possible, and to recognize that these ideas and presumptions often function in ways that exclude other people.

The argument outlined above does not only hold true for philosophical foundations, but for the foundations of meaning-making in general. Meaning is often achieved through “cognitive failures” (Spivak 1988) or what Butler (1993) calls the “constitutive outside”: elements that are excluded, but whose very exclusion allows our concepts to achieve their coherence, or naturalness. Meaning, representations, or relations are “normalized by the ‘casting-off’ of that which does not fit within [their] conceptual frame” (Braun and Wainwright 2001: 54). In the case of autoethnographies, the “naturalness” of the fields of power in which they exist (or the “normalization” of dominant representations of subordinate peoples) is achieved through the ‘casting-off’ of subordinate peoples’ subjective agency and voices – in Mernissi’s case, the voices of Arab and Muslim women.

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13 On this point in particular, Butler (1992: 7) warns that “within the political context of contemporary postcoloniality […], it is perhaps especially urgent to underscore the very category of ‘universal’ as a site of insistent contest and resignification.” Refer to Chapters Three and Four for a more comprehensive discussion of the importance of disrupting assumptions of universalism for (post)colonial peoples.
Autoethnographers take on universalized representations and disrupt them or their foundations, and autoethnographic expressions often point out the exclusions which form the foundations of dominant knowledge and relations of power. Autoethnographers assert their ability to represent themselves, and their knowledge of the ways in which they have been represented, and they do so by engaging dominant representations of themselves. In so doing, they juxtapose their own representations against those with which members of the dominant group are already familiar and thus pose challenges to these representations. They point out (often indirectly) the lack of coherence in any dominant representation by posing as that very incoherence. For example, when Fatima Mernissi, as an unveiled woman, insists on claiming a Muslim identity, or writes as an Islamic feminist, she contests dominant images of the veiled, demure, silent Muslim woman. In other words, autoethnographic texts have the potential to be tools of deconstruction of dominant knowledge: autoethnographers may point out that what those at the centre have understood to be coherent, correct images, only appear that way due to forced silences/absences. Autoethnographic texts reveal hidden knowledges, and provide windows into hidden worlds, but they often highlight the reciprocal gaze out of their discursively constituted social position (as objects) that meets the dominant voyeur’s gaze. In so doing, they may begin to unravel seemingly coherent discourses of subject-object positions and relations. Autoethnographies thus have the potential to resist dominant knowledge, but given the position of autoethnographers within power relations, the realization of this potential is facilitated by favourable structures of reception.

In some senses, autoethnographers engage the productive potentials of power relations in order to resist the oppressive elements of those relations. Indeed,
autoethnographers' address of metropolitan audiences illustrates precisely what Foucault has called the productive potential of power relations. According to Foucault, power relations are not always, and not only, oppressive. Foucault (1995: 194) warns that "we must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes', it 'represses', it 'censors', it 'abstracts', it 'masks', it 'conceals'. In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth." In saying this, Foucault does not deny that power relations have repressive or exclusionary effects. Instead, his critique of the "repressive hypothesis" is a suggestion that "power is dispersed through social relations, that it produces possible forms of behaviour as well as restricting behaviour" (Mills 2004: 17, emphasis added). Foucault's view is clearly related to his insistence that power is a discursive relation.

What then does Foucault mean by discourse? Foucault uses the term discourse in several different ways, and his definitions have been revisited and revised by several thinkers (Mills 2001, 2004). Paul Routledge (2002: 311) defines discourse as "a field of strategies (statements, views, theories, concepts, and objects of analysis and their interrelations) that create knowledge about something and create differentiations by posing limits on what can be said and by whom." This definition sounds close to what is commonly understood by ideology, and indeed, Foucault defines discourse in relation to Marxist notions of ideology – although as a way to distinguish what he means by discourse from what is usually meant by ideology (Mills 2001, 2004). Foucault rejects the notion of ideology for three reasons. The first is that, whether one wants it to be or not, it is always in virtual opposition to something like the truth... The second inconvenience is that it refers, necessarily, I believe, to something like a subject. Thirdly, ideology is a secondary position in relation to something which must function as the
infrastructure of economic or material determinant for it. (Foucault, quoted in Mills 2001: 11; 2004: 28-29)

It seems, then, that there are three areas where ideology and discourse can be differentiated. First, Foucault does not look for a true meaning which discourses cover up. For him, there is no independent, autonomous truth to be discovered by researchers. Thus, while ideology is often defined as false consciousness, as some smoke screen that prevents us from seeing or knowing "the truth," Foucault's discourse precludes even the possibility of finding "the truth." In fact, within such an understanding, one may argue that "'the truth' about the world is ... an effect of practices of signification" (Braun and Wainwright 2001: 45) and, I would add, the power relations they reflect and produce.

Discourse cannot be defined as "false" because such a classification would imply some position outside of the social world (i.e. outside the realm of discourse) from which to apprehend falseness. The point is that we are always already within the discursive constraints of the social world and the power relations which constitute it.

Second, Foucault argues that there are problems with the idea of a singular, coherent, individual subject. Foucault is not rejecting the idea of a subject, but of an autonomous, fully-formed, extradiscursive subject. What is meant by "the critique of the subject is not a negation or repudiation of the subject, but, rather, a way of interrogating its construction as a pregiven or foundational premise" (Butler 1992: 9). To critique the notion of a fully formed, prediscursive self is not the same as saying there is or can be no self. Instead, the point is that no self can exist as an entity independent from the discursive relations that form it.

There is no implication here of a denial of agency, which would leave no room for the possibility of resisting and disrupting such discourses, and thus no possibility for
political change/activism. The relationship between a *dividual* (as opposed to an *individual*) subject and the discourses that form her/him needs to be understood as dialogic: any given person’s sense of self “is *constituted by* ... positions ... [which are] fully embedded organizing principles of material practices and institutional arrangements, those matrices of power and discourse that produce [her/him] as a viable ‘subject’” (Butler 1992: 9, emphasis in original). The point is that I am shaped by the discourses that constitute me even as I play a role in shaping them, and that “no subject is its own point of departure” (9).

Third, Foucault’s understanding of discourse is distinguished from ideology in the role that economic relations play in each of these conceptions. Ideology is associated with Marxist and neo-Marxist theory, and as such, economic relations are understood to play, not only a significant, but often a primary role in determining power relations (and by extension the ideological constraints placed upon people). Within poststructuralist thought, “a real or essential class consciousness is [not]... anticipated on the basis of an individual’s material conditions” (G. Pratt 1994: 468). For those working within classical Marxist notions of ideology, the task is self-evident: one needs to replace false consciousness with real class consciousness in order to emancipate people from domination. For Foucault’s notion of discourse, it is not simply the economic base that “determines what can be said and thought at a particular time; instead ... the relation between economics, social structure, and discourses [is] ... a complex interaction with none of the terms of the equation being dominant” (Mills 2004: 32).

Another major difference between notions of ideology and discourse is that, for Marxists working within the framework of ideology, power is most often understood to
be repressive, “an infringement on someone else’s rights... taken or seized from others, ... something which one can possess” (Mills 2004: 32). Foucault understands power as productive, and discourse is produced within/by power relations: power produces discourses, and consequently, it also produces our subject positions. Recall from above that there is no possibility of a prediscursive self. By being born into the world, we are born into discourse, and are thus produced by discursive formations even as we play a role in producing and forming them. The notion of the self as formed by discourse is also a matter of social groups/categories being discursively formed through social relations: a social group “is a collective of persons differentiated from at least one other group by cultural forms, practices, or way of life... Groups are an expression of social relations: a group exists only in relation to at least one other group” (I.M. Young 1990: 43, emphasis added). In other words, specific cultures, understood as distinct social groups, are discursive categories, socially constructed, always shifting, and defying rigid definitions.

Hoping to call into question the idea of distinct cultures as explanatory categories, Don Mitchell (1995: 103) asserts that culture has often functioned “as something which differentiates the world and provides a concept for understanding that differentiation.” He goes on to argue that “there is no such (ontological) thing as culture. Rather, there is only the very powerful idea of culture” (103). Mitchell argues that cultures do not exist in and of themselves as explanatory categories, but are socially constructed under specific socio-historical conditions, in naming and defining (i.e. representing) “groups” or categories of human beings. In their assertion “of self as more-than-another’s-other” (Pratt 1994: 45)

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14 Power relations do not produce only dominant discourses, but counter-discourses also arise within their context, and enabling as well as restraining constraints.
autoethnographers point out the construction of their particular social group by their dominants within dominant structures of knowledge.

The creation of ontological categories of explanation (categories which may be disrupted by autoethnographic endeavors) is part of the process of signification discussed above. While in some philosophical systems ontological categories “reflect” what is really there, within a poststructuralist understanding, they “produce” meaning: representations create shared meaning for those working within the same structures of knowledge. Ontological categories give the illusion that things are easier to understand, and they are heuristically useful. If I were to say the word “tree,” the sign would mean something to most hearing individuals who understand the English word. The speaker and the hearer assume that we are speaking about the same thing. Yet, in my understanding of it, the word tree may encompass a nest of birds residing within it, while the person who hears the utterance may not include the nest. On a day-to-day basis, this does not make much of a difference in our ability to communicate, and has no major influence on our lives. If I tell you there is a tree in front of my house, it generally does not much matter whether or not you know that there is nest of birds in it. The case changes dramatically, however, when I use the word Muslim or Arab, for example, instead of tree. These are not stable categories, and they signify different things to different people. Memissi, as autoethnographer, questions the ontological status of such categories, particularly the category of “Muslim woman.” Indeed, autoethnographies problematize what is thought to be “known” about their subjects.

Accepted as ontologically valid, the notion of a “cultural group” draws boundaries and differentiates; it is perceived as allowing us to “know” things about people.
Understood as a foundational premise for “knowing” people, a specific “culture” is given the status of an ontological category, signifying something: it signifies to us that we are speaking of a set group of people who share things in common. By disrupting dominant representations of their “culture,” autoethnographers call this knowledge about them into question (although they may simultaneously reproduce its status as “a culture”).

Autoethnographies may indicate that the reliance on such categories only functions to limit the knowledge that may result, that there is “more” that has been left out (i.e. “more-than-another’s-other”). Taken seriously for the challenges they pose to the foundations of dominant knowledge about subordinate peoples, autoethnographic representations may point out that when we rely on reified dominant representations, “we have already circumscribed the space and the dimensions of [our knowledge] ...[T]here remains a surplus of difference beyond, and perhaps because of, our circumscription” (Marcus 1998: 391). Recognizing culture as a discursive formation, one must also realize that we are always “caught between cultures” (Clifford 1988: 11). As transcultural texts, autoethnographies reflect this between-ness of cultures — although they may also strategically deny it.

I want to expand briefly on the discursive formation of social groups and individuals and its relation to power/knowledge because these are important aspects of my understanding of autoethnography. Autoethnographers often perform (some elements) of the discourses constituting their social group. They do so because discursive social relations constrain the space from which they may speak (i.e. their speech is more likely to be recognized from this space), but with the aim of a transformative intervention. Their intervention is thus simultaneously restricted and enabled by the
discursive formation of their social group. In contesting representations of their social group, autoethnographers intervene in the discourses that produce their social group for members of the dominant population. In so doing, they intervene in power relations because discursive formations reflect and are reflected by structures of knowledge, which are imbricated with power relations. Discourses reflect power relations: for autoethnographers, they are not “simply” a matter of participating in knowledge, they are issues of social justice, which contain a possible route to fighting against oppression.

In *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Iris Marion Young (1990: 39) suggests that those who are interested in social justice must pay attention “not only to distribution, but also to the institutional conditions necessary for the development and exercise of individual capacities and collective communication and cooperation.” According to Young, unjust or oppressive institutional conditions can create “disabling constraints” which may be both material and discursive. Take, for example, the justification of slavery and colonialism through racist discourses of white normativity/civilization and discourses of “savage races” (Anderson 2001). As Robert Young (2003: 2) argues,

> colonial and imperial rule was legitimized by anthropological theories which increasingly portrayed the peoples of the colonized world as inferior, childlike, or feminine, incapable of looking after themselves (despite having done so perfectly well for millennia) and requiring the paternal rule of the west for their own best interest.

For autoethnographers, discursive representations of their social group are often experienced as oppressive, they often create constraints, and they certainly influence the possibility of reception of their utterances by members of dominant populations because, as Robert Young (1991, 2003) suggests, dominant representations of subordinate peoples tend to “justify” their position within power relations.
Within arenas defined by dominant discourses, subordinate peoples are “defined from the outside, positioned, placed, by a network of dominant meanings with whom they do not identify and who do not identify with them” (I.M. Young 1990: 59). The knowledges of subordinate peoples may not be received by their dominants because they are defined by the knowledge of those who stand in relations of power with them. Within the dominant discursive field, oppressed peoples are prevented from speaking at all or are not heard when they do speak. Iris Marion Young (1990: 40) argues that “all oppressed people suffer some inhibition of their ability to develop and exercise their capacities and express their needs, thoughts, and feelings.” Although the inhibitions are not purely discursively determined, members of oppressed groups do not have the same routes available into dominant discourses as do members of dominant groups, and they often face more discursive pressures than do their dominant counterparts.

There are several reasons for these discursive pressures. First, while members of subordinate populations may have their own “hidden transcripts” (Scott 1990), known to themselves and unknown to their dominants, within the arena of transcultural representation and dialogue only the knowledge structures of the dominant population are accepted/acceptable. Second, members of subordinate populations tend to be excluded from contributing to these structures of knowledge; they are seen as too subjective, as not normative enough. Third, because of the existence of dominant representations of subordinate populations, subordinate peoples are always “up against” dominant representations of themselves. These three discursive pressures are not separate, they reinforce one another, and they often combine to make the participation of subordinate peoples in the arena of transcultural representations more difficult. Often, the end result is
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that those in subordinate positions are not authorized to speak about themselves or their experiences; they are not authorized to represent themselves (Young 2003). In other words, dominant knowledge structures tend to define the discursive field of “what can be said and by whom” (Routledge 2002: 311).

The above difficulties often circumscribe the possibility (and ways) of receiving the expressive communications of subordinate populations. As I said earlier, Iris Marion Young (1990: 40) argues that oppressed peoples cannot fully express or exercise their needs, feelings, or thoughts. I would add that it is not always a matter of not being able to do so, but of not being able to do so effectively, or on one’s own terms. For example, as a Muslim Arab Canadian, I may be able to speak of the constraints I felt after the attacks on the twin towers with other Muslim Arab Canadians or with close friends within my home. Together, we may rage against the coverage on CNN that followed the attacks, or wonder why there was a sudden need to “explain” Islam in response to the events, but no similar need to explain Catholicism in response to the Oklahoma bombing. Outside of these circles, however, once I enter the “public” domain, and am met by dominant discursive conceptions of Islam-as-other (which often translates to Islam-as-terror), the same words are received quite differently, if I am able to utter them at all.

In thinking about representations as “terrains of signification” which reflect and are reflected by power relations, Butler (1990: 148) argues that “to enter into the repetitive practices of this terrain of signification is not a choice, for the ‘I’ that might enter is always already inside.” Butler (148) reiterates the impossibility of a prediscursive self: “there is no possibility of agency or reality outside of the discursive practices that give those terms the intelligibility they have.” In other words, my
categorization as a Muslim Arab Canadian woman has meaning for people, including myself, insofar as these categories have been discursively constituted. Butler (148, emphasis added) goes on to state that “the task is not whether to repeat [the significations], but how to repeat, and through a radical proliferation [of the categories], to displace the very … norms that enable the repetition itself.”

A parallel can be drawn between Butler’s call for simultaneous repetition and disruption and the process involved in autoethnographic expression. Since the discourses that construct members of subordinate populations are always already there, defining the very terrains of signification in which they find themselves, they are forced to enter into them when engaging their dominants. At the same time, their texts challenge these discourses. Their undertakings, therefore, disrupt these very discourses even as they perform them (or resist even while being accommodative). I want to suggest that the corresponding task of those receiving the representations is to read them with an autoethnographic sensibility, to disrupt the search for an authentic Other, and look instead for the resulting fissures in dominant meanings. In other words, our task on the reception end is to read the self-representations of subordinate peoples in ways that facilitate the disruption of dominant representations and meanings. While I think autoethnographies may be conceptualized as tactics which attempt to produce such a reading, the disruption can only be achieved with the collaboration of readers.15

Thus far, I have spoken mostly about the oppressive aspects of power relations, but have said several times that power has (both emancipatory and oppressive) productive

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15 In Chapter Six, I will speak in more detail about the importance of the interaction between the autoethnographer, their text, and their audience. For now, suffice it to say that (partially because it is accommodative) autoethnographic knowledge may be reincorporated into dominant knowledge paradigms and autoethnographers may be dismissed as producing “unrepresentative” or culturally tainted texts.
potentials. Power relations produce and are produced by discourses with tangible material effects on people’s lives, but they simultaneously produce the possibilities of resisting these. As Douglas Haynes and Gyan Prakash (1991: 13) argue, “power and struggle [are]... not polar opposites but ... phenomena which often coexist and shape each other.” If power is a relation, it cannot be solely associated with domination; resistance is also a form of power. To focus only on domination when discussing power is to ignore key aspects of the relation which may transpire in analyses of resistance. Thus, an analysis of autoethnography may reveal something about resistance and domination. Given the entanglement of domination and resistance, and the ways in which they “coexist and shape each other” (13), one may gain an enriched understanding of domination by studying resistance. Indeed, Steve Pile (1997: 3) suggests that we may use resistance as “a mode through which the symptoms of different power relations are diagnosed and ways are thought to get around them, or live through them, or to change them.” Pile’s main argument here is that we should study power relations through resistance instead of looking for domination as the diagnostic of power relations. Pile further argues that domination can be understood neither as the primary form of power nor as the only way to identify power relations. He asserts a need to recognize resistance as worthy of attention in and of itself, and not always and only in relation to authority.

One advantage of using resistance as a diagnostic of power relations is that it provides the opportunity to see power from below. If we always start with domination,

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16 Resistance as power may be glimpsed in the use of the term empowerment, where to feel empowered is often to feel that one has the capacity to resist.

17 I will be following Haynes and Prakash (1991: 3) in defining resistance as “those behaviours and cultural practices by subordinate groups that contest hegemonic social formation, that threaten to unravel strategies of domination; consciousness need not be essential to its constitution.”
we continue to take the dominant position as normative, we reiterate its primacy, and as Chandra Mohanty (2002: 511) argues, we reiterate the blindness of privilege:

It is more necessary to look upward – colonized peoples must know themselves and the colonizer. This particular marginalized location [seeing up from below] makes the politics of knowledge and the power investments that go along with it visible so that we can then engage in work to transform the use and abuse of power.

If we are willing to start with resistance, and particularly with everyday forms of resistance, we can disrupt the normativity of (studies of) domination. As Haynes and Prakash (1991: 1) argue, studies which do so allow us to see “power as always tenuous, and ... the cultural practices of subordinate groups as ever-ready to tear through the fabric of hegemonic forms.” Perhaps more importantly, such studies may constitute the possibility to “‘unlearn’ the traditional models [of power relations] that derive from Orientalist understandings and to construct new approaches that stress the place of resistance in the construction of everyday social relations” (Haynes and Prakash 1991: 6-7). Such an approach would emphasize the activity and agency of the subordinate within these relations, who would cease to be mere objects acted upon by domination. They emerge instead as the subjects of resistance.

To stress “the place of resistance” in constituting social relations, to see power from below, is to make more evident that domination is not all-pervasive, and that whether or not the dominant recognizes it, the subordinate plays a role in shaping power relations. Taking resistance as our starting point may thus also allow us to recognize the agency of the subordinate who resists. Using resistance as a diagnostic of power relations has the further benefit of demonstrating “that episodes of resistance... rarely mark pure forms of escape from domination; struggle is constantly being conditioned by the structures of social and political power” (Haynes and Prakash 1991: 3).
Lila Abu-Lughod's (1990) "The Romance of Resistance" provides an illustration of the heuristic values of using resistance as a diagnostic of power relations. Writing in 1990, Abu-Lughod identifies a move in scholarship since the 1970s from an exclusive focus on emancipatory movements to the study of off-kilter forms of everyday resistance. Her main focus is on the implications of studying resistance for understanding power, which she argues would allow for a broader understanding of the complex, interweaving, and simultaneous power relations within which we are always imbricated. Abu-Lughod uses the experiences of the Awlad 'Ali Bedouins to show that changes in the forms of resistance used by members of a community may point to transformations in power relations, and enable a better understanding of the intersections of multiple oppressions.

Abu-Lughod develops the view that resistance is not singular, uniform, and unidirectional, but multifaceted and intricate. Accordingly, studying resistance opens up new questions about power relations which we may be less likely to identify with an exclusive focus on domination. Abu-Lughod identifies four types of resistance which the women of the Awlad 'Ali community direct at close male relatives: (a) silences or secrets, (b) narratives of foiled marital arrangements, (c) sexually irreverent discourses, and (d) poem/songs known as ghinnawas. Each practice serves a specific purpose and is enabled by sexual segregation, which provides women with a safe space from which to defy restrictions and teach each other effective ways of doing so.¹⁸

Narratives of foiled marital arrangements, for example, are described as resistant and pedagogical discourses told to young women by the matriarchs of the tribe. Related

¹⁸ Memissi presents a similar image of harems as places where female resistance is taught and practiced. In speaking of the possibilities opened up by harems, however, there is often a danger of romanticizing them as spaces of female subjectivity. Memissi's discussion of her familial harem makes clear that it is an institutional space, reflective of power relations, which simultaneously restricts and enables women's activities.
in the absence of men, such narratives teach young women the possibility of effectively thwarting undesired marriages even when they are beneficial to the (men of the) tribe. Listening to the narratives of the matriarchs, young women learn that despite dominant tribal discourses and traditions, they can oppose undesired matches and will have the support of their female relatives in doing so. Women thus learn about hidden histories of female resistance. Abu-Lughod’s discussion of the women’s songs, poetry, and stories illustrates the complex ways in which these women produce hidden counter-discourses to contest the usually male-dominated, and male-produced, public transcripts of the tribe (Scott 1990). Throughout the article, it is apparent that although the women may appear passively constituted by tribal social relations, they continually engage in behaviours and take on attitudes which constitute these very relations. Put another way, the agency of the women of the tribe is highlighted by Abu-Lughod’s approach to her analysis.

Abu-Lughod’s study also effectively demonstrates that studies of resistance may uncover historical shifts in power relations. Her main argument is that a careful examination of apparently trivial changes in oppositional behaviours and attitudes exposes relevant information about changes in the community and its power relations. These subtle changes are more clearly apprehended when we start from below. For example, Abu-Lughod tells us that traditionally female, subversive acts of defiance are increasingly being used by young men, new forms of struggle are being used by women, and there is a new division between the women resulting in intergenerational confrontations. These new forms of resistance, which take place alongside older ones, indicate changes in power dynamics. The young men’s use of traditionally female forms of confrontation, for example, responds to an increased exercise of power by the
patriarchs of the tribe, while new forms of women’s resistance (directed against recent restrictions on their movement) reflect new power dynamics resulting from sedentarization (forced upon the Awlad 'Ali community by the Egyptian government).

The young men are thus positioned quite differently in relation to older males than to the women of the tribe. Abu-Lughod’s close reading of these multiple, simultaneous practices of resistance reinforces Steve Pile’s (1997: 3) assertion that people are positioned differently in unequal and multiple power relations, that more or less powerful people are active in the constitution of unfolding relationships of authority, meaning and identity, and that these activities are contingent, ambiguous and awkwardly situated.

Abu-Lughod’s article demonstrates the potential usefulness of close readings of resistance. Her discussion makes clear that one does not need to prioritize domination, and may learn a great deal about power relations by looking to resistance as a diagnostic tool because it, too, exists within, is reflective of, is influenced by, and influences power relations. Again, such an approach (a) highlights the agency of the subordinate, (b) allows us to see power from below, calling into question the normative view of power from above, and (c) emphasizes the inability of domination to be(come) totalizing.

The conception of oppressive aspects of power relations as always fraught with tensions and gaps with disruptive potentials is key for thinking through autoethnography, and it is underscored by autoethnographic expressions. Autoethnographers enter the fissures in power relations in ways that disrupt images of a consistent whole: they engage representations borne out of these power relations and used to dominate them (or at the very least, to justify their oppression), and reproduce these representations with a difference. At times, they may seem to play on (or into) these representations, but they use them as points of entry into ever-present dominant discourses, which are neither fixed
nor impervious to change. They do so in order to produce new images that challenge or intervene in these dominant representations. Recall that, in Pratt’s words, autoethnography is “an assertion of ... self-as-more-than-another’s-other.”

Autoethnographers do not only assert a self-representation, but they establish their acquaintance with dominant knowledge about themselves. Autoethnography thus bridges the gap between valorized dominant knowledges and resistant knowledges inaccessible to those in the dominant position within power relations. By bridging these knowledges, in (post)colonial contexts, one of the effects of autoethnography is to contest the strict or neat separation of European and “local” into two distinct categories.

In this chapter I laid out the theoretical concepts on which I will draw in my discussions of autoethnography and Mernissi’s books. I outlined my understanding of discourse, subjectivity, agency, and power, and their relationships to processes of representation. Where possible, I pointed out how each of these factors relates to autoethnography. As members of subordinate populations, autoethnographers are constituted within discursive fields of power relations which deny their subjectivity and define them from the outside in. Their autoethnographic expressions emphasize their agency within unequal fields of power relations, highlight their knowledge of dominant representations of themselves, and resist discursive formations which represent them as passive objects of domination. In the following chapter, I would like to focus more specifically on the (post)colonial setting of transcultural representation and power relations (i.e. on colonial representations of the colonized). I do so both because Pratt’s concept is formulated within this framework and because Mernissi’s texts are written within this same context.
Second Intermission:

When I wake up in the morning I am not sure that I’ve made the right decision. Although I have thought about this for weeks, have really tried to make sure that it is entirely my decision, have silently thought about all of the possible implications, when the day finally arrives the nervousness of the previous evening has been replaced by a sense of angst. I know that my life, that my existence in the world outside of my home, will be forever transformed, I know that I am crossing a boundary. Not a physical one, but one which, at this moment, feels much more material and powerful than any physical frontier I could ever face.

I suppose I am also crossing a physical boundary though: the threshold of my home. To exit my house today will be different than it was yesterday. For the past five years, I have worn the hijab, and although five years ago I had been in the regular habit of leaving my home with my hair showing, blending into the crowd – indiscernible, just another white girl – today is different. The past five years of my (veiled) experience have ensured this difference, have ensured difference.

For the last five years, with my hair covered by a hijab (although the rest of my attire had remained generally “Western”), I have become Other every time I left my home. I have become an object of public contemplation both “known” and unknowable.

The hijab is just a scarf, worn to cover a woman’s hair. But it is a piece of cloth that functions as a sign. It signifies my Otherness, but what I often experience as even more overwhelming is that it often seems to signify my oppression as a Muslim woman.

* * * *

As I walk down the halls of my high school, a school with a fairly large Muslim population, a school that prides itself on its “multiculturalism,” I am stopped by Jennifer, a White Canadian fellow student. Jennifer and I have never exchanged words in the six months that we have shared the halls of the school. It is my first day at school as a “veiled” woman, and although I am very aware of the questioning glances from students and teachers, Jennifer’s words still come as a surprise: “You are so brave, Samah!”

I am shocked that she knows my name.

When I ask for clarification, she tells me that she is really sorry I have to wear “that thing” over my head, “even here in Canada, where women have gained their freedom.” I think about my teachers: every single department at my school has a male head, the principal and two vice-principals are all men, and there is only one woman in the math department. I cannot help but (silently) wonder why visual access to my hair seems to be a sufficient measurement of liberation.

Surprised by Jennifer’s comments, I smile and walk away; I am not sure I want to or can take this on right now.
Later, at home, I think about the earlier exchange in the hallway… I am angry at myself for not having responded to her comments. Jennifer is “the liberated Western Woman.” When she had spoken to me, she had done so as Western (read liberated) Woman, rather than as a woman. I replay the scene in my head several times that evening, my responses to her more clever with each repetition.

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The next day, just before gym class, the changing room falls silent when I enter. Jennifer smiles emphatically and says hello – her smile seems to say “I know your pain.” Michelle, who is standing next to her, approaches me. Michelle and I had gone to the same grade school, but we were never friends. “Is it true” she asks “that you wear that until you lose your virginity?”

I laugh. I imagine a young, veiled woman sauntering into her home, hijab in hand, greeting her parents, skipping past them to her bedroom to write in her diary of her sultry encounter of the previous evening.

I explain to Michelle that this is, indeed, not the case. I say that although there are some traditions that suggest “a reason” for veiling, different women come to that decision in different ways. As I am about to explain to her why I have chosen to take up the veil, she smirks. “As if anyone would CHOOSE to wear that thing!”

I fall silent. Apparently, she knows me better than I can know myself. While I may claim to have acted as a subject, she “knows” that Muslim women do not have any agency, she “knows” that I have, in fact, only been acted upon.

How had I come to be denied the possibility of agency? How had I become so physically visible at the same time that my experience was rendered utterly invisible?

Why did these women who didn’t even know me in the colloquial sense suddenly think that they “knew” me? How could this piece of clothing turn me into a known object when the day before I had been an unknown subject?
Chapter Three:  
Orient(alism) Express(ed): Creating an Exoticized, Primitive Other

In the previous chapter, I suggested that discursive formations have played an important role in justifying and reproducing power relations. I also tentatively suggested that autoethnographers may disrupt these discursive formations. In this chapter, I outline more specifically some of the colonialist discursive formations that enter into the constitution of the colonized. I then go on to examine the ways autoethnographies may resist dominant colonialist discursive formations that deny the active agencies and subjectivities of the colonized.

I begin this chapter by examining the discursive formations involved in colonialism for four main reasons. First, Pratt defines autoethnography specifically in relation to (post)coloniality. Second, Mernissi’s texts, which form my case study, are examples of (post)colonial autoethnography. Third, the tropes used by members of the dominant population to represent subordinate peoples to the metropolis become the dominant tropes within the transcultural field of representation. These are the structures of knowledge sanctified by dominant discourses, and they are what autoethnographers have to work with if they are to enter dominant realms of meaning-making. Finally, I think it is difficult to speak about (post)colonialism without first saying something about the colonialist assumptions it challenges.

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19 I think, however, that autoethnographic expressions are not necessarily limited to colonial relations, but may take place within the context of any set of power relations, where members of the subordinated group represent themselves to their dominants using the dominant group’s idioms. Autoethnographers do not necessarily have to be writing against an ethnographic cannon in the traditional, disciplinary sense of the term. Members of subordinate populations are always “up against” dominant representations of themselves and their “group,” be they images found in “cultural productions” or more official scholarly representations.

20 If by starting with colonialist discourses, I seem to be giving them primacy, or perhaps feeding into structures of knowledge which take the dominant position as primary, I can only defend myself by saying that after attempting several ways to approach the subject, I have found this the most heuristically useful way to do so within the scope of a masters’ thesis.
For much of the following discussion I will rely on the work of Edward Said, who "has shown that ... features which occur again and again in texts about colonised countries ... are ... due to large-scale belief systems structured by discursive frameworks, which are given credibility by imperial relations" (Mills 2004: 95, emphasis added). In terms of my specific project, the work of Edward Said is not only important for what he contributes to analyses of colonial discourses in general, but also for the specific references he makes to the representation of the so-called Muslim and Arab world as "the Orient." Since Memissi's texts are written specifically about what can be broadly categorized as Northwestern Euro-American representations of Muslims and Arabs, Said's work is useful in framing and understanding her texts and the particular representations to which she refers.

As an autoethnographer, Memissi engages the dominant discursive structures and representations Said analyzes, which have been integral to the ways in which Muslims and Arabs have been Othered (both in scholarship and in the popular imaginary). These discourses have also had severe consequences for the peoples who occupy these regions. Indeed, after the end of the First World War, "the newly independent Arab states [were placed] under British or French mandate because, in the words of Article 22, they were deemed to be 'inhabited by peoples not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world'" (Gregory 2000: 304). Such a pronouncement does not stand by itself as a singular political decision, but is in keeping with what was "known" about the Orient. Moreover, once it is uttered, the statement functions to keep
Orientalist discourses in further circulation by adding to the body of representations of Arabs and Muslims as (Western) Europe’s primitive Other.\(^{21}\)

According to Robert Young (2003: 140) colonialism involved “the transformation of an indigenous culture into the subordinated culture of a colonial regime, or the superimposition of the colonial apparatus into which all aspects of the original culture have to be reconstructed.” Young’s claim suggests that all aspects of indigenous life and knowledge were rearticulated using the colonizer’s practices of signification to meet the requirements of colonialist structures of knowledge. He identifies this reformulation as a process of translation: of translating local knowledges and identities into the colonizer’s language both literally and metaphorically. Young (141) argues that the “translation becomes part of the process of domination, of achieving control, a violence carried out on the language, culture, and people being translated.” Within such a process, the colonized become the objects of (colonialist) knowledge; they can only be signified (as objects) and their ability to signify (as subjects) is denied by the colonizer.

Where “locals” played a role in processes of translation, and the creation of knowledge for/by the colonizer, they were seen as merely providing information to be converted to the status of “knowledge” by members of the dominant population.

(Post)colonial analysis (the focus of this chapter) offers the insight that what has so often been understood in colonialist discourses and representations as “pure information” provided by an objectified “native” has, in fact, been delivered by a subject, who like the

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\(^{21}\) Said has often been criticized for his poor treatment of the complicated intersections of gender relations and colonialism. Said’s accounts of colonialism and of (post)colonial “resistances” tend to have an overly simplistic approach to gender, where gender relations are analyzed at all. The formation of particularly gendered discourses is central to Memiass’s texts and to my project, and although I will be drawing heavily on Said throughout this chapter, I do recognize the limitations of his analysis. I engage some criticisms of his analysis of colonialism in Chapter Four.
colonizer, has a certain amount of interest invested in the information provided. Within colonialist terrains of signification, however, which are enabled by the terms of the power relation between colonizer and colonized, the agency of the colonized is denied, their speech is unauthorized, and they are constructed as passive informants.

Defined as Native Informants, members of subordinate populations “attempt to make their own history as they act (in the most robust sense of agency) a part they have not chosen, in a script that has as its task to keep them as silent and invisible” (Spivak 1999: 85, emphasis added). The figure of the Native Informant emerged out of an ethnocentric “European philosophical tradition… [which theorizes] the Western subject (universalized as Man)... [and] aborts the possibility of the Native informant as subject” (Butz and MacDonald 2001: 182). Spivak (1999) argues that the Native Informant was integral in defining the Northwestern European subject; the Native Informant is both necessary for the formation of “the subject” (read the European as subject) and always outside that formation (i.e. it is a necessary/constitutive outside). Ultimately, where members of subordinate populations enter into dominant arenas of representation, dominant discourses proscribe for them the role of Native Informant, who functions to confirm dominant knowledge, and whose capacity to act is reinterpreted as evidence (their subjective agency is itself objectified). To use Spivak’s (1999: 85) terms, autoethnographers strategically perform “a role they have not chosen” in order to rewrite “a script that has as its task to keep them silent and invisible.”

Members of subordinate populations are generally well aware of their representation through and within dominant structures of knowledge; they experience this
construction in their interactions with their dominant. Moreover, the colonized recognize – and in some ways autoethnographic texts point out – that

the struggle over representation ... informed racist knowledge and practices, constructing the grounds within which debates about race were largely conducted and the typologies within which indigenous people and their descendants were forced to be categorised and to categorise themselves. (Mills 2004: 96, emphasis added)

In Orientalism, Edward Said (1994) outlines the sanctification of these representations as knowledge. As Said (1997: xlix) stresses elsewhere, “the underlying theme of Orientalism is the affiliation of knowledge with power.” What I read as a key point in Said’s text is that power relations sanctify certain (people’s) knowledge as “the truth,” but that, in some circular way that results from the messiness of the world, the sanctification of this knowledge comes to function as justification for the power relations which sanctified it in the first place. In other words, power and knowledge come to sanctify one another and thus form a tangled web of meaning and meaning-making.

Said outlines the processes and messy tangles of meaning-making that created the (West’s) Orient: what he identifies as Orientalism. He defines Orientalism as “a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient’s special place in European Western experience” (1994: 1). Orientalism involved redefining and reordering “the Orient” within colonial structures of knowledge and experience. According to Said, Orientalist authors tend to take the European experience of the world as normative and universal. He further argues that

the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experiences. Yet none of this Orient is merely imaginative. The Orient is an integral part of European material civilization and culture. Orientalism expresses and represents that part culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles. (1-2, emphasis in original)
Despite his reference to ideology – based on his use of Gramsci – Said’s main argument is that Orientalism is a *discourse*. For Said (3), only when one approaches Orientalism as a discourse can one begin to “understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage – and even produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period.”

One of Said’s major contributions to (post)colonialism is his insight that with the advent of colonialism, it “becomes normative to see the West as fundamentally constituted by its imperial enterprises, as unthinkable apart from them” (Robins, Pratt, Arac, Radhakrishnan, and Said 1994: 2). “The colonies” become a necessary or constitutive outside in constructing “the Empire” (or the metropolis): they are forever outside of it, but their very exclusion allows for its *perceived* fundamental coherence. Colony and empire come to make sense only in relation to one another, and in terms of their differences from one another, but always with the empire as normative (Mills 2001, 2004; Pratt 1991, 1992, 1994, 1999; Said 1993, 1997, 1994, Shohat and Stam 2004).

Allison Blunt and Gillian Rose (1994: 16) argue that “the slum, the ghetto, the harem, the colony, the closet, the inner city, the Third World, the private [haunt] the imagination of the master subject, both desired and feared for their difference.” The desire partially arises from the use of these categories of difference in defining the master subject, which is master and neutral in so far as it does not resemble these categories. At the same time,
they are feared precisely because they may enter and disrupt the central, (non)category to which the master belongs.\(^{22}\)

Said seems to agree with this. He argues that the Orient, as it was (and continues to be) imagined by Western scholars and media, is a discursive formation that has functioned to represent the exotic Orient to the West. Yet, throughout this text, he also takes great pains to show that by defining the Orient as exotic, barbaric, and erotic, Orientalists also define Europe as the opposite of all of those things. Said suggests that the characteristics with which the peoples of the Orient are “endowed” reflect the privation of all the best of Europe, and in so doing, work to justify or posit the “need” for European intervention and rule. In other words, the Orient becomes a constitutive outside, forever excluded, but necessary for Europe’s self-construction. Again, I want to point out the ironic circularity of this process: the knowledge that arises about the West and its Orient is founded on/by the very power relations it functions to justify; the structures of knowledge which sanctify the power relation are themselves sanctified by the same power relations.

Said gets at the contingencies of Orientalist knowledge and colonial relations when he argues that Orientalism is made up of three interrelated aspects: an academic designation, a style of thought/imagination, and a body of institutions and policies whose object is the Orient. Thus, according to Said, Orientalist knowledge is reproduced and maintained academically, ontologically and epistemologically (by designating the parameters of what can be thought/said), and through institutional mechanisms. The first

\(^{22}\)Derrida suggests that constitutive outsides always threaten to enter and disrupt the sign. He calls this hauntology, arguing that what is left out of them haunts the ontological categories of the dominant system of signification.
of these is made up of academic disciplines and canons whose object of study is the Orient, the second is the epistemological and ontological limits on thought whose object is the Orient, and the third includes the policies, political decisions, and administrative offices whose object is the Orient. In each of these, the Orient is the object of Western European knowledge, to be translated and rethought within its terrains. These three aspects of Orientalism each contribute to the creation of a vast area of the world inhabited by several populations as the Orient, or more accurately, as Europe's (or the West's) Orient, inhabited by Orientals (and by colonial administrators, scholars, artists, etc.). These three lines of knowledge are not separate for Said: they are interconnected aspects of the same discursive formation, and they maintain and justify one another.

Recall that discourses constitute what can count as and who may contribute to knowledge at any given time/place. Said argues that Orientalism reproduces itself along the three lines noted above and becomes what can count as knowledge about the Orient. Yet, the "internal constrains [of Orientalism] upon writers and thinkers were productive, not unilaterally inhibiting" (14, emphasis in original). If discourses pre-exist us, and they are what we have available to think through and talk about our world, then any knowledge we produce necessarily arises from them, and how we conceive of ourselves and our others will be products (and effects) of our terrains of signification. The point

23 Despite colonialist discourses shaping the power relation and terrains of signification that constitute members of the subordinate population, subordinate knowledges (produce ways to) penetrate and "enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority" (Bhabha 1985: 156). This is the other sense in which Orientalism is productive: while discourses enter into the formation of the world, they may also be used as the very tools that disrupt that which they produced. (Again, this is similar to Butler's assertion that we are bound to repeat/perform the discourses which constitute us, but we can do so actively, and in ways that "radically proliferate" these same discourses). Homi Bhabha (1985) argues that members of colonized populations are hybridized through their interactions with the colonizers. Bhabha's formulation of hybridity "incorporates the possibility of active forms of resistance" (Butz and MacDonald 2001: 183), which take advantage of the ambivalence and incongruity inherent in colonialist discourses. I will return to the relationships between hybridity, mimicry, and autoethnography later in the chapter.
Said makes here is that once they are accepted and come to circulate as knowledge, discourses about other peoples *produce* those people as Other — both to their other and to themselves. I briefly want to flesh out what this means, and to show the intricately complex and reinforcing relations constituting Orientalism, by outlining how productions of knowledge and identities are maintained along the three lines outlined by Said.

In the previous chapter I argued that there is no possibility of a prediscursive self, that we are born into the discourses that constitute us, that we signify ourselves and are signified by others within the terms of these constituting discourses. If this is the case, then members of colonized populations are born into colonialist discourses, and are thus constituted within their limits (and possibilities). Said hints at the discursive limits of how we may conceive ourselves and our others when he argues that Orientalism is a style of thought. Because discourses function through processes of exclusion (i.e. by excluding that which falls outside of their confines) they limit what can be said or thought on any particular topic. Accordingly, when “the Orientalist, poet or scholar, makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West” (21), s/he may only do so using the Orientalist discourses sanctified within dominant (in this case Western colonialist) terrains of signification. Having done so, however, the same author or scholar adds to the body of literature which sanctifies the discourse, and thus further sanctifies it. In this way, the discourse of Orientalism *reproduces itself* as it produces identities and categories of meaning acceptable within its confines.

By speaking for the Orient, those who represent it deny its ability to speak for itself using signifiers and signifying practices that are not accepted (and therefore, unacceptable) within dominant structures of knowledge and realms of meaning-making.
Those who represent the Orient recreate it as passive object in need of “proper” (read Western colonial) representation. The denial is made effective because of its context: an asymmetrical power relation wherein Orientalist or colonialist institutions and discourses dictate the terms of knowledge. This is precisely what Said means when he speaks of the interrelations of the three aspects of Orientalism. Each of these aspects lends support to the other two, and they all justify and reproduce one another.

The objectification of the peoples represented is an integral part of their Othering. Within such an Orientalist paradigm, the Other becomes an “object” of study (to be represented). The peoples thus represented remain silent to members of the dominant group, and “the exteriority of the representation is always governed by some version of the truism that if the Orient could represent itself, it would, since it cannot, the representation does the job, for the West, and ... for the Orient” (Said 1994: 21). Quoting Marx, Said (21) suggests that a basic premise of Orientalist representations is that ‘Sie können sich nicht vertreten, sei müssen vertreten warden.’

Said repeatedly tells his readers that his point is not that a false Orient is created in opposition to a more true Orient that really exists but needs to be discovered and properly represented; it is not that the scholars or policy makers he discusses get it wrong. In the introduction to his text, Said (6) warns that “one ought never to assume that the structure of Orientalism is nothing more than a structure of lies or of myths which, were the truth about them to be told, would simply blow away.” Said is not trying to point out who got it right and who got it wrong, but rather the power relations that are evident in and reproduced by Orientalist scholarship. The point then seems to be that if we analyze Orientalist scholarship as forming part of a discourse, we can learn something about the

24 They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented.
power relations which make/made it possible and how these function(ed). As a discourse, Orientalism not only “generates, encodes, and arranges [knowledge] in diverse forms and locations” (Prakash 1995: 203), but by signifying the Orient, it sets the terms within which one can speak or even think about the Orient; it creates the “reality” of the Orient, becoming the only possible “truth” about it within the accepted terrains of signification.

In her analysis of the relationship between women’s travel literature and colonialism, Sara Mills (2001: 9, emphasis added) insists that “it is not necessary to read travel writing as expressing the truth of the author’s life, but rather, it is the result of a configuration of discursive structures with which the author negotiates.” Said’s caution that his text is not about finding the truth that Orientalist texts “cover up” can be read in the same way as Mills’ assertion that we do not need to read travel writing for the truth of the author’s life. In both instances, what we can learn through the analysis is something about the power relations that make a text possible and keep it in circulation (i.e. about the affiliation of power with knowledge).

Autoethnographies may be read in the same way. As I said in Chapter One, my analysis of autoethnography is not about objective truths, but about processes of claiming and recognizing agency. Sara Mills (2001) argues that colonizing women’s travel texts perform many of the patriarchal gender discourses that are also clearly contested in their texts (and by the very existence of their texts). Autoethnographies contain similar tensions. Yet, the tension between what is said in the text (stories which may alternately confirm and deny the ontological validity of discursively constituted social categories) and what the text performs (its denial of the discursive constitution of subordinate peoples as objects of dominant knowledge) is a productive epistemological space for
constructing alternate ontologies. This space of productive tension (between objectification and subjectivity) is perhaps where autoethnographic intervention lies. Kelly Oliver (2001: 93-106) argues that this space underscores “the necessity and impossibility of witnessing,” or “the paradox of bearing witness to one’s own oppression.” According to Oliver, members of oppressed populations, who are objectified by dominant discourses, face a paradoxical task of speaking (as subjects) out of an assigned object position. In order to claim their subjective agency, it is necessary for subordinate peoples to bear witness to their objectification by narrating it. This is where the tension arises, however, because their very objectification (that to which they must bear witness as subjects) constrains their speaking as subjects. Oliver argues that the tension between the necessity and impossibility of witnessing is the space within which subjective agency (particularly of oppressed peoples) must be produced. She also contends that the paradox necessitates a certain approach to reading the communications of subordinate peoples (i.e. highlighting their subjectivity by recognizing their infinite response-ability) as an ethical responsibility towards social justice.

Some of the more hostile reviews of Said’s work are illustrative of the very Orientalist processes he defines and highlight the tensions of negotiating one’s objectification and subjectivity. Gyan Prakash (1995) outlines the response of Bernard Lewis – whose work Said critiques in Orientalism – to Said’s text. It seems that for Lewis, Said’s endeavor “was nothing but an example of ‘word pollution,’ an attempt to besmirch honest scholarship. Attributing the origin of this pollution to the Muslim world, Lewis declared Orientalism to be an ideological and illegitimate intrusion of politics into the world of scholarship” (Prakash 1995: 202, emphasis added). Such a critique clearly
misses the point of *Orientalism*: scholarship is already entangled with the world of politics. Said's text is certainly not lacking in examples of the many ways in which this has taken place, including travel writers and scholars being consulted or outright hired for planning policies on how best to handle/rule/manage the parts of the world in which they traveled and about which they wrote.

Lewis's dismissal of Said's work as pollution, the source of which is "the Muslim world," in fact demonstrates his Orientalism. Bernard Lewis seems to see his own assessment as arising from a neutral or normative, and thus objective, position. Lewis fails to recognize himself as located, historically, socially, discursively, and in so doing, he misses Said's point that Orientalist literature, in demarcating a realm of the world as Oriental, has simultaneously produced a Northwestern Euro-American subject position as neutral/normative. Indeed, Lewis does not seem to recognize that his own participation in creating "the Orient" as "different" has simultaneously created "the Occident" as "the same," and therefore as neutral. As Said (1994: 50) says, "no one [including Lewis] is likely to imagine a symmetrical field [to Orientalism] called Occidentalism." Within the dominant paradigm, the Occident is normative, it does not need to be named because of its presumed normativity or neutrality: it is a non-place. Lewis locates himself—and is indeed located by dominant Orientalist discourses—in "a culture of no culture" (Haraway 2004b: 223). This is why Lewis can dismiss Said's location, which clearly does not resemble his own, as being too ideological, as being an intrusion (of the margins into the centre)—perhaps Derrida would call Said's work hauntological.

What writers like Edward Said and Mary Louise Pratt have shown is that all knowledge, even that which is rooted in the "empirical" act of seeing, is located or
situated both culturally and historically. Indeed, speaking of scientists, but arguing that this is true for the creation of any knowledge about the Other, Donna Haraway has argued that the location of the (usually capitalist, white, heterosexual, male)\(^{25}\) scientist is invisible to himself, and that this self-invisibility is taken to represent a detachment from the (physical) self\(^{26}\), the virtue of modesty. Because such a person does not see her/himself as existing in a category of difference, s/he understands her/himself as being free of the constraints of categorical difference. Those who have been categorized, those who have been expelled in the creation of “the same,” are taken to be “representative” of their categories; their speech is understood as being ideological because it is presumed to include the desires and fears of their social group, of their culture.

For example, “Flaubert’s encounter with an Egyptian courtesan produced a widely influential model of the Oriental woman” despite the fact that “she never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence, or history” (Said 199: 6). Instead, Flaubert, as master subject, as “neutral” observer who can use dominant paradigms of meaning-making “spoke for and represented her. He was foreign, comparatively wealthy, male, and these were historical facts of domination that allowed him not only to possess Kuchuk Hanem physically, but to speak for her and tell his readers in what way she was ‘typically Oriental’” (6, emphasis added). She is taken to be representative of her “kind” and used to reproduce a typological category of difference. Said (6) argues that Flaubert’s

\(^{25}\) Although Haraway generally uses “he” when referring to those who have generally been recognized as capable of producing valid knowledge, I will be using “s/he.” I do this not to deny that men have historically been seen as the bearers of true knowledge and objectivity, but to point out that there have also been women writers who have contributed to the colonialist body of knowledge that objectifies those who are represented.

\(^{26}\) Note that the detachment from the body is taken to represent a more “pure” state of mind. This is a logic rooted in Cartesian dualism (itself rooted in Aristotelian bipartism) which separates the mind from the body, giving value to the former and relegating the latter to the “naturally” base animal/female. For more information about Cartesian dualism please refer to Barbour, Ian. (1997). Religion and Science: Historical and Contemporary Issues. San Francisco: Harper Publishing.
encounter and his representation of it “fairly stands for the pattern of relative strength between East and West, and the discourse about Orientalism that it enabled.”

On the other hand, those who have not been categorized, those who belong in the category of “the same” are not understood to be representing any social group. They can push forward frontiers of expansion and discovery because they are perceived to be doing so in the name of knowledge, not in the name of a social group – despite their planting of the Empire’s flag on mountain tops, or their declaring a land/peoples “discovered” in the name of a king/queen/empire, for example. Because they are constructed by dominant discourses as “neutral,” as unrepresentative, members of the dominant population can come to take on the role of “legitimate and authorized ventriloquist for the object world” (Haraway 2004b: 224). The point is that standards of neutrality, including those expressed by Lewis, reflect expectations that knowledge arise out of a specific subjective location that has been constructed as neutral; they are based in the notion that (only) certain individuals can act as autonomously independent subjects.

In her discussion of travel literature, Mary Louise Pratt (1992) provides some striking illustrations of the appropriation of local knowledges into European systems of meaning-making, and the related construction of the autonomous colonial subject. Pratt (201) tells us that just “as the Linnaeans had their labeling systems, ... the Victorians opted for a brand of verbal painting whose highest calling was to produce for the home audience the peak moments at which geographical ‘discoveries’ were ‘won’ for England.” As Pratt describes them, “discovery narratives” reinforce Orientalist representations of the colonized as a primitive, passive, illiterate object, “lacking” all the best of Europe’s active love of and drive to expand knowledge (Pratt 1992, Said 1993,
The narratives involve signifying an event in a way that makes sense within dominant discursive formations.

The resulting narratives, which may be understood as a public interpretation of the "discovery," further entrench representations of "natives" as illiterate or primitive, and serve to exclude them from the (European) endeavors of knowledge creation, even when they have been integral to the "discovery." For example, speaking of Richard Burton’s travels in Africa and his "discoveries" of geographical sites, Pratt (1992: 203, emphasis added) tells us that for the European explorer, identified as an active, neutral creator of knowledge,

the 'discovery' of sites like Lake Tanganyika involved making one's way to the region and asking the local inhabitants if they knew of any big lakes, etc. in the area, then hiring them to take you there, whereupon with their guidance and support, you proceed to discover what they already knew... [D]iscovery in this context consisted of a gesture of converting local knowledges (discourses) into European national and continental knowledges associated with European forms and relations of power.

African landscapes are thus rewritten by European explorers using European idioms, and categories. Through the reliance on (discursively constituted) acceptable/accepted colonialist Western European epistemological standards, knowledge comes to be understood as the sole possession of "the West." The histories of colonized peoples and nations are thus re-written as the History of European expansion into a land, and their (multiple) cultural practices and artifacts are subjugated to the European experience of (a singular) Culture of India, or of Morocco, for example (Chakrabarty 1992).

Pratt argues that it is through their links to European systems of knowledge, discourses, and the institutions which maintain their circulation, that travelers' accounts are converted into "knowledge." That is to say, their accounts become ontologically validated through such links, so that
the ‘discovery’ itself... has no existence of its own. It only gets ‘made’ for real after the traveler (or other survivor) returns home, and brings it into being though texts: a name on a map, a report to the Royal Geographical Society, the Foreign Office, the London Mission Society, a diary, a lecture, travel book. Here is language charged with making the world (Pratt 1992: 204)

Pratt’s discussion makes clear that such European endeavors of knowledge production were not neutral, but already politically charged because, as Said’s three aspects of Orientalism remind us, these endeavors maintained and were in turn maintained by colonialist styles of thought, academic literatures, and policies and administrations. Moreover, on a personal level, “as the explorers found out, lots of money and prestige rode on what you could convince others to give you credit for” (Pratt 1992: 204).

Participation in “discoveries” and knowledge production is thus linked to one’s social position, and not just the result of a “natural” European love of and drive towards the production of knowledge. Economic and cultural capital were both at stake in the denials of the active role of “locals” in the creation of colonial knowledge.

For Said (1993: xiii), as for other post-colonial critics, “the power to narrate, or to block off other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the most important connections between them.”

While Linnaeus’s participation in colonization involved his “scientific” taxonomic categorization and racialization of African peoples as inferior to Europeans (Pratt 1992: 24-37), Dickens’ novels clearly show that colonization was a more comprehensive process than what we may glimpse in “purely” academic accounts (Said 1994). Empire building encompassed everyone in the Empire. The point is that the world and the text relationally influence one another. To read any text outside of its contextual power relations – as if it were in a vacuum, somehow divorced from the world – or to claim “a universal ethical, moral, or emotional instance in a piece of English literature... [is to
collude] in the violence of the colonial legacy in which the European value or truth is defined as the universal one" (R. Young 1990: 124). Is it any wonder, then, that (post)colonial peoples continue to grapple with and attempt to disrupt the Eurocentricity of Western interpretations of the non-Western world?

Indeed, given the denial of voice that has come with being the object of colonialist representations, “contests for meanings … are a major form of contemporary political struggle [and] releasing the play of writing is deadly serious… [because it is] about access to the power to signify” (Haraway 1991: 175, emphasis added). In my understanding, autoethnographic texts enter into such contests over meaning, and may be understood as sites or resources in struggles over the power to signify. As sites of struggle, the audience may contextualize the texts and read the (post)colonial struggle into them. As resources, they may be used both by the author and the audience to rupture dominant discourses and terrains of signification.

So far in this chapter I have attempted to flesh out processes of representation within a specifically (post)colonial context. I have argued that the discursive conquering of the Other, which has been accompanied by the silencing of their voices, has often functioned to strengthen and to justify their physical domination, and to deny their subjective agency. Within the field of colonial representation, the colonized have often been read as silent Others and recreated as the objects of knowledge. Only those members of the subordinate, colonized population who use colonialist practices of signification, structures of knowledge, and discourses have historically been allowed/able to speak to the colonizer within transcultural arenas of representation. These have “coincidentally” been people who appear (to the colonizer) to best match the already
existent colonial discourses; they have been authentic(ated) “others.” This largely continues to be the case where mainstream, public knowledge is concerned, and has continued to mean that mostly those willing to dilute or disguise their message – to concede something to, or to appropriate something from, those with greater political power – have had a voice in the public arena. For the remainder of the chapter, I would like to outline briefly how autoethnographic practices may be thought of as processes of signification undertaken by members of colonized populations which insert the colonized into the colonizers’ terrains of signification in ways that disrupt these same terrains.

Autoethnographers engage dominant representations and use dominant tropes in their self-representations. Their engagement with dominant representations is frequently dismissed both by members of the dominant group and by those of the subordinate group as betraying a concession (and it may, in fact, have the effect of conceding something). For example, speaking of discourses of history, Dipesh Chakrabarty (1992) has argued that the histories of (post)colonial nations have been rewritten as the History of the European encounter with those particular countries, and always with the European subject/experience at the centre. Chakrabarty (1992: 2) suggests that “a certain version of ‘Europe,’ reified and celebrated in the phenomenal world of everyday relationships of power as the scene of the birth of the modern, continues to dominate the discourse of history.” Using India as his main example, he shows that many (post)colonial Indians within the academe often continue to demonstrate their knowledge of European authors and texts through multiple specific references. On the other hand, while seemingly championing the voice of marginal peoples within the academe, many are unable to provide specific references and citations of Indian authors or philosophical traditions.
I do agree with Charkabarty’s argument that this unidirectional referencing of European authors and/or texts by previously colonized subalterns indicates and reproduces the continued transcultural domination of Western European standards, values, and structures of knowledge. Nevertheless, the texts of Indian authors working out of North-Western Euro-American academic institutions cannot be read apart from the asymmetry of their contextual power relations: they may not be subaltern, but they are shaped by colonialist North-Western Euro-American philosophical and historical knowledge. It is (largely) this colonialist knowledge which sets the terms of acceptable signification. Consequently, if members of subordinate populations wish to address their dominants within a transcultural context, they must engage the dominant’s accepted knowledge. Their engagement, however, may be a strategic move used to enter an arena in order to rupture its defining elements. Put another way, what has been read as their concession to dominant knowledge may be reinterpreted (using the concept of autoethnography) as accommodative resistance to that same knowledge.

In being “accommodative,” autoethnographers say “we know/are familiar with the ways you (the dominant) represent us, we have access to your knowledge about us” (Butz 2002: 22-23). Autoethnographers resist their exclusion from (currently) accepted realms of knowledge by strategically accommodating colonialist knowledge (in order to enter into the transcultural arena). The point is that autoethnographies may concede something to members of the dominant group, but they simultaneously resist what members of dominant groups take as valid knowledge about their subordinated others. The accommodative elements of autoethnographies provide subordinates with a tactical way to overcome dominants’ denials of their experiences and stories.
Autoethnographic texts are conceptualized as forms of accommodative resistance. The emphasis here is on the contestation of dominant knowledge: the adjective “accommodative” modifies the noun “resistance.” The political and anti-colonial potentials of autoethnographies lie mostly in their refutations of dominant representations of subordinate populations, but heavily rely on the repetition of dominant discourses. As mentioned in Chapter One, autoethnographic texts reflect their author’s knowledge of “self-as-another’s-other” (how they have been represented by their dominants) as well as representations of “self-as-more-than-another’s-other” (what the dominant discourses have excluded or silenced). The first of these, “self-as-another’s-other,” may be thought of as the accommodative element. It is the inclusion of this representation which provides members of the dominant population with something recognizably within their realm of knowledge. The second kind of representation, “self-as-more-than-another’s-other,” is equally important, and may be thought of as the resistant aspect of autoethnography (or a form of resistant claiming).

To frame autoethnographic texts strictly as forms of accommodation would not be correct because it suggests that their main objective is to perform dominant discourses, or to defer to dominant practices of signification. On the other hand, neither would it be entirely correct to frame them solely as forms of resistance, because their disruptive effects are enabled through their accommodations. To read autoethnography as purely accommodative or purely resistant is to miss the point of autoethnographic expression as a transcultural (and thus transculturated) site of negotiating identity and meaning-making. Such a reading would reproduce the discursive division between colonizer and colonized as mutually exclusive, insist on a total separation of dominant and subordinate
knowledges, and deny the transculturation of autoethnographic texts, which strategically draw on both dominant and subordinate knowledges.

Autoethnographic texts’ accommodation lies precisely in their performance of dominant knowledges, but they *simultaneously* call their performance of these dominant knowledges into question. Their resistances are often enacted through proliferations and disruptions of the dominant knowledges they perform with knowledges from subordinate realms of meaning-making (usually hidden transcripts, unfamiliar to the dominant). To look for evidence of *either* (autonomous) resistance *or* (total) domination is to rely “on the figure of [a prediscursive and] autonomous subject who operates against, but outside, the field of domination” (Butz 2002: 21). Autoethnographies’ accommodative and resistant aspects support and enable one another: accommodations of dominant knowledge offer routes into the realms of intervention in dominant discourses.

Through intervention in the dominant realm of representation, autoethnographies may have two important, but related, resistant effects: they may resist dominant representations through their speech act (a) as a speech act itself, and (b) through the content of that speech act. In the first instance, autoethnographies have an implicit resistant effect because the resultant texts testify to or assert autoethnographers’ subjective agency (Butz and Ripmeester 1999). In representing themselves, autoethnographers enter the transcultural arena of signification as more than *objects* of dominant knowledge; they become *simultaneously* the agents of representation and its objects. By that very fact, autoethnographers necessarily intervene in dominant colonialist representations that create them as Other. As I argued above, Orientalist discourses have often created the Other as primitive, passive, illiterate object, who cannot
(want to) contribute to knowledge (Said 1993, 1994). Given this context, by inserting themselves into the circuit of dominant knowledge production, autoethnographers contest the Orientalist discourses which have excluded them from being the subjects of knowledge. The Other’s documented (and recognizably familiar) participation in creating knowledge ruptures dominant images of her/him as unable or uninterested to participate in epistemological and ontological endeavors. The entry of subordinates into dominant terrains of signification as subjects who can contribute to knowledge has a second effect. It simultaneously begins to unravel dominant narratives which construct the coherent unity of “the Master Subject,” and the image of knowledge as solely within her/his realm of understanding and possession.

In the second instance, one must look to the content of a particular autoethnographic expression. The content may engage with dominant representations, often responding to them in ways that subtly reflect their fallaciousness or outright deny their accuracy. The content of specific autoethnographies reflects what I discussed above as accommodative resistance, which is often necessarily involved in self-representation to one’s dominants. The content may accommodate specific images, discourses, novels, paintings, films, or plays which are familiar to one’s dominant, but autoethnographers may also take up an idiom (such as ethnographic writing, a particular language, internet websites) commonly used by members of the dominant population. For example, in

27 For example, David Butz (2002; Butz and Besio 2004) has written about the residents of Shimshal, a village in Northern Pakistan, who struggle to maintain their access to agricultural and herding land against national government and international environmental and development organizations' interventions. Members of this village community have drafted the “Shimshal Nature Trust” as part of the effort to express their desire for autonomous control over their grazing land. The document highlights their knowledge of the land and their ability to maintain it, and has been posted on the internet in order to reach a wider, international audience. In this particular case, computer and internet literacy may be thought of as a dominant idiom, not usually associated with small, rural, herding populations.
Scheherazade Goes West, Fatima Mernissi includes references to several (likely familiar) images to accommodate her North-Western Euro-American audiences: lyrics from Elvis Presley’s *Harum Scarum*; paintings by Ingres, Delacroix, and Matisse; Diaghilev’s ballet, *Scheherazade*; passages from Burton’s translations of *One Thousand and One Nights*; Kantian philosophical expositions on gender roles. These images give her reader something to work with, something s/he may recognize (many would at least recognize the authoritative names she invokes, if not the specific details of the reference).

Moreover, Mernissi does not only provide these references, but she engages in discussions about each one with a North-Western Euro-American friend or journalist, or with her French editor, Christiane. Each of these people is presented as providing Mernissi with the particular representational sources she analyzes in the book, as well as the material with which to analyze them. Mernissi is a sociologist, she has written several books, and for those who are already familiar with these facts, her apparent deferral to the journalists and her editor throughout the research process she narrates in the book may seem surprising. She uses these characters’ recommended research material, analyzes her sources in collaboration with them, and even sends them single paragraphs for their feedback as she begins to build her arguments. These facts may be read as concessions: they may be read as Mernissi reproducing the authority of North-Western Euro-American voices, or reproducing their constructed intellectual superiority. At the same time, however, Mernissi’s use of these characters also reverses dominant roles as she turns *them* into Native Informants.

A careful reading may reveal that Mernissi recognizes the discursive authorization of these people’s (the artists, philosopher, journalists, and her editor) Western voices and
analytic conclusions within the transcultural arena. She uses them to disrupt the
discursive construction of Muslim women as passive objects. As a Muslim woman, she
narrates her unaccompanied travels from Morocco to Europe and North America, and
relates her shock at Western representations of passive women in the texts she analyzes.
Memissi juxtaposes these representations against Muslim or Arabic narratives and
paintings where women are portrayed as physically and mentally active. She thus
accommodates the transcultural authorization of Western subjects, drawing part of her
authority through her association with them, but she ultimately refutes their
representations and highlights the subjective agency of Muslim women. In her reliance
on old Islamic texts to make these arguments, she also claims a historical precedence for
Muslim women’s subjectivities, resistances, active agencies, and feminist struggles.

Butz and MacDonald (2001) argue that autoethnographic expressions are public
transcripts, defined by James Scott (1990: 4) as “subordinate discourse in the presence of
the dominant.” While I do agree with this, I think that autoethnographic texts may also
reveal some elements of subordinate populations’ “hidden transcripts,” which take place
away from the gaze of the dominant, amongst members of the subordinate populations.
As I argued at the end of Chapter Two, autoethnographic texts bridge a gap between
dominant knowledges and expectations of authenticity (which constitute some of the
defining elements of public transcripts) and subordinate peoples’ resistant knowledges,
usually inaccessible to their dominants (which often constitute the hidden transcripts of
subordinates). I am not arguing that autoethnographers necessarily intentionally bridge
this gap, nor that their texts include intentional revelations of hidden transcripts (although
it may be an intentional strategy of some autoethnographic texts). Instead, I want to
suggest that because autoethnographic texts are transcultural products, they draw on and negotiate several structures of knowledge available to subordinate populations.

The accommodative elements of autoethnographic texts rely on dominant discourses of knowledge, and reveal the familiarity of subordinate populations with dominant practices of signification (autoethnographers can neither engage nor accommodate these structures of knowledge if they do not first know them). Again, this stresses the necessity of subaltern populations’ (perhaps forced) familiarity with their dominants’ discourses, and it threatens dominant populations’ denials of their subordinates’ ability to engage this knowledge as subjects.

The discursive (re)negotiations of the borders of authorized speech and subjective agency within colonial power relations is well articulated by Homi Bhabha’s formulations of mimicry and hybridity. Mimicry and hybridity may be particularly useful ways of conceptualizing the transculturation of autoethnographic texts as reflective of their accommodative resistance. Bhabha’s formulations of these concepts also highlight the “ambiguity inherent in subaltern speech ... [and reveal] an ambivalence that lies at the root of the West’s approach to subaltern speech” (Butz and MacDonald 2001: 183). Bhabha argues that the colonizer and colonized cannot be understood as respectively powerful and powerless because colonial power relations are continuously renegotiated around this ambivalence.

Bhabha’s understanding of colonial relations is similar to Butler’s notion of subordinate populations as constitutive outsides. Like Butler, Bhabha (1985) draws on Derrida’s conceptualization of the impossibility of a finality to meaning, and its ambivalent construction through expulsion and exclusion (of the other) as something
which haunts dominant ontologies, continuously threatening to penetrate them and to unravel their constructed coherent unity. He argues that mimicry is a desirable and threatening process which forces upon the colonizer the perception of a same-ness in the colonized. This presents a continuously looming threat of a possible conflation between (colonizer) self and (colonized) other, which may challenge the relational construction of colonizer and colonized as categorically different (Bhabha 1984, 1985). I have already argued that since colonialist discourses construct the colonizing self through a rejection of the other, the other is simultaneously excluded from the self but necessary for its construction and transparently known and knowable (partly because the other may be reformulated as the not-self or the negation of the self).

Colonialist discourses thus rely on a relational categorical differentiation between the colonial self as a knowing subject and the colonized Other as a known object. These constructed subject positions authorize colonial power relations. Since recognition of "same-ness" between colonizer and colonized is threatening to the colonial self, and as part of the process of attempted diffusion of the threat through renegotiating colonial identities, similarity is rearticulated by the colonizer as (a necessarily imperfect) mimetic imitation of them: colonial construction of "mimicry rearticulates presence in terms of its 'otherness,' that which it disavows" (Bhabha 1984: 132). Colonial authority is thus maintained by and relies on disciplining subaltern speech, and by representing any similarities perceived by the colonizer within the subaltern as imperfect imitations. Bhabha seems to argue, then, that where images of the colonized threaten to interrupt the constitution of colonial authority, represented in the exclusive reservation for the colonizer of the subject position that actively shapes colonial relations, the images are
reinterpreted as mimicry of the colonizer, and they “emerge as ‘inappropriate’ colonial subjects” (Bhabha 1984: 129), who can never be (recognized as) the same. In some senses, this implies that within colonialis, the subjective agency of the colonized can only ever be a failed, imperfect, mimicry of subjectivity.

Mimicry is threatening precisely because it is produced “at the crossroads of what is known to be permissible and that which though known must be kept concealed; a discourse uttered between the lines and as such both against the rules and within them” (Bhabha 1984: 130); it takes place at the borders of colonial identities. The discursive regulation and separation of colonizer and colonized (as subjects and objects of power, respectively) is thus maintained in an ambivalent tension: the colonizer does recognize the actions of the colonized, recognizing “the same” (active subject authorizing colonial rule) within the other (passive object of colonial rule), but disavows and reinterprets them as failed imitations, or partial representations.

Bhabha (1984:127) argues that the (impossible possibility) of recognizing subaltern agency (as evidenced in their mimicry) forces upon the colonizer an awareness of “the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double.” In other words, mimicry makes the colonizer aware of the reciprocal gaze of the subaltern: “the menace of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority” (Bhabha 1984: 129). The colonizer’s awareness that s/he has been the object of their subordinate’s gaze is particularly threatening to the colonizer’s previously assumed transparent and total colonial authority because it destabilizes the authority assumed on the basis of seeing without being seen, what Donna Haraway (1989) has called the god-trick. Thus, mimicry is threatening because it forces the recognition of limitations on
colonialist power, threatening to unravel the constructed authorizing subject position of the colonizer. Indeed, Bhabha (1984: 127) marvels, “it is as if the very emergence of the ‘colonial’ is dependent for its representation upon some strategic limitation or prohibition within the authoritative discourse itself.”

Mimicry forces a continual renegotiation of colonial subjectivity, which “must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference” (Bhabha 1984: 126). Bhabha formulates mimicry as “the sign of the inappropriate [and thus inappropriate],... a difference or recalcitrance which coheres the dominant strategic function of colonial power, intensifies surveillance, and poses as immanent threat to both ‘normalized’ knowledges and disciplinary power” (Bhabha 1984: 126). Mimicry is therefore a process which stresses that “the place of difference and otherness, or the space of the adversarial ... is never entirely on the outside or implacably oppositional. It is a pressure, and a presence that acts constantly, if unevenly, along the entire boundary of authorization” (Bhabha 1985: 152). The point is that the borders constructing the differences between colonizer and colonized are always sites for renegotiating their relations and identities.

Bhabha’s mimicry does not, however, presuppose the intentional resistance of subalterns. Mimicry is an inevitable process in the negotiation of power relations, it emerges within, and is produced by, these relations (and their articulation of the social locations of the colonizer and colonized as antithetically and categorically different). Hybridity, on the other hand, “incorporates the possibility of active forms of resistance into Bhabha’s formulation of the ambivalence of colonial discourse” (Butz and MacDonald 2001: 183). Like mimicry, hybridity relies on (but may also intentionally and disruptively utilize) the inherent ambivalence of power relations, which again results
from the simultaneous desire for and rejection of the colonized as both knowable and Other. Bhabha argues that colonial interactions produce hybrid subjectivities, which draw on authorized colonialist knowledge and on the unauthorized knowledges of the other. These hybrid subjectivities may be used intentionally or actively to play on and utilize the ambivalence inherent in colonial relations in order to disrupt the very relations of power (between the colonizer and the colonized) which produced these subjectivities and enabled their resistant use in the first place. These hybridized subjectivities thus become the very points of entry into and sites of contestation of dominant knowledges (Bhabha 1985). They constitute the borders of authorized and unauthorized, permissible and impermissible, colonizing subject and colonized object.

It may be possible to understand autoethnographic texts either as instances of mimicry or as the products of hybrid subjectivities. Pratt argues that autoethnographic texts are transcultural, that they engage dominant knowledges (accommodating dominant power structures) in order to present subordinate knowledges (resisting dominant knowledges by providing alternative representations and interpretations).

Transculturation implies hybridity; it implies the interpenetration of dominant and subordinate knowledges. Nevertheless, it is impossible to be absolutely certain of the intent of the autoethnographic authors. In some cases, it may be easy to read intent into their textual representations, but precisely because they rely on the ambivalence of power relations, autoethnographic texts may themselves be ambiguous. The ambiguity of accommodative resistance, which we may read into autoethnographic texts, is what makes the autoethnography a safe public expression (under the gaze of authority) of private knowledges (which deny the knowledge and authority of the dominant).
Occupying this space of ambivalence (what Bhabha might call a third space) between accommodation and resistance, autoethnographic texts may avoid reprehension or punishment through a strategic ambiguity (Pratt 1999; Butz 2002; Butz and MacDonald 2001; Butz and Ripmeester 1999). This same ambiguity, however, may also serve to neutralize the potential resistances of autoethnographic texts. Because autoethnographic texts threaten the borders of authority, because they occupy the space between what is or is not permissible or acceptable, they may be reincorporated into the knowledges they seek to disrupt. I will use mimicry here, again, to demonstrate what I mean. Mimicry threatens colonialist knowledges, but precisely because it falls within this ambiguous space, the colonizer is able renegotiate its borders and effects. The colonizer thus rearticulates the potentially disruptive colonized subject as a mimic-person (perhaps an imperfect copy of the perfect original), thereby returning each of the colonizer and colonized to their authorized ontological category and (re)authorizing the binary distinction between them.

Moreover, the ambiguity of autoethnographic texts sometimes makes it difficult to read an intention to resist into them. In these cases, rather than conceptualizing autoethnographies as hybrid texts, or as representative of hybridized subjectivities, one may think through their autoethnographic potentials in the same way Bhabha uses mimicry: one may read autoethnographic texts for their possible resistant effects. As we see in the discussion of mimicry, the knowledges of subordinate peoples, their self-representations, their senses of identity, particularly when they underscore the reciprocal gaze of subordinate peoples, need not be intentionally disruptive of power relations. Their very reflection of the subordinates’ watchful return of the gaze produces a (perhaps
disciplinary) disruption in colonialist knowledge, and forces the renegotiation of the terms of their constitutive power relations.

Particularly interesting are Bhabha’s formulations of the disruptive potentials and threats to dominant colonialist knowledges presented by mimicry and hybridity as *emerging out of* the power relations they undo. Within such an understanding, colonial power relations produce fissures in their own authority. His concepts seem to highlight the productive potentials of power. The subordinates’ use of these fissure as points of entry into the power relations they resist, their creative use of the productive potentials of power, may be a useful way of conceptualizing autoethnographies as forms of accommodative resistance. Autoethnographies may thus creatively utilize the opportunities afforded them within the power relations which constitute them, and in this sense, they are accommodative forms of resistance.

It may be useful here to describe Mary Louise Pratt’s illustration of autoethnography. Pratt’s classic example of an autoethnographic text is a twelve hundred page long letter written by Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala to the Spanish crown in 1613 (Pratt 1992, 1994, 1999). The letter, “written in a mixture of Quechua and ungrammatical, expressive Spanish” (Pratt 1994: 27), begins with a reconstruction of Christian history “with Andean rather than European peoples at the centre of it” (27) and ends with a retelling of the Spanish conquest as it was experienced by “locals.” Poma engages the cultural idioms familiar to the Spanish crown – such as Biblical narratives – but reformulates them in such a way as to include Andean peoples and cultural idioms.

Pratt (1994: 26-27) tells us that until 1908, when “a Peruvianist named Richard Pietschmann was exploring in the Danish Royal Archive in Copenhagen and came across
the manuscript... [no] one, it appeared, had ever bothered to read it or figured out how.”

According to Pratt (1994: 27), only in the late 1970s “as colonial ethnocentrism [began to give way to] postcolonial pluralisms, [did] western scholars [find] ways of reading Guaman Poma’s [manuscript] as the extraordinary intercultural tour de force that it was.”

Guaman Poma’s letter arrived, but it was “350 years late” (27). The extreme delay in the reception of this autoethnographic text draws attention to the importance of the reception end of autoethnographic endeavors: if a text is not received, or if it is read for confirmation of stereotypical understandings of subordinate peoples, its potential for autoethnographic intervention is sharply curtailed or lost altogether.

At the time of the letter’s discovery in 1908 scholars had assumed that Quechua was not a written language and that Andean peoples had been illiterate. If, however, Quechua was an unwritten language, the text Pratt discusses is an even further demonstration of transculturation, and Guaman Poma’s undertaking written forms of communication in a largely oral culture reflects an even further attempt at communication with the Spanish colonizer through engaging their cultural idioms. That is to say, given the emphasis placed on written communication by Europeans engaged in empire-building, Guaman Poma may have taken up the pen as a tool/weapon in order to enter the European realm of a more highly “civilized” and valued method of communication. Thus, Guaman Poma takes up European communication technologies in order to resist European representations of (and administrative policies towards) Andean peoples.

Having done so, he then uses European narratives – thereby appropriating something from his European audience – in order to re-narrate the European history of cultural contact and domination. Autoethnographic texts may thus be thought of as reflections of
colonized groups taking up the task of self-representation in order to usurp some of their colonizers' power to signify.

As Pratt (1992: 7) defines them, "autoethnographic texts are typically heterogeneous on the reception end... usually addressed both to metropolitan readers and to literate sectors of the speaker's own group, and bound to be received very differently by each." I have a strong interest in both the production of autoethnography, and its reception by members of the dominant group (i.e. metropolitan readers). Indeed, there is a certain degree of responsibility to read autoethnographic texts in ways that disrupt colonialist knowledges and representations of colonized peoples, particularly if we want to intervene in and resist "the continuing effects of colonial discourses and structures of domination on contemporary cultures and societies" (Butz and Besio 2004: 350).

David Butz and Kathryn Besio (2004: 350) argue that researchers' "efforts to dismantle colonial discourses and structures of domination must... include - and perhaps begin by - applying a critical postcolonial perspective to [their] own research practices." I think that their argument can be extended to encompass the reading practices of metropolitan audiences, in general. Members of dominant populations may use the concept of autoethnography, as a way to resist their inherited colonialist discourses and structures of knowledge. In some ways, what I am suggesting is that instead of searching for an Other, instead of reading in ways that confirm colonialist representations, or which search for the object of colonialist signifying practices, we need to read in ways that haunt the colonialist terrains of significations we have inherited. As Spivak (1988: 292) has argued, "the task of the first-world subject of knowledge in our historical moment is
to resist and critique 'recognition' of the Third World through 'assimilation' into dominant, first-world significations. Ultimately, our attitudes on the reception end matter.

Indeed, Pratt (1994: 30) stresses the importance of reception when she suggests that "the absence of structures of reception made Guaman Poma’s project an impossible speech act": his letter does not seem to have even been read for 350 years. The point, however, is not simply to read the text, but to read it in ways that are receptive to its resistances to colonialism. In reading the self-expressions of colonized peoples as autoethnographic, one may foreground discussions of the subjective agency of subaltern authors by understanding what they produce as instances of resistance and anti-conquest initiatives. Like Butz and Besio (2004), I am not suggesting that we officially place the specific self-representations of members of subordinate populations into the category of autoethnography, or that we keep others from inhabiting that category – the theoretical problems I outlined in the previous chapter about the categorization of people hold true for texts as well. Instead, what I am recommending as a reading practice is “to be attentive to, respect, analyze, and indeed celebrate, the potential autoethnographic characteristics of indigenous self-representations” (Butz and Besio 2004: 354).

In “Serving Sahibs with Pony and Pen” David Butz and Ken MacDonald provide an example of such a reading practice. Discussing Rasul Galwan's Servant of Sahibs: A Book to be Read Aloud, Butz and MacDonald (2001) begin by suggesting that the book “may be read credibly as a text that aids the colonial establishment in utilizing a discourse of Native authenticity in support of a somewhat discredited discourse of benevolent labor relations” (182). The text in question is aimed at a colonialist, European audience, and edited by Katharine Barrett – the wife of Robert Barrett whom Galwan had
served as caravan overseer. While Galwan is credited with authorship of the text, “the published [version] includes less than a quarter of Rassul Galwan’s manuscript” (180). Basically, then, while the Barretts allow — and indeed someone in the position of the Barretts has the ability both to allow and to disallow — Galwan’s voice (in the form of his text) to enter into the Western, or even the transcultural, arena of representation, they simultaneously edit his speech.

It seems that Western audiences, including the Barretts, have generally tended to read this text as an authentically native expression of the grateful servant who recognizes both his own otherness, and the “benevolence” of his colonialist masters. The Barretts portray the narrative included in the text as an illustration of the “possibilities” available to the good servant. Galwan is represented as a poor boy who has, through good service, worked his way from a “destitute” childhood to his current position as a caravan overseer (179). Although Galwan’s text clearly contains expressions of resistance to his objectification, and striking evidence of his subjectivity, colonialist Western European audiences seem to have received it as a reflection (and confirmation) of their own understanding of their Native other. In other words, they have tended to receive it into and to read it through dominant and sanctified colonialist discursive formations.

In their analysis of the text, Butz and MacDonald (2001) suggest that we could read the text, instead, for its autoethnographic potential. When read in this way, Galwan ceases to be a “native informant,” simply an object of colonialist knowledge who can do no more than act as confirming evidence of that knowledge. Butz and MacDonald’s reading of the text as an autoethnography, insists on recognizing that Galwan acted as a subject when he wrote the text. The point is not to read a particular intentionality into the
texts and self-representations of indigenous peoples. Rather, the point is to read them for, and to enable, their potential to disrupt the dominant discourses which constitute (post)colonial identities (Butz 2002). In reading texts with an autoethnographic sensibility, we may be able to do just that.

In the previous chapter, I outlined elements of social theory that contextualize my understanding of autoethnography. In this chapter, I have attempted to flesh out the particularly (post)colonial terrains of signification and power relations that constitute autoethnography. I began with a discussion of the colonizers’ translation of indigenous knowledges and identities into colonialist discursive formations. Processes of translation and their resultant “knowledge” were sanctified by colonial power relations, and came to justify the same relations which sanctified them. I also argued that one of the effects of these processes, which re-created colonized peoples as forever outside the discourses that constituted them, has been the denial of the subjectivities of colonized peoples. Autoethnographers disrupt these processes of translation, and perhaps expose them as mis-translations. The texts produced by autoethnographers contain self-representations which are more true to their senses of self, but which also engage dominant discursive formations in order to communicate within a transcultural arena of meaning-making.

In the next chapter, I contextualize Mernissi’s texts by outlining the transcultural arena of representation she enters, and the dominant colonialist discourses about Islamic gender relations she engages. Mernissi’s two texts help me to demonstrate the disruptive or resistant potentials of autoethnographic texts. When the books are read together, they aptly illustrate the ambivalence of colonial power relations outlined above. Dreams of Trespass reflects this ambivalence as providing the opportunities for subordinate peoples’
disruptive (but safe) enunciations, or their accommodative resistances. In *Scheherazade Goes West*, however, Memissi seems to acknowledge the reincorporation of her text into dominant structures of knowledge. Memissi’s response to the renegotiation of discursive borders by her dominant is her own renegotiation: increasing the *reciprocity* of the disciplinary gaze, Memissi opens up an autoethnographic dialogue of renegotiation.
Third Intermission:

As I sit in my "Ancient Civilizations in History" class, I am aware that when people want their opinions about Islam confirmed, they tend to turn to me. They especially do this when they are discussing how horrible, barbaric, or backward Islam is in its treatment of women. They do not ask for my opinion, but only for my confirmation of theirs.

Some students ask me questions outside of class: Egypt, Iran, Turkey, I am supposed to know them, to know about them as they existed centuries ago. I sometimes respond by asking who the 5th prime minister of Canada was, but some miss the point of my question, I am finally forced to profess my ignorance and explain that these are not the time periods or parts of the world I “come from.”

My teacher, at least, seems to understand this. She and my father often discuss history and politics when she sees him at parent-teacher nights. She tells me how knowledgeable he is and I tell her that he had been a history teacher in Lebanon. She asks why he does not teach here, in Canada. I can only muster the courage to mumble that Lebanese credentials not translatable – maybe the board of education is afraid that Rome and Greece look different from Beirut than they do from Toronto.

* * * *

This year, my mom appears at parent-teacher night and my teachers all seem shocked when she saunters into their respective rooms in her short skirt, high heels, and no hijab. Tomorrow, they will all tell me how beautiful she is. They will say they never would have guessed that she was my mom, and I know what comes next: “Why doesn’t she wear the scarf?” When I explain that my mother is not religious, they ask if she had worn it “back home.” I tell them that she has, in fact, never worn it.

My chemistry teacher says he thought it was required in the Middle East for women to “cover themselves,” and I wonder if I will get bonus marks in geography class as I explain that the Middle East is composed of several different countries and that not all Middle Easterners are Muslim.

I will repeat this process several times in the next five years; I will repeat it every time someone new meets my mother. But I understand where such questions come from. I understand that the Middle East is often represented as a monolith, conflated with Islam – itself represented as a monolith – and equated with the patriarchal control of women evident in such things as veiling, seclusion, and “honour killings.” I watch the same news broadcasts and films; I read the same news papers and magazines. I know that I am always “up against” these representations.

When I read Said, I wonder why he does not include more of an analysis of gendered colonial relations and representations. I find that while his texts explain something of my
experience as a Muslim Arab, they are silent when it comes to my experience as a Muslim Arabic woman (and even less as a Muslim Arab Canadian woman). I am all of these things at once, however: “not a coherent substance with two or more attributes, but an oxymoronic singularity” (Haraway 2004a: 53). To find analyses of my experiences as a woman, I have often turned to feminist scholarship. But here again, I do not necessarily find feminist discourses that speak to my experience. Instead, I have often found ones that further represent and objectify me, discourses that speak about the injustices Muslim women, often grouped into the category of Third World Woman (Mohanty 2000), suffer at the hands of Islamic men.
Chapter Four:
Veiling the “West”/Writing the “East”: Scripting Social, Political, and Legal Bodies

In the previous chapter, I summarized aspects of Said’s conceptualization of Orientalism that are crucial to the formation of dominant realms of transcultural knowledge, and which autoethnographic representations resist. Despite his thorough critique of Orientalism, however, Said “says remarkable little about the sexualization and eroticization of the Orient” (Gregory 2000: 315), processes that involve(ed) particular gendered representations of the Arab or Muslim world(s), and of the relations between the men and women who inhabit(ed) them. Yet, sexualizing and eroticizing discourses continue to be evident in many current representations of Islam (Abu-Lughod 1998; Ahmed 1982, 1992; Blunt and Rose 1994; Elie 2004; Gregory 1995, 2000; Lazreg 1988; Lewis 1996; Mills 2001 Shohat 1990; Waines 1982).

Interestingly, in an interview in 2003 Said identifies Orientalism as a “male imposition,” but he goes on to say that “Arab women were always cast as entertainers, dancers, exotic women, ‘come into the Casbah with me’ that kind of thing. The basic assault [of representations of Arabs] was on the [Arabic] man, and the man was always a kind of degraded, obscene figure” (Katz and Smith 2003: 645). Said therefore seems both to recognize the importance of gendering and sexualizing the Orient, but also to dismiss it in the same gesture. Said’s comment can be read as attributing importance to dominant significations of Arabic women within the transcultural arena of knowledge in so far as their representation as objects of heterosexual Western male desire (and knowledge) is offensive to Arabic men – the “basic assault” is on the men of the region. His formulation is particularly problematic: although he critiques the status of Arabic women as objects of Western colonial knowledge, he objects, not to the objectification of Arabic women as
such, but to its implications for Arab men. In his comments, representations of Arabic women are refigured as disguised insults against Arabic men. The women emerge as objects in the discursive wars waged by (Western) and against (Arabic) men, both of whom figure as active subjects. Said's formulation, however, is in keeping with many of the dominant discourses (with and against which Mernissi struggles) that construct the subjectivities of colonized women.

In this chapter, I want to complicate the colonial relations and processes of representation outlined in Chapter Three by intersecting them with gender relations. In so doing, I will also set the context for my analysis of Mernissi's books. The gendered power relations of (post)coloniality are important for contextualizing Mernissi's self-representations and for identifying potentially resistant audiences for her books. More specifically, Mernissi's texts can be read in relation to discourses of "female seclusion," of the fundamental patriarchy of Muslim men, and of the oppression of Muslim women by Muslim men. These discourses have been integral to the constitution of Islam – sometimes conflated with the Middle East or with "Arabia" – within the transcultural arena, and they are exemplified in representations of the harem. Often within these discourses, Islam is opposed to the West, and both of these complex, heterogeneous entities come to be constructed as singular, monolithic, homogeneous singularities through such binary differentiation.

The significations involved in the discursive construction of difference between East and West have the simultaneous effects of denying the existence of patriarchal institutions and discourses within the imagined West and the existence of Muslim or Arab subjectivities and discourses which resist patriarchal institutions. Moreover, it is not
simply a matter of the gender of the person doing the representing, but of the intersection of masculinist and colonialist discourses which constitute knowledge about the region; it is the discourses themselves which are colonialist or patriarchal. Just as Orientalist significations form a style of thought/imagination used to think through/abtout the so-called Arab or Muslim world, so too do colonialist, patronizing, masculinist discourses form the imaginative spaces available to think through/abtout Arab and Muslim women, and the image of the harem has figured prominently in justifying colonization. Spivak (1999: 299, emphasis in original) argues that “the protection of [third world] woman ... [became] a signifier for the establishment of a good society.” Discursively, in discourses about Arabs or Muslims colonial power was represented as a benevolent, civilizing intervention which would free Muslim women from oppressive living conditions as the property (and in some instances, sex slaves) of despotic Arab and Muslim men (Hoodfar 1993; Shohat 1990, 1991; Shohat and Stam 2004).

In her 1982 article, “Western Ethnocentrism and Perceptions of the Harem,” Leila Ahmed, an Egyptian feminist, relates her familiarization with transcultural representations of Islam upon moving to the United States. Ahmed begins by narrating her experience of attending the 1980 conference of the National Women’s Studies Association, in Indiana. At a presentation on “Women in Islam,” Ahmed finds herself “hotly speaking up from the audience because the panel of three Arab women were ... presenting an unwarrantably rosy picture of women in Islam” (1982: 521). Ahmed (1982: 521) recognizes some of the rosier aspects of Islam, listing several improvements in women’s lives ushered in with the advent of Islam. She also pointedly reminds us that
some of these rights (such as "the right to own property") were "not granted to women in
the West until the nineteenth century." In speaking to the panelists she insists,

Islam could not be judged to be more malevolent in its attitude to women than
the other two monotheisms [Judaism and Christianity]. Nevertheless ... this did
not warrant ... glossing over the harshness for women of, in particular, [Islam's]
mariage, divorce, and child custody laws. (521)

In the very next sentence, however, Ahmed (521) confesses that this interaction had
occurred "over two years ago and before I'd lived in America. Now that I have," she goes
on, "I see perfectly why the women making the presentation took the stand they did."

Ahmad argues that anyone from a Muslim or Arabic background feels
"compelled" to take the same stance and present the same image as the women on the
panel, in opposition to what she represents as dominant Western28 discourses about Islam.

Ahmed (1982: 522-523, emphasis added) states:

What compels one [to take a defensive stance] is not only that Americans by and
large know nothing about the Islamic world, which is indeed the case... [It] is,
rather, that Americans 'know,' and know without even having to think about it,
that the Islamic peoples -- Arabs, Iranians, or whatever they call themselves -- are
backward, uncivilized people totally incapable of rational conduct.... [They]
know with the same flawless certainty that Muslim women are terribly oppressed
and degraded. And they know this not because they know that women
everywhere in the world are oppressed, but because they believe that,
specifically, Islam monstrously oppresses women... These are "facts"
manufactured in Western culture.

A few things may be gleaned from this passage. Ahmed is getting at (a) the Orientalist
constitution of knowledge about Islam, (b) colonialist feminism -- to which I will later

28 I would criticize Ahmed's argument for its reproduction of the binarism between Islam and the West,
which at times in her article emerge as monolithic, diametrically opposed entities, and she can further be
accused of often conflating Muslims and Arabs in several spots. On the other hand, I think that an
East/West divide often results from the terms of engagement available for most of us speaking of
(post)coloniality. It is difficult to find ways of speaking about these subject matters without seeming to
reproduce these binary divides (Mohanty 2000, 2002). As Chandra Mohanty (2002: 506) argues, "we are
still working with a very imprecise and inadequate analytical language." Where Ahmed uses the word
"Western," she is usually speaking specifically of the dominant colonialist Northwestern Euro-American
discourses and identity formations: North American or Western European, White, capitalist, colonialist
patriarchal (but not necessarily male) constructions. This is not to say that all white Northwestern Euro-
Americans reproduce the Orientalist knowledge she addresses, but perhaps that these are the discourses
such folks inherit from the power relations that predate, and therefore, constitute them.
return, but can quickly summarize as the championing of feminist ideals by Northwestern Euro-Americans in other parts of the world as specifically Western ideals – and (c) the peculiar position of Muslims in relation to Islamic patriarchy and feminism, resulting from (a) and (b). Indeed, ten years after this paper, in *Women and Gender in Islam* (1992), Ahmed reiterates her earlier conclusions, contextualizing them within an historical, Orientalist, colonialist tradition. She tells us that, as part of the traditionally colonialist study and representation of Islam, the “practices of Islam with respect to women had always formed part of the Western narrative of the quintessential otherness and inferiority of Islam” (1992: 149). Within these terms, the West becomes the epitome, and the only vehicle, of “women’s liberation.”

What the three aspects I read above into Ahmed’s critique of colonialist representations of Islam have often meant for Muslim and Arabic women—and indeed, for (post)colonial women in general – is that their feminism “unfolds within an external frame of reference and according to equally external standards… [whereby] the consciousness of one’s womanhood coincides with the realization that it has already been appropriated in one form or another by outsiders” (Lazreg 1988: 81, emphasis added). These outsiders may be “local” men, colonizing women, or colonizing men (as well as some local women when class, sexuality, age, or ability are taken into account). In these instances of (post)colonial gender identity formation, women often find themselves “caught between three overlapping discourses” (82): they are constituted through the interactions between colonialist feminism, Orientalism, and patriarchal representations of gender difference. These three discourses are important to the constitution of Muslim
women (and their experiences) within the transcultural arena of signification, and they are ones Memissi engages in her texts.

I do not intend to discuss each of these discourses in turn. Instead, I want to highlight their interactions with and reinforcement of one another. Colonialist feminism, for example, is often enabled by Orientalist discourses. At the same time, Orientalism in turn enables colonialist feminism. I want to highlight the combined effects of these three types of discourses in constituting Muslim women’s subjectivities, and in forming the terrains of signification in which Muslim women find themselves. For the remainder of this chapter, I will discuss these discourses in terms of their overlapping support of one another, and their collective effects on the subjectivities of Muslim women, and will refer frequently to the harem and the veil as two dominant, provocative images that exemplify and evoke these overlapping discourses (and figure prominently in Memissi’s accounts).

Robert Young (2003: 97) identifies colonial feminism as practices whereby “the colonial government intervened on behalf of women, claiming it was doing so on humanitarian grounds... [usually favoring] interventions they regarded as a way of transforming the values of the societies whose traditions resisted their rule.” For Young (97), “this was clearest with respect to the French colonial policy of forced unveiling in the Maghreb.” Although Young points specifically to government policies, which were key in administering and managing the colonies, I would add something to his definition.29 As Said points out in Orientalism and Culture and Imperialism, Orientalist, Othering discourses – and their material effects – were reproduced and maintained along three lines. The policies of colonial feminism to which Young refers were supported by

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29 Note that colonial feminism, as Robert Young uses it, refers to policies administered by colonial governments. Colonialist feminism, on the other hand, discussed above, refers to feminist academic studies.
academic “explanations” of gender and familial relations within the colonies (often in the form of colonialist feminism). Moreover, the administrative and academic aspects of colonial feminism had a mutually constitutive relation with the terms of engagement with and signification of indigenous gender relations and the lives of indigenous women. The administrative and academic aspects of colonial feminism contributed to and were reinforced by a style of thought that recreated the colonies as inferior, barbaric, and backwards, as evidenced in the lives of their women. The effects of this dominant style of thought continue to be evident in, among other things, mass media representations of Islam. Common representations (re)imagine an authentically pure Muslim woman as demure, veiled, obedient, passive, oppressed, and in need of liberation and they reinforce (and are reinforced) by academic discussions that rehearse the same stories of female seclusion, veiling, or “honour killings” as fundamentally Islamic practices.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty has argued that hegemonic “Western feminism” (perhaps best understood as the academic equivalent of Young’s colonial feminist policies) participates in the colonization of non-Western women, partly through the “production of the ‘third world woman’ as a singular monolithic subject” (2000: 302). Within Western feminist discourses, the third world woman is constituted as exceptionally oppressed by the especially patriarchal nature of her “undeveloped” societies. Ultimately, Mohanty seems to argue that there are Orientalist underpinnings to a particular Western feminist approach (colonialist feminism), which takes the third world woman as its object of study, to be explained and defended by “Liberated Western Feminists.” Within colonialist feminist studies, the liberated western feminist is constituted (as a subject) in relation to the oppressed third world woman (as an object).
Mohanty (2000: 302) calls this a process of colonization, which reproduces "'scholarship' and 'knowledge' about women in the third world ... which take as their referent feminist interests as they have been articulated in the U.S. and Western Europe."

Like other (post)colonial critics, Mohanty argues that this kind of "Western" thought understands its own position as a universal one, and in so doing, not only becomes exclusionary, but ends in becoming universalizing and reproducing the structures of domination it seeks to undo. The types of academic discourses she outlines are often used to justify colonialist policies of intervention, sometimes even when this is not specifically the intention of the authors of the studies. It is possible to use feminist academic knowledge in this way because discourses on the primitiveness of "non-Western" societies and cultural practices preexist particular feminist studies (often as the constitutive outside for Western feminism), and are reinforced by (post)colonial power relations. Moreover, both the policies and the academic literature support an Orientalist style of thought, and define the imaginative limitations of thinking about and through subordinate cultures identified as constituting the third world (or the South/East). Although "Western" feminists may critique patriarchal structures existing in "the third world," often ones that are oppressive to women, their own representations of these women may recolonize and further oppress them.

Mohanty demonstrates the power relations that contextualize and are illustrated by any act of representation (i.e., where one has the public power to represent and to speak about/for someone else). She points out that "defining women primarily in terms of their object status (the way in which they are affected or not affected by certain institutions and systems) ... characterizes this particular form of the use of 'women' as a
category of analysis” (2000: 306, emphasis in original). Mohanty argues that the process of colonizing third world women within a monolithic category of “the third world woman” has a generally coherent effect: it relegates the women who are supposed to be the subjects of the study to passive objects of study and reproduces white Euro-American women as master subjects. What Mohanty repeatedly points to in her article is that any academic analysis, feminist or otherwise, which takes the Euro-American subject position, male or female, as the (only) master subject interested in and capable of liberating women from patriarchal practices and relations relies on “Eurocentric analytic paradigms.”

In 2002, Mohanty revisited “Under Western Eyes,” first published in 1986, in order to clarify some of her earlier intentions. She reminds us in 2002 that such Eurocentric analytic paradigms continue to reproduce the “effects of discursive colonization on the lives and struggles of marginalized women” (Mohanty 2002: 509).

An analysis that calls itself feminist, or claims to be interested in unyoking the chains of patriarchy, but which does so in ways that take the white, capitalist, heterosexual, North-Western Euro-American subject position as normative or universal leaves power relations and hierarchies untouched since ideas about center and margin are reproduced along Eurocentric lines...Since in this paradigm feminism is always/already constructed as Euro-American in origin and development, women’s lives and struggles outside this geographical context serve only to confirm or contradict this originary feminist (master) narrative. (Mohanty 2002: 518-519)

One of Mohanty’s main arguments against such analytic paradigms is that one’s subjectivity (both subject position and subjection) is always relational (and I would add that it cannot be prediscursive). Mohanty therefore warns that women are formed as sexual-political subjects through the very political processes criticized as oppressive,
even as women inform these processes. This is not to say that the political processes or social relations in question are not oppressive, but to suggest that “the ‘doer’ is variably constructed in and through the deed,” and to remind us that “it is precisely the discursively variable construction of [the doer and the deed] in and through the other” (Butler 1990: 142) that form our subject positions.

So what does this relational construction mean? To begin with, women are created as women through the social relations and political processes they encounter in their everyday lives. An awareness of this requires us “to be attentive to the micropolitics of everyday life as well as to the larger processes that recolonize the cultures and identities of people across the globe” (Mohanty 2002: 508-509, emphasis added). As stated earlier, a social group exists as such only in relation to at least one other group; it comes to be understood as a separate social group once it is differentiated from at least one other group, through social, political, discursive processes. Thus, in gendered discourses, women emerge as women in relation to a group we call men. For those who are categorized as local/indigenous women, there arise several other groups from which they are differentiated: they are indigenous in relation to the (North-Western Euro-American) colonizer and women in relation to men. This places them within a matrix of constructed identities: they are constructed in relation to colonizer women, colonizer men, and indigenous men (again, when sexuality, age, class, or race, are taken into account, the matrix is further complicated).

In Mohanty’s discussion of Western feminist studies of Muslim women, it is evident that Muslim women discursively inhabit the designation of third world women

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30 This may seem binary, and I recognize that women are also differentiated from girls, for example. Such a differentiation, however, is based on age, rather than gender. Where gender is concerned, there tends to be a binary differentiation between women and men.
despite the physical residence of thousands of Muslim women in North America and Western Europe (i.e. the First World). What becomes clear is that it is not one's physical location that dictates the discursive categories into which one is placed. Muslim women who may physically reside in the Western/First World continue to inhabit the discursive category of Other. It is precisely this category of otherness (and by implication, their construction as categorically different) that defines them as third world women, and leads to their being represented and spoken for. The point is that women who are discursively other are excluded from the subject position inhabited by their dominants. These othered women form the constitutive outside: they are necessary for the formation of the normative subject position of the dominant, but necessary in so far as they remain outside it and constitute its borders.

In the end, "well-meaning interventions by western feminists, human rights groups, and ... non-government organizations can ... [make] life more complicated for local feminists" (Young 2003: 98). The complications arise precisely from colonized women's location in relation to anti-colonial and to feminist struggles: within this context, their feminism may be interpreted as a betrayal of anti-colonial movements at the same time that their anti-colonialism may be interpreted as an ignorance of feminist ideals. This has often meant that (post)colonial women are "ambivalently placed in relation both to colonialism and anti-colonial nationalism... [W]hile women struggle with the legacies of colonialism in the postcolonial era, they are repeatedly accused of importing western ideas" (Young 2003: 97). Ultimately, feminism is discursively equated with Westernization and anti-colonialist nationalism is discursively equated with women's oppression.
In discussing colonialist representations of veiling as a particularly oppressive Islamic practice, Homa Hoodfar (1993: 5) reveals that in most of her encounters with “a person of white/European descent,” the veil is a contentious point of discussion. Hoodfar adds that despite her interrogators’ professed ignorance of Islam and veiling, they are often adamant that women had a particularly tough time in Muslim cultures. Sometimes they went so far as to say that they were happy I am living in their society rather than my own, since obviously my ways are more like theirs, and since now, having been exposed to western ways, I could never return to the harem! (1993: 5)

Hoodfar underscores the links between Western Europe’s colonization of the Ottoman Empire, and the emergence of an interest in Muslim women – and by extension, an interest in their oppression by Muslim men. Although European colonial expansion, in general, had been taking place since at least the sixteenth century, according to Hoodfar, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries there was a growing colonial interest in the oppression of Muslim women. This interest manifested itself in a preoccupation with Muslim men and their patriarchal practices of female seclusion and veiling as inherently Oriental.

The preoccupation with Muslim women’s oppression came to be a powerful motif in colonialist justifications of “interventions” in the Middle East and North Africa. Thus, while the Crusaders had represented the Orient and the Ottomans as barbaric, new representations of their barbaric nature began to focus on Muslim men as “ignorant male[s] whose masculinity relies on the mistreatment of women, primarily as sex slaves. In this manner, images of Muslim women were used as a major building block for the construction of the Orient’s new imagery” (Hoodfar 1993: 8), and figured prominently in the construction of colonial feminism. Western European expansion into the
Mediterranean, Middle East, and North Africa thus came to be represented as a benevolent act undertaken to save these imprisoned Arab/Muslim women.  

Hoodfar reminds her reader that this is the historical socio-political context of colonial interest in women’s veiling and seclusion in “harems,” and their emergence as tropes in representations of the Orient by colonial Western European subjects to and for the Empire. Painters, poets, novelists, photographers, all undertook to represent the women of these harems. As Hoodfar (1993: 8) points out, in most of these images,  

[w]omen are invariably depicted as prisoners, frequently half naked and unveiled and at times sitting at windows with bars, with little hope of ever being free (Alloula, 1986). How these mostly male writers, painters, and photographers have found access to these presumably closed women’s quarters/prisons is a question that has been raised only recently.  

Since these men had little or no access to the women of the harems, we can safely assume that much of what we have in the form of depictions of harem women and their lives has been the product of their imagination, trying to probe and gain access to the unknown.  

Ahmed (1992: 121) provides the example of a depiction by a European male, British physician Alexander Russell, who “in his medical capacity had access to harems normally denied to European men.” Ahmed quotes his description a harem: the women of the harem “ask numberless questions concerning [his] country. They are particularly inquisitive about the Frank [European] women... Their questions are usually pertinent, and the remarks they occasionally make on manners differing so widely from their own, are often sprightly, and judicious” (Russell quoted in Ahmed 1992: 123). Clearly, these are not passive women, they ask “numberless” questions, and are “sprightly” in their comments.  

Interestingly, as Leila Ahmed (1992: 121) points out, despite the common male-authored representations of harems as places inhabited by female sex slaves of barbaric Muslim men, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s narrative of her entry into upper class harems describes the female slaves as belonging “to the women and... not accessible to their husbands.”
Ahmed (1982, 1992) tells us that despite Russell's description of harem women (again, afforded to him by his profession), men generally had no access to harems or the women within them. Nonetheless, "it was the harem on which they focused with fascination and loathing" (Ahmed 1982: 524). She goes on to define the harem and to describe the nature of the "loathing and fascination" of colonial representations:

The harem can be defined as a system that permits male access to more than one female. It can also be defined, and with as much accuracy, as a system whereby the female relatives of a man - wives, sisters, mother, aunts, daughters - share much of their time and living space, and further, which enables women to have frequent and easy access to other women in their community... It is interesting then to discover, reading early Western accounts of the harem, that in permitting males access to more than one female, the system often but not invariably elicited from Western men pious condemnation for its encouragement of sexual laxity and immorality. But it was its second aspect, that of women being freely and continuously together, and the degradation, licentiousness, and corruption that must inevitably ensue, which Western men viewed with considerable fascination. What recurs in Western men's accounts of the harem is prurient speculation, often taking the form of downright assertion, about women’s sexual relations with each other within the harem. Yet, however confident their statements, Western men had in fact no conceivable means of access to harems. Nevertheless, they wrote often with great assurance, as did George Sandys in describing the women of the sultan’s harem. (Ahmed 1982: 524)

According to Ahmed, in some of these early accounts, authors report the sexual appetites of harem women to be so voracious that they could not even remain in the vicinity of a cucumber, unless it had first been sliced up to abolish any phallic resemblance. Note that these early accounts clearly do not present the reader with images of passive objects, the women are active. Yet, given the absence of the men purporting to undertake their representations, these are imagined activities. In the imaginative acts of these male authors, women are endowed with an agency that, in fact, objectifies. The women seem to be allowed only one kind of activity: an abnormally insatiable sexual appetite/activity. Despite the details of the imagined activity of these women, they are the objects of a sexually possessive and objectifying imagination, and theirs is an agency that exists only
for the pleasure and titillation of men. The heterogeneity of harem women is absent, and their imagined (objectifying, sexual) activity ironically veils their lived experiences and serves to exclude them from the meanings given to their lives and their bodies (as sexually available and accessible objects, whose sole purpose is the sexual gratification of (hetero)sexual men).

In such representations, colonialist authors (re)produce false dichotomies – between us/active and them/passive – based on notions of unbridgeable differences that are necessary for significations of internal coherence by differentiation from the constitutive outside. As stated in the two previous chapters, the resultant discourses tend to construct an essentialized and objectified Other (in this case, passive and female). What the reader is left with in a textual representation such as a painting, for example, may come to be presumed as a “universal” interpretation, representative of the subordinate Other who is depicted: a snapshot, frozen in time, to which the reader can play voyeur.

If, for example, I look at Ingres’ *The Turkish Baths* today or in 50 years, the women he has painted will still and always be laying down in the same positions, naked, awaiting my penetrating gaze; the Turkish women never change, they are always the same women, born out of Ingres’ imagination. Because we can only see what he (by implication of painting it) has seen, the artist’s single experience may come to be reproduced as “our” universal interpretation. Ingres’ unseen presence behind the canvas

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32 There are clearly implications of processes of abjection here. It is not possible within the confines of this project to enter into a discussion of abjection and its relation to notions of the constitutive outside. I can briefly say that abjection, as defined by psychoanalytic theory, is a process whereby “the self” or ego is created through its differentiation from and rejection of “the not self.” For a fuller explanation of abjection and parallels to the concept of a constitutive outside please refer to Chapter One of Judith Butler’s *Bodies That Matter* (1993).

33 Recall from the previous chapter Said’s discussion of Flaubert’s Kuchuk Hanem.
gives him a "veiled authority" that establishes its truth, "leaving information for objective perusal and voyeurism by 'us'" (Cook 1999: 96). This is particularly ironic: harem women are, by definition, inaccessible to a male artist; they are veiled from his gaze. They may see him, from the rooftop of the harem, through its windows, or from beneath their veils, but he is unable to see them. Yet, Ingres' painting unveils these imagined women. In his painting, he is able to position the women according to his exact desires, and he can imaginatively create a visible image to substitute (or compensate) for that to which he is denied visual access. Through the artist's text, we enter and experience the world of Turkish women in the baths. We reproduce his objectifying gaze as we take in and consume the text, and Ingres thus functions as a conduit: the reader experiences (an)other culture through his text.

Ingres' claim to have based his painting on the description of the Turkish baths provided by Lady Montagu (Ahmed 1982, Shohat and Stam 2004) is especially interesting. Lady Montagu depicts the baths as "the women's coffee house" (quoted in Ahmed 1992: 122); she explains that the women are there to bathe and chat, that "there was not the least wanton smile or immodest gesture among them" (quoted in Ahmed 1982: 525). Yet, even at a quick glance, Ingres' _Turkish Baths_ clearly contain more than one "wanton smile" and several sexual gestures. When we read his painting in an unquestioning way, we identify "with the gaze of the [colonizer, and come] to master ... the codes of a foreign culture as simple, stable, unselfconscious and susceptible to facile apprehension" (Shohat 1990: 40), and we thus become complicit in his representation. What the case of _The Turkish Baths_ surely reminds us is that many of our representations of the experiences and lives of Middle Eastern and North African Muslim women have
been provided by “male European observers apparently sharing an obsession for the erotic and exotic” (Waines 1982: 643). If we contextualize these representations, we may realize that “such outpourings produced an artificial reaction to and understanding of Muslim women since meetings were few and brief; while this gave free play to the writer’s imagination, it underscored the fact that women were … inaccessible” (Waines 1982: 643). Orientalist representations of women were particularly reliant on the imagination of colonial Western European males who eroticized that which could not be known (Alloula 1986).

So why this obsession with these hidden women’s worlds? Malik Alloula (1986: 14) argues that for colonial photographers, veiled women “are not only an embarrassing enigma … but an outright attack on him… [Their implicit, hidden gaze at him] resembles his own.” Alloula (14, emphasis in original) argues that “thrust in the presence of a veiled woman, the photographer feels photographed; having himself become an object-to-be-seen, … he is dispossessed of his own gaze.” The implications are that the photographer’s own subject position relies on his objectification of others. Alloula’s argument may be extended to colonialist creations of knowledge in general. Used to being the subjects who create knowledge, colonial authors, painters, photographers, etc., need to enter these hidden worlds which threaten to see them without being seen; they need to unveil the secret worlds of the colonized.

The process of entering these spaces and seeing the hidden worlds of colonized women comes to function as an allegory for the colonizer’s power of possession. The availability and penetration of these women’s “secret” spaces represent the availability of everything “local” for colonial knowledge and consumption (Shohat 1990, 1991; Shohat
and Stam 2004). The representations of these spaces and women represent their accessibility and serve as evidence of the power of colonial penetration and its accompanying all-pervasive god-like gaze. Such representations often include unveiled, scantily dressed, or completely nude women. They unveil the bodies of these women through acts of imaginative substitution, presenting a sexual, erotic object of desire as representative of the (often invisible) harem women. They further illustrate the power of the (equally discursively imagined) Northwestern Euro-American (usually male) subject by revealing their access to the unseen. The women of the harems or the women behind the veils are thus rendered invisible (even unnecessary or insignificant, since their presence, activities, appearance, etc., can be imaginatively substituted) as they are visually represented as the objects of the voyeuristic gazes of their dominants.

Colonizers’ focus on veiling and harems may be better understood in the context of colonialist constructions of colonizing subjectivities, activities, and deserved positions of power (in relation to colonized populations) than in terms of colonizers holding strong feminist ideals. In Women and Gender in Islam, Leila Ahmed (1992: 151) argues that colonial uses of feminism “against other cultures in the service of colonialism [were] shaped into a variety of ... constructs, each tailored to fit the ...the immediate target of colonization.” In her discussion, colonial feminist discourses on Islam emerge as a contradictory amalgam of patriarchal ideals (which intentionally entrenched male dominance within administrative and educational institutions) and feminist discourses (used to justify colonial presence and interventions). Ahmed (152) argues that these discourses produced an understanding of Islam as “innately and immutably oppressive to women,” and the practices of veiling and sexual segregation became the focal
significations of the fundamental backwardness of the religion. She describes the discursive constitution of Islam by colonial administrative powers as appropriating feminist language, but suggests that the same administrators who appeared to champion women's rights in the colonies remained equally patriarchal to women in the Empire.

British administrative policies in Egypt serve as a useful illustration of Ahmed's point. She outlines national debates concerning the role of women in Egypt, arguing that prior to British interest in Egyptian women, these debates (and Egyptian women's movements) had increased women's access to education, and had even led to the creation of the School for Hakimas (women doctors) in 1832. In 1882, however, with the start of British colonization, the availability of educational opportunities for Egyptians, in general, but particularly for women, was sharply curtailed by colonial administrators (137). Lord Cromer, the British consul general, opposed the education of women doctors, and limited the education women could receive at the School for Hakimas to midwifery, arguing that "throughout the civilized world, attendance by medical men is still the rule" (Lord Cromer quoted in Ahmed 1992: 153). In Cromer's comments, "civilization" equally excludes women's education as physicians, and practices of veiling and seclusion: Egypt was doubly uncivilized, and the locus of its lack of civilization could be located in Islam. Indeed, according to Ahmed (153), Lord Cromer insisted that Islam denigrated women, "and it was to this denigration, most evident in the practices of veiling and segregation, that the inferiority of Muslim men could be traced." Ahmed quotes Lord Cromer's assertion that veiling and segregation have "a baneful effect on Eastern society. The arguments in the case are, indeed, so commonplace that it is unnecessary to dwell on
them" (Lord Cromer quoted in Ahmed 1992: 153, emphasis added). These comments clearly reflect Lord Cromer’s Orientalist leanings – to say the least.

Lord Cromer’s vocal opposition to veiling and seclusion while limiting women’s educational opportunities is a strikingly arbitrary distinction between “oppressions.” Equally remarkable, however, is his vocal defense of Muslim women in Egypt (against veiling and seclusion) when juxtaposed against his role as “founding member and sometime president of the Men’s League for Opposing Women’s Suffrage” (153) in England. What appears to surface then is that “feminism directed against white men was to be resisted and suppressed; but taken abroad and directed at the cultures of colonized peoples, it could be promoted in ways that admirably served and furthered” (153) the patriarchal power relations which privileged white, Northwestern Euro-American men.

Muslim women thus emerge as a discursive battle ground upon which – or pawns through which – (neo)colonialist concepts of modernization and patriarchal notions of “tradition” wage their wars against each other, and veiling/seclusion is the easiest, if because the most visibly transparent, symbol of their successes and/or failures (Hoodfar 1993, Abu-Lughod 1998, Kandiyoti 1996, Sabbagh 1996). Yet, while many women do object to forced veiling, for example, many others object to forced unveiling; the practice cannot be a standardized test of women’s liberation from patriarchal oppressions. Rather, the key word in the previous sentence is forced: what many Muslim women fight against is their forced embodiment of a signification as represented by the presence or absence of a veil. Muslim feminists generally insist that their active agencies are recognized, and their choices about their bodies/clothing are respected as their decisions instead of interpreted as assimilative Westernization or authentic Islamization.
Ultimately, these are the discourses that set the terms of signification available for discussing the experiences of Muslim women (Lazreg 1988). Consequently, the discursive emphasis on Islamic patriarchal traditions – understood to be epitomized by veiling, harems, seclusion, etc. – "constrains its critics, compelling them either to ritually refer to its parameters or to submit to them" (Lazreg 1988: 85). Given that harems and veiling have comprised many of the discourses on Islam/Arabia, those wishing to enter into or perform discursive interventions within the transcultural terrains of signification must return to these idiomatic tropes (not either to reinforce or to unravel them, but possibly to do both simultaneously). They sometimes find themselves in the position of having to defend their feminism, and to make the case for feminism as not always and not exclusively Western. Formed through the interactions among and the slippages between discursive constructions of (the impossibility of) their subjective agency and their cultural (im)purity, Islamic feminists are necessarily located within a transcultural crossroads. Their location involves continuous renegotiations of their subjectivity in relation to a multiplicity of discourses. Their self-representations may, therefore, reflect these necessary transcultural negotiations, and may present a site of potentially autoethnographic enterprise (and investigation).

A recurring theme in Fatima Mernissi’s books is the existence of (even the possibility of) an Islamic feminism, a theme that reflects the position of Islamic feminists I outlined above. Writing as a Moroccan Islamic feminist, Mernissi has published several books, with titles such as Beyond the Veil (1975), The Veil and the Male Elite (1988), The Forgotten Queens of Islam (1990), Women’s Rebellion and Islamic Memory (1993), Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood (1994), and Scheherazade Goes West:
Different Cultures, Different Harems (2001). As evidenced even in the titles of her books, Mernissi clearly engages the same terms of the debates about Islam and women outlined in this chapter as making up the transcultural arena of representation: (the possibility of) Islamic feminism, veiling, and harems. In the next two chapters, I offer my analysis of Mernissi’s Dreams of Trespass and Scheherazade Goes West, texts that I think may be well-conceptualized thematically within the framework of Islamic feminisms’ transcultural discursive construction. Both books reflect Mernissi’s awareness of the intersections between colonial and gender power relations, and their discursive production of/through the continual interactions between colonial, feminist, and patriarchal representations of Muslim women.

My analysis of these texts is broken down into two chapters. In Chapter Five, I offer an analysis of Dreams of Trespass as a potentially autoethnographic text. I draw on Mernissi’s particularly interesting use of a childhood quest for knowledge. Mernissi writes her book as a memoir of a shared mission she undertakes at the age of nine with her male cousin, and constant childhood companion, Samir, in search of the meaning of the term harem. Mernissi’s provocative resignifications of the word draw on common imaginative colonial representations of imprisoned women. Yet, she disrupts these representations by discovering a multiplicity of (especially female) characters whose relations to the dominant significations of Islamic gender relations are intersected and interrupted through the interactions of gender, class, race, geographic location, colonialism, and imperialism. In Mernissi’s text, we are presented with images of Muslim women as constantly engaged in physical and mental activities and well aware of global political events (from the activities of Ataturk in Turkey, to the Holocaust and the Second
World War, to the writings of feminist Egyptians). The women of her harem persistently renegotiate their identities, narrate alternatives to conditions they perceive as oppressive, and frequently question the dominant meanings given to their lives. Throughout the text, women emerge as feminist pedagogues, who teach their children (especially the young Mernissi) to contest and change oppressive institutions and living conditions.

*Dreams of Trespass* may be conceptualized as autoethnographic. It displays an awareness of and engagement with dominant representations of gender relations in “Islamic societies” (and is therefore accommodative), and creatively re-imagines the self as “more-than-another’s-other” (and is therefore resistant). The text was first written in English (implying an English-speaking audience), but has since been published in 24 languages (which clearly highlights the transcultural character of her narrative, and an address to more than one audience). In other words, Mernissi’s text may be understood as a transcultural, disruptive engagement with dominant terrains/practices of signification.

My particular analysis of this book will specifically highlight Mernissi’s responses to the colonialist discourses signifying Muslim women – although maybe particularly Arabic Muslim women – within a transcultural arena of representation.

In Chapter Six, I will turn to Jolene Armstrong’s reading of the text in order to foreground the role of the reader in autoethnographic communication. In her reading of *Dreams of Trespass*, Armstrong receives and interprets the text through rigidly defined colonialist structures of knowledge, which foreclose the possibility of Muslim women’s active agency. Her reading of *Dreams of Trespass* betrays a search for confirmation of inherited categories of difference, thereby (re)creating Mernissi as a Native Informant and frustrating the text’s disruptive potentials. Armstrong’s failure of imagination, her
refusal (intended or otherwise) to read outside colonialist analytic categories, thwarts the autoethnographic potential of Mernissi’s text. Yet, Armstrong’s reading is, in fact, quite reminiscent of Mernissi’s experience on her promotional tour of the book, narrated in *Scheherazade Goes West*. In this text, Mernissi takes on (more directly than she had in the previous text) the dominant meanings, which appear to have been imposed onto Mernissi’s text by male Northwestern Euro-American journalists. She confronts these journalists, demonstrating a reciprocal gaze, and searching for the specific significations they attribute to the word *harem*, and the routes available for contesting them. Mernissi thus seems to engage in a dialogic process of autoethnographic communication, which underscores the importance of the interaction between author, text, and reader. My analysis of the communicative process between Mernissi and her dominants leads me to revisit the concept of autoethnography, in order to use Mernissi’s endeavor to inform Pratt’s concept.
Fourth Intermission:

Expectations of being “authentic” do not only come from “White, Westerners.” Nor does my objectification end with them.

I am at the airport with my mom. My cousins are arriving from the United Arab Emirates, and I have never met them before. The youngest, a year older than me, expresses relief that I am not “really” veiled. She confides on the car ride home that she had been concerned that I dressed in “traditional Arab” dress, and that she would have to go out in public with me dressed like that. She says she is glad I am “moderate” in taking up the hijab.

Her brother asks me, with audible contempt in his voice, why I even bother wearing it if I am still going to wear jeans and fairly fitted clothing. He says I am too “Western” in my veiling.

Later that evening he recounts his latest excursions with his current partner: She is a 5’ 9” blonde Swiss masseuse. (From what he is saying, she does NOT sound veiled, or un-Western. I can safely bet that she does not even veil in my “more Western” way). He notices the look on my face and tells me that it is different for men than it is for “girls.” He seems to think we are born with this difference; he cannot see that his claiming of difference is complicit in creating that same difference.

He also tells me that it is ok for Western women to be sexual, but that Arabic and Muslim “girls” should be more conservative. He tells me that no man would want a “ruined” Muslim girl. I tell him that I hope no man is pining after any “girl.” I say that my or any other woman’s sexuality is none of his business, and that, in any case, his advice does not matter too much to me as I would not be interested in any person who was so fixated on my sexual history. I wonder why my sexuality is any of his concern, why he feels the need and the right to give me such advice.

* * * *

Two months later I go with them to Montreal where they go to visit some of their diasporic friends. I go to a club with them, and as we enter, I am stopped by a woman who tells me, in Arabic, how glad she is when she sees veiled women out “having fun.” I say nothing. How does one respond to such a declaration?

Later, on the dance floor, a man approaches me. He seems about the same age as me, and he also speaks to me in Arabic: “I really respect you!”

I laugh out loud. I guess this is the pickup line one uses with veiled women.

* * * *
That summer, I go to Austria to visit my uncle. His circle of friends consists of other Muslims residing in Vienna. The women are all veiled (although in a way that my cousin would consider much more “authentic”).

They take me to get my hair cut. They know a hairdresser who caters to the Muslim community; she has a room in the back of her hair salon where women can unveil without fear of being seen by male passers by or other male customers. In the last three years, I have often had to wait to cut my hair until the summer when I could go to Dearborn, Michigan. There is also a large Muslim community there: there are many veiled women. A lot of hair salons, as capitalist ventures will, have accommodated their practices to this requirement, a requirement that, once unveiled, I have the privilege of forgetting.

My uncle proudly displays me to all his friends: “Her mother is not veiled. She came to this on her own, through God’s grace.”

I want to scream every time he does this.

* * * * *

I had taken up the veil to avoid objectification. I had especially understood my veiling as process of resisting the (uncomfortably destabilizing) objectifying sexual glances I had received since I was in grade 6 and wearing a DD size bra. It had seemed to work for a while; I no longer felt like I was perceived as a sexual object.

I was still objectified though: for “Westerners,” I was the object of pity and shock, for Arabs and Muslims I was the object of contempt, of admiration, of pride.
Chapter Five:
(Re)presentations of Self: Re-writing the Other as Self or Writing Another Self

In the previous chapter I discussed the emergence of the harem and veiling as major tropes in dominant colonial significations of Islam, in general, and the increased attention to Muslim women as an embodied reflection of the discursive contests for meaning-making between “traditionalist” Islam and “Western” feminism. In the formulation of these discursive debates, Muslim women are often constituted as objectified evidence of who is winning these battles. Moreover, the discursive constructions of Islam and feminism as mutually exclusive categories have often set the transcultural terms of engagement in relation to Islam and gender. Muslim feminists who attempt to penetrate these transcultural terrains of signification and “assert knowledge that is outside the parameters of the dominant discourse” (Mohanty 1991: 39) often feel compelled to enter into the same discourses whose parameters they want to disrupt.

What I have previously outlined, then, is a context “in which feminists in the West tend to assume the historical preeminence of Western women in shaping a feminist agenda, and in which conservatives in Islamic countries claim that feminism is nothing but a Western imposition” (Donandy 2000: 85). It is therefore no surprise that many Arab and Muslim feminists have undertaken to represent themselves transculturally in ways that undo the association of feminism and modernity with Westernization. Their representations have often been addressed both to those within their societies who discursively reproduce the equation of feminism with Westernization, and to Northwestern Euro-American audiences who have inherited the colonialist universalizing knowledge structures that construct Muslim women as victims of fundamentally Islamic patriarchy. Addressing members of their own “social group,” Muslim feminists often
challenge accepted definitions of "traditional" or "indigenous" history (Flint 2003, Abu-Lughod 1998, Sabbagh 1996); many have argued that what has been constructed as a return to tradition, draws on partial, patriarchal histories that leave women entirely out of the picture and thereby refigure them as constitutive outsides. As a result, Muslim feminists simultaneously insist that it is necessary to recognize the construction of gender within discourses of "tradition," and to resist colonization and neocolonialism. For them, feminism is and must be an everyday practice with rich histories within their cultures: it is decidedly not a Western imposition.

In this chapter, I argue that Fatima Mernissi's *Dreams of Trespass* may be read as an autoethnography: a transcultural representation, which engages and disrupts dominant discursive constructions of Islam and feminism as diametrically opposed. Most of this chapter will focus on Mernissi's narrative in *Dreams of Trespass*, and the discourses the text may call into question. In particular, I think Mernissi (re)presents for her reader the multiply-constituted power relations between male-female, colonizer-colonized, public-private, and modern-traditional. Mernissi's text disrupts (a) the assumed direction of the power relations within these binary constructions through their intersection with each other as well as with the age and class position of particular actors; (b) the equation of male/colonizer/public with activity and female/colonized/private with passivity, and its implication that the male/colonizer/public is the domain of total control; and (c) any understanding of narration and language as mere entertainment – indeed, to narrate and to weave alternatives to one's current social position arise as important elements of political struggle (and may even be read as an endorsement of autoethnography).
Mernissi seems to give a great deal of importance to processes of self-representation. In “Muslim Women and Fundamentalism” (written in response to representations of Muslim women as passive objects acted upon by “Muslim fundamentalist” men), Mernissi (1988a: 8) urges readers to be attentive to “the discourses [people] use to articulate their political claims.” Speaking about the neo/postcolonial condition of many Muslim nations, Mernissi stresses the importance of the self-representational practices of subordinate peoples, and argues that these cannot be understood outside of the power relations constituting the subjectivity of the speaker.

Mernissi challenges the imposition of an exclusive discourse defining a singular, monolithic, authentic Islam. She argues that when “Muslim men” speak from an authorized position of authenticity to claim “that they are traditional, and that their women miraculously escape social change and the erosions of time, this has to be understood in terms of their need for self-representation, and must be classified not as statement about daily behavioral practices” (1988a: 8, emphasis in original). Mernissi thus both questions claims to defining an authentic “traditional” Islam, but also places these claims within their contextual (post)colonial power relations in order to clarify their strategic use in resisting colonization. I think that Mernissi’s own self-representations must be read in the same way she asks us to read claims to authenticity: they must be read both within and against their contextual power relations. Within such a reading, Mernissi’s text can be understood as an autoethnographic endeavor, which enters into the ambivalence of constitutive power relations in order to disrupt their foundations.

Mernissi’s books can be understood as autoethnographic for several reasons. First, recall that Pratt specifies that “autoethnographic texts are typically heterogeneous on the
reception end... usually addressed both to metropolitan readers and to literate sectors of the speaker's own group, and bound to be received very differently by each" (1992: 7).

The dual address of autoethnographic texts seems to be an important characteristic; they address several groups of people. Mernissi's *Dreams of Trespass* was first published in English, and was later translated into 24 languages (Huff-Rouselle 2003: ¶ 6). Her initial choice of language suggests, among other things, English-speaking target audiences.

English is a language associated with the British Empire (the most powerful post-Enlightenment Empire, which lasted approximately 300 years), and it has traveled the world through colonial and neocolonial enterprises. The book therefore seems to contain an address to multiple audiences. Although English is often thought of as a Western language (because of its association with England and North America, for example), it is not only the language of the (Western) colonizer: colonization sometimes necessitated the adoption of the colonizers' language. In particular, colonial languages come to be associated with more elite members of the colonized population. Increasing economic globalization, as well as the globalization of mass media, also continue to spread or necessitate the use of English by peoples throughout the world. Mernissi's audience is, therefore, likely to include Moroccans who are literate in English and to exclude Westerners who cannot read English.

Mernissi's interest in speaking to (the broad category of) Westerners is highlighted as she draws attention to Western knowledges about Arab or Muslim populations (i.e. she engages dominant knowledge about subordinate peoples). She does so throughout the book in footnotes which temporarily take the reader out of the narrative story and directly address Western interpretations of the phenomenon, incident, or text
she is discussing. At the same time, however, Mernissi includes italicized segments of text throughout her book. The italicized segments of text speak directly to the women of her harem, rhetoric addressing Yasmina, or Aunt Habiba, for example. They appear to be Mernissi’s innermost thoughts and reflections on the way she will use the intellectual skills her female relatives help her develop (within the domestic harem), in order to fight dominant systems of meaning and power. The text’s narration in English, the footnotes, and the italics imply a multiple address. In particular, Mernissi seems to address her self-representations to members of a transculturally dominant group associated with (post)colonial power relations (Westerners), and to members of her own group (Muslim women who espouse feminist ideals).

Second, Pratt emphasizes autoethnographies as emerging out of contact zones, and therefore created within the confines of unequal power relations. She defines contact zones as “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in *highly asymmetrical* relations of domination and subordination – like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe *today*” (1992: 4, emphasis added). I think that the notion of “disparate cultures” may rely too heavily on some notion of originary differentiation and separation, and implies “first contact” between the colonizer and the colonized as an archetypal condition for the creation of autoethnographic texts. Colonization (indeed, power relations in general), as I have discussed in earlier chapters, involves a continuous renegotiation of difference, and the effects of differential constructions of colonizer/colonized (as powerful civilized authority/powerless primitive) continue to be felt and contested.
Pratt (1994: 27) stresses this point: "under conquest, social and cultural formations enter long-term, often permanent states of crisis that cannot be resolved by either conqueror or conquered. Rather, [social relations and interactions] become the medium in which and out of which" peoples' social positions, collective identities, and senses of self are constructed. Pratt's particular examples of autoethnographic texts tend to focus on "communication under conquest" (Pratt 1992, 1994, 1999). Certainly, there are differences between life under conquest and life after official independence. Nonetheless, the empire's knowledges continue to be dominant in the transcultural setting. Colonialist discourses and knowledges set the terms of signification, and the colonizer's power and its effects do not simply disappear with the official end of the empire. In other words, the power of the colonizers' knowledge structures and significations does not cease when the Empire falls; they continue to be influential, as does their insistent categorical differentiation between colonizer and colonized as belonging to two disparate cultures.

Although autoethnographic texts may intervene in the discursive power of the dominant, they do not necessarily have to be produced under official conquest, but within unequal power relations (i.e. under the continuing conquest of indigenous knowledges). The asymmetry of the relation is what matters, as well as the authorization of dominant knowledges experienced as oppressive (and often reproducing the inequality of the relations). Pratt defines autoethnographic texts in relation to ethnographies. She says, "if ethnographic texts are a means by which Europeans represent to themselves their (usually subjugated) others, autoethnographic texts are those the others construct in response to or in dialogue with those metropolitan representations" (Pratt 1992: 7). This particular
formulation seems to emphasize autoethnographies as responses to and engagements with dominant representations of subordinate peoples. Yet, Pratt (personal communication February 17, 2005) would not limit autoethnographic texts to those which directly respond to an ethnographic canon. Just as the production of ethnography did not cease with official end of colonization, autoethnographic texts continue to be produced. Unlike the territory of the (post)colonial nation, subordinate peoples’ knowledges and subjective agencies continue to be “under conquest.” Autoethnographic representation is one of the sites/resources at which the discursive power relations are negotiated.

*Dreams of Trespass* can certainly be understood as a transculturated enunciation that takes place within unequal power relations. It was not written under the rule of French colonialism, but it was, nevertheless, produced under the discursive pressures-of colonialisations and understandings of Muslim (and Arab) women’s subjectivities and lives. These are the representations that signify Mernissi’s Islamic feminism as a contradiction in terms, and their pressures and effects are experienced in her everyday life. Even the knowledge that Mernissi’s editor is actually a Parisian woman has important implications for the production of her text under asymmetrical power relations. Mernissi is a Moroccan Muslim woman with a Parisian publisher (to whom we are introduced in the second text). Her writing must pass through, and be approved/authorized by this editor, who is her transcultural, (post)colonial dominant. Christiane is French; she inherits the privilege associated with the position of the colonizer (and constructed through colonial power relations and discourses). The same discourses which locate Christiane’s power also construct Mernissi’s social location/categorization. Being an Islamic feminist, Mernissi is doubly excluded (as an
oxymoronic contradiction) from dominant constructions of feminism (as Western) and Islam (as masculinist). Transculturally, her position is that of a subordinate, but her privileged class position, and the fact that she is a well-established academic, provide her with other entry points and voices from which to speak authoritatively. In her representation of Muslim Moroccan women to a Western audience (and possibly to Muslim men) Mernissi creates a self-representation within unequal relations of power. When the notion of “disparate cultures” is deemphasized, and autoethnographic communication is understood as subordinate peoples’ self-representations, not so much “under conquest,” as under discursive (and material) constraints on subjective agency, it becomes possible to understand current texts, produced after the fact of official decolonization, as autoethnographic expressions.

Third, autoethnographic texts may be read as interventions in the discursive constitution of (post)colonial power relations. Pratt argues that they both accommodate and resist these power relations. Because of their first two characteristics (i.e. their being accessible to readers who are the dominants of the author’s discursively constituted group, and their production within unequal power relations), the possibilities and limits of autoethnographic communication are confined by power relations. Yet, these relations are also the very sites of production of autoethnographic texts, the knowledges they disrupt, and the hybrid subjectivities they represent. These relations of power, therefore, seem to produce both the constraints and the possibilities of autoethnography. By strategically using the ambivalence of their constitutive power relations (discussed in Chapter Three), autoethnographies may penetrate, disrupt, and threaten colonizing discourses, while remaining within the realm of what is permissible. The strategy of autoethnography is to
accommodate dominant discourses even as it resists them: accommodative resistance takes the form of engagement with dominant representations (in order finally to challenge the knowledges that result in/from them). Autoethnographic texts present their dominant with something the dominant recognizes, but they complicate and call into question the recognizable image they present.

For those writing from subordinate positions, actively engaging dominant discourses provides routes into transcultural arenas of representation. Strategic association with these discourses authorizes potentially disruptive speech. I began by arguing that since dominant structures of knowledge define the parameters of acceptable speech, subordinate peoples are compelled to enter into or to perform these knowledges to gain legitimacy. I now want to suggest that in and through autoethnography we see the obligatory engagement with dominant discourses and terrains of signification reproduced/recreated as challenges to these same discursive parameters. Mernissi’s Dreams of Trespass includes multiple examples of such disruptions.

Mernissi accommodates dominant knowledges and readers by presenting them with several recognizable elements in her text. The book is constructed as a memoir, and on a surface level, it is a narration of Mernissi’s childhood within a domestic harem.34 The plot includes domestic struggles between in-laws, the teaching of beauty routines, the children’s learning codes of conduct, their games. The text may generally be read as a coming-of-age narrative, with a special focus on the recognition of the role of gender in

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34 Dreams of Trespass is Mernissi’s best-selling book (Huff-Rouselle 2003: ¶ 6). Interestingly, Mernissi “would describe [the book] … as a work of fiction. Publishers promote [it] as a memoir, but the book… is a necklace of fairytale vignettes” (¶ 6). There are several interesting implications to the promotion of a fictional book of fairytale, with lessons the author intends to impart, as a memoir. Especially important are the implications for receptions of the book, to which I will return in Chapter Six.
social organization and interaction as one comes of age (recognizable tropes, often found in "Western" novels, movies, etc.).

Yet Mernissi and her cousin Samir are fashioned as explorers or anthropologists who overcome dangerous obstacles and travel to distant and dangerous places in their search for the meaning of Moroccans' "Islamic" practice of female seclusion in "the harem." An excellent portrayal of the children as explorers in search of knowledge-expanding discoveries occurs when Mernissi narrates their first expedition to the uppermost (forbidden) terrace of their home. Fatima and Samir must gather several items and use them to construct a make-shift ladder, and they learn how to do so by closely observing Aunt Habiba (one of the "natives" of the harem) perform the ritual several times. Access to this terrace is forbidden to children because of its height and lack of a railing or outer wall to prevent falling over the edge. Mernissi is extremely nervous both to climb up to this terrace and to gather atop it, but she and Samir (and in this instance their cousin Malika, who knows how to reach the top terrace) use it as a place for collecting their data (or constructing their fieldnotes), which they gather in conversations with adults (who may be understood as the "natives" or "locals" whose culture is the object of ethnographic study), and through careful observation. In this case, readers are presented with an image of two nine-year-old children, "playing" at anthropology.

The image is certainly a recognizable one, and the engagement of children in the activity may seem endearing or cute. Indeed, as one reviewer notes, "the child's vantage point makes for delightful reading, although the underlying narrative perspective is hardly that of a child" (Booth 1995: 419). While the children's playing at exploration is often endearing, it may also be read as a parodic imitation. At times, Mernissi's narrative
tone may credibly be read as parodic as she repeatedly speaks of “the Christians,” but one can never be entirely sure if Mernissi is intentionally imitative, if she intentionally “uses the conqueror’s language [and mode of authoritative representation of “cultural practices”] to construct a parodic, oppositional representation of the conqueror’s own speech” (Pratt 1994: 29). The ambiguity of the parody is what makes it a safe form of accommodative resistance which may circumvent dominant audiences’ refusal to gaze back at themselves through the texts. In other words, the ambiguity of the parody, for example, may make the text feel safe for readers whose knowledge it seeks to disrupt.

Nevertheless, the ambiguity of the text’s parody (one of its elements of accommodative resistance), also leaves room for audiences’ failure to recognize her resistance, to read her text as “authentically Native” speech, or to receive her as a “Native informant” (Butz and MacDonald 2001). I will discuss the dangers associated with accommodation in the next chapter. For the remainder of this chapter, I want to read Dreams of Trespass specifically for its disruptive potentials.

One gets a sense throughout the book that Mernissi’s focus is on perceived power relations and struggles in the Muslim world. Mernissi engages with “Arabic customs, French colonialism, the Moroccan patriarchy, and an increasingly powerful U.S. imperialism [which] worked together (and against one another)” (Flint 2003: 359). The stories she relates contest dominant representations of Muslim women, and in turning to Mernissi’s work, it is increasingly evident that both “the doer and the deed” (Butler 1990) create each other in images that do not conform to expectations of the “known” passive, primitive, silenced Muslim woman.

Mernissi (1994: 1) opens her narrative with the following passage:
I was born in a harem in 1940 in Fez, a ninth-century Moroccan city some five thousand kilometers west of Mecca, and one thousand kilometers south of Madrid, one of the dangerous capitals of the Christians. The problem with the Christians start, said father, as with women, when the hudud, or sacred frontier, is not respected. I was born in the midst of chaos since neither Christians nor women accepted the frontiers. Right on our threshold, you could see the women of the harem contesting and fighting with Ahmed the doorkeeper as foreign armies from the North kept arriving all over the city.

Memissi thus immediately locates herself in relation to Islam – “five thousand kilometers west of Mecca” – and in relation to European colonialism. (I think her use of “the Christians” may perhaps be understood as a parodic appropriation of the use of Islam as a catch-all phrase in Orientalist representations). In so doing, she draws on the dominant distinction between East and West, as she does throughout her text. Yet while Memissi places herself firmly between these two areas, she locates herself not East of the Christians, but to the South of them, and thus disrupts the simple East/West divide: she is between the East and the North, and as she tells us, “trouble and wind came from the North and we turned to the East to pray” (2). According to Memissi’s father, however, trouble does not come only from the North – in the form of colonization – but also from within – in the form of women’s rebelliousness. Thus, Memissi opens her narrative by drawing attention to colonialism and feminism, which in her formulation, cannot be collapsed into a single category.

What is also interesting in this passage is Memissi’s reference to the frontier, which her father represents as sacred, but which emerges as something quite different in her text. She tells us, for example, that in ‘Arbaoua, “an arbitrary spot, ... [the French and Spanish colonizers] had built a huge gate and said that it was a frontier... In the landscape itself, nothing changes. The frontier is in the mind of the powerful” (2-3, emphasis added). In speaking about her education, she further tells us that “the hudud
[frontier] was whatever the teacher forbade,” and she goes on to explain that “looking for the frontier has become my life’s occupation. Anxiety eats at me whenever I cannot situate the geometric line organizing my powerlessness” (3). Frontiers thus become neither sacred lines nor lines of expansion. Rather, throughout Mernissi’s text, the arbitrariness of frontiers and their relation to power struggles between adults and children, colonizer and colonized, or women and men, for example, is highlighted. In other words, frontiers become arbitrary borders of ex/inclusion defined by those in relations of power, and they are always sites of contestation and negotiation.

Mernissi’s representation of frontiers as sites of negotiation draws attention to their construction through social processes and interactions. Indeed, even her father’s discussion of the hudud in reference to the dangers of the activities of the Colonial armies – crossing it to get in – and to those of Moroccan women – crossing it to get out – reflects the relational character of frontiers as well as the interdependence of how one perceives them and one’s location in relation to them. The point is, however, that there is activity on both sides of the frontier, and that one’s position shifts according to the particular frontier in question. Thus, “even Uncle ‘Ali and Father, who were so powerful in the city and ordered around everyone in the house, had to ask permission from Madrid to attend Moulay Abdesslam’s religious festival near Tangier, three hundred kilometers away” (2). Mernissi’s surprise that her father and uncle have to get permission to do something points to the complications involved when different relations intersect. Her father and uncle are important men in the city due to their class position, they can order everyone around in the harem – although their mother is clearly excluded here – because of their gender and age, but because of colonial relations they must get permission from the
Spanish to cross into Tangier. Throughout Mernissi’s narrative there are several instances where the assumed power position of particular characters in relation to one another and the attitudes presumed to be associated with that position are disrupted. These disruptions are especially evident in Mernissi’s search for what the term “harem” signifies, which propels the narrative in many ways (sometimes seeming to confirm dominant images of Muslim patriarchy, and at others seeming to call these images into question).

It may be pertinent to point out here that while Mernissi, as child-narrator, searches for the meaning of a harem, Mernissi as author/sociologist enters the discussion in a footnote “to introduce a distinction between two kinds of harems: the first we will call imperial harems, and the second, domestic harems” (34). The footnote goes on to tell us that the imperial harem was part of “the territorial conquests and accumulation of wealth of the Muslim imperial dynasties,” and that the last of these – an Ottoman one – ended in 1909 when the last sultan, Abdelhamid II, “was deposed by western powers” (34). Mernissi (34, emphasis added) defines domestic harems, “which continued to exist after 1909” as “extended families, like the one described in this book, with no slaves and no eunuchs, and often with monogamous couples, but who carried the tradition of women’s seclusion” (34). She thereby makes a clear point of distinguishing between her childhood home and “the Ottoman imperial harem that has fascinated the West almost to the point of obsession… [and] which inspired hundreds of orientalist paintings of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries such as Ingres’s famous ‘Bain Turc’ [Turkish Baths]” (34). The footnote further includes a discussion of the sexualization of the term “harem” within these Orientalist images, and contrasts them pointedly to the reality of domestic harems, which “are rather dull, for they have a strong bourgeois
dimension... with hardly any erotic dimension to speak of” (35). According to Memissi, “what defines it as a harem is ... the men’s desire to seclude their wives, and their wish to maintain an extended household rather than break into nuclear units” (35). So, the harem of which she speaks is comprised of an extended family made up of several brothers and their families.

Memissi (39) informs her reader that “‘what exactly is a harem?’ was not the kind of question grownups volunteered to answer. Yet they were always insisting that we children use precise words... But, given the choice,” she tells us, “I would have used different words for Yasmina’s harem and our own, so different were they” (39). Yasmina is Memissi’s maternal grandmother, who resides in a rural harem, a farm without the walls and gate enclosing the one in which Memissi resides. Moreover, Yasmina’s harem is a polygamous one, and Yasmina has several co-wives, while Memissi’s father and uncle, who support the nationalists’ ideal of monogamy, each have one wife. To complicate matters further for the young Memissi, “Yasmina and her co-wives rode horses, swam in the river, caught fish, and cooked it over open fires” (39), without needing to ask permission from anyone. Her mother, on the other hand, “could not even step out of the gate without asking multiple permissions... and always had to be accompanied by other women of the household, and by one of my younger male cousins. So it did not make sense to me to use the same word for both” (39) of these harems.

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35 In this instance, what we see is the intersection of power relations based on age and gender. While, in Memissi’s city harem, the women have to rely on the younger males when they leave the space of the harem, the young men have to accompany the women. The women’s requiring male accompaniment stresses the gender dynamic of the requirement, the young men’s having to comply with the accompaniment (once permission from the older males was granted to the women) stresses the age dynamic, with the young having to respect and obey those who are older than them.
Mernissi and Samir\textsuperscript{36} begin to hold sessions during which they attempt to determine the meaning of the word “harem.” In one such session they conclude, if words in general were dangerous, then ‘harem’ in particular was explosive. Anytime someone wanted to start a war in the courtyard, all she had to do was prepare some tea, invite a few people to sit down, throw out the word ‘harem,’ and wait for half an hour or so. Then poised, elegant, ladies, dressed in lovely embroidered silk caftans and pearl-studded slippers, suddenly would turn into shrieking furies. Samir and I therefore decided that, as children, it was our duty to protect the adults. We would handle the word ‘harem’ with parsimony, and gather our information through discretion and observation only. (40)

Mernissi tells us that within her harem the women were divided into two camps on the harem question: pro-harem and anti-harem. The pro-harem camp is composed of Samir’s mother, Lalla Radia, and Fatima’s paternal grandmother, Lalla Mani. Fatima’s mom, her cousin Chama (Samir’s sister), and Aunt Habiba make up the other camp. The division between the women is quite interesting; Lalla Mani is the oldest woman in the harem, and therefore the person with the most authority among the women, and she is followed immediately in age and status by Lalla Radia. In a sense, then, their position of power in relation to the rest of the women is guaranteed by the familial institution of the harem. Another reading may also suggest that, as older women, they fall in line with more “traditional” modes of thought. Yet, Yasmina (Fatima’s maternal grandmother) is also one of the older characters in the book, and she leads a life which is clearly a lot less restricted – in terms her movements and activities – than the women of the Mernissi household. Indeed, although “there were no limits to what women could do on the farm” (55), Yasmina (who is also illiterate, but full of Koranic knowledge and narratives of the lives of important Islamic figures) is vociferous in her objections to the harem, therefore

\textsuperscript{36} Samir is the same age as Mernissi and her constant companion throughout most of the book. Towards the end of the narrative, as they get older, Fatima and Samir decide to part ways. What is clear in their final dispute is that while gender does not matter when they are young, it becomes an issue with age, because Fatima must “choose between play and beauty” (220). Declaring that “skin is political” and that “it is a woman’s fate to be beautiful,” the nine-year-old Fatima parts ways with her playmate.
complicating any straightforward correlation between one’s age and one’s stance on the harem question. Again, read autoethnographically, the narrative poses challenges to dominant understandings which sometimes posit straightforward associations between social location and stance on “the harem question.”

Yasmina, however, is not the only character with a complicated relation to the harem question. Aunt Habiba, who falls into the anti-harem camp, but who must be much less vocal about her stance than either Chama or Mernissi’s mother, is a divorced female relative. It is her status as a divorced woman that contributes to her paradoxical relationship with the harem. According to Mernissi (1994: 18), female relatives often came to the harem with their children to seek refuge on our top floors for a few weeks when they got into fights with their husbands. Some would come to stay with their children for a short time only, just to show their husbands that they had another place to stay, that they could survive on their own and were not desperately dependent. (This strategy was often successful and they would return home in stronger bargaining positions.) But other relatives came to stay for good, after divorce or some other serious problem.

When understood as a place of female seclusion, the harem constitutes a frontier which encloses these women within its borders, but also offers them refuge, a safe space to which they always know they may turn in times of trouble. In the above description, it is clear that the harem, the very structure against which many of the women are fighting, is also held in high regard by some of them as a place from which they may wage their wars, gain authority, and resist their positions within power relations. Mernissi emphasizes throughout her text that one’s relation to the harem cannot be simply
predicted on the basis of gender — with women against the institution and men for it\textsuperscript{37} — but is rather complicated by several factors.

Mernissi offers several different answers to “the harem question” in the form of conversations with “grownups” and observations of social relations. When the text is read as a parody on ethnography, these may be understood as her field notes or her conversations with “locals.” Questioning the meanings/significations of a harem is clearly a major preoccupation of Mernissi as narrator-child, and she uses the notion of the harem as borders that delineate people’s positions and relations of power to suggest that a harem is not necessarily, and not only, a physical space that encloses people.

Mernissi is quite confused by Yasmina’s harem on the farm, because “to be in a harem, [she] thought, you needed a barrier, a frontier” (60). In the conversation that unfolds between Fatima and Yasmina, several interesting meanings are added to the word. When Mernissi asks her grandmother which is the right interpretation of harem, Yasmina said that I needed to relax about this right-and-wrong business. She said there were things which could be both, and things which could be neither. ‘Words are like onions,’ she said. ‘The more skin you peel off, the more meanings you encounter. And when you start discovering multiplicities of meanings, then right and wrong becomes irrelevant. All these questions about harems... are fine and good, but there will always be more to be discovered.’ And then she added, ‘I am going to peel one more skin for you now. But remember, it is only one among others.’ (61)

Yasmina then informs the young Mernissi that the word “harem” originates from haram, the forbidden. She tells her that it is “the place where a man sheltered his family, his wife or wives, and children and relatives. It could be a house or a tent, and it referred both to the space and to the people living within it” (61). Yasmina also says that other men cannot enter the harem without the permission of the owner, and inside of someone else’s

\textsuperscript{37} Mernissi tells the reader that other than her father and Uncle Ali, all of her uncles had, in fact, split off from the harem and each was living in nuclear family units with his wife and children.
harem, they had to obey his rules: the harem codifies conduct and relations, regardless of one’s gender – although it clearly works differently in the case of men and women.

Although Mernissi’s grandmother tells her that “a harem is about private space and the rules regulating it,” (i.e. of who or what is forbidden) she goes on to say that “it did not need walls. Once you knew what was forbidden, you carried the harem within. You had it in your head” (61). Thus, it seems that the harem is about codes of conduct one is expected to embody. Moreover, through Mernissi’s mother’s constant vocalizations of her desire for privacy within their harem, where she claims she never has any privacy, the division between private and public space is also complicated, and appears not to be as simple as one may presume.

Further deconstructing the notion of a harem, Yasmina goes on to explain that although there are no physical, or material borders around her farm, the space of the harem is constructed and defined by socially shared meanings and understandings which create and recognize apparently invisible borders. Yasmina also tells Mernissi that these borders are recognized by other people in the area. If, for example, she were to go out riding a horse or walking unveiled, and to stumble across a man who was not a relative, the man would be expected to avert his eyes or to cover his face as a declaration of his recognition of the invisible frontier.38

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38 Yasmina adds yet another complication to these multiple definitions of a harem when she tells the young Fatima that “both men and women worked from dawn until very late at night. But men made money and women did not. That was one of the invisible rules. And when a woman worked hard and was not making money, she was stuck in a harem, even though she could not see its walls” (63). In this way, Yasmina equates women’s reproduction of labour, and patriarchal notions about “women’s work” – i.e. domestic labour – as a labour of love, and their resulting constructions of gender, with the physical seclusion of women in harems—usually a middle/upper-class practice. As far as Yasmina is concerned, it appears that any rules governing conduct which are imposed upon a person are oppressive structures, regardless of whether or not they are visually represented by physical structures.
There are several passages in the book where Mernissi further complicates the meaning of the word harem. These passages also disrupt the possibility of straightforward understandings and closure on the meanings of power relations, fear, and desire. For example, in discussing the "Ville Nouvelle," the living quarters of the French colonizers in Morocco, Mernissi (23) insists that the French were afraid of the Moroccan cities, with their "serpentine streets," which defy the colonizer’s aesthetic order (i.e. codifications of order in architectural designs composed of wide streets, with regulated grids (Scott 1998)).

Mernissi (1994: 23) informs the reader that the French were always in their cars. Even the soldiers would stay in their cars when things got bad. Their fear was quite amazing to us children, because we saw that grownups could be afraid too. And these grownups who were afraid were on the outside, supposedly free. The powerful ones who had created the frontier were also the fearful ones. The Ville Nouvelle was like their harem; just like women, they could not walk freely in the Medina. So you could be powerful and still be a prisoner of a frontier. Nonetheless, the French soldiers, who often looked so young, afraid, and lonely at their posts, terrorized the entire Medina. They had power and could hurt us.

Mernissi goes on to suggest that due to their fear the French had not only created a harem which imprisoned them, but they had also created a harem which contained Moroccan men, who had to ask permission of the French colonizers in order to congregate in certain mosques, or to carry their hunting rifles.

Mernissi also makes it clear that the harem often reflects class relations. In one of the many altercations between the pro- and anti-harem camps in the Mernissi household, Lalla Radia explains that women who were “taken care of” by their men folk had the

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39 Mernissi says, “their [the French’s] streets were large and straight, and lit by bright lights in the night... Our Medina streets were narrow, dark, and serpentine – filled with so many twists and turns that cars could not enter, and foreigners could not find their way out if they ever dared to come in. This was the real reason the French had to build a new city for themselves: they were afraid to live in ours” (23). The designs of the wide, large, straight streets, which form regular, repetitive, and predictable grids reflect an attempt to create and visibly codify the (desired) imposition of colonialist order. James Scott (1998) would explain the colonizer’s enforced street designs as a visual codification of order: their designs represent visually, they literally display for all to see, the highly prized “order” of their streets, understood by the colonizer as reflecting their superior rationality and reason.
luxury of remaining in the harem: “it was only poor women like Luza, the wife of Ahmad the doorkeeper, who needed to go outside, to work and feed themselves. Privileged women were spared the trauma” (46). According to Lalla Radia, “harems were wonderful things. All respectable men provided for their womenfolk, so that they did not have to go out into the dangerous, unsafe streets. They gave them lovely palaces with marble floors and fountains, good food, nice clothes, and jewelry” (46). Luza is conspicuously absent from the book: she is referred to twice, and in both instances, it is to say that she works outside the harem. In one reference to Luza, we are told that her husband, whose movements are restricted by his job since he must remain at the gate, has the children on his lap while she is out. In this instance, the role of child carer, usually understood as woman’s work, is undertaken by Ahmed (20). The class position of Ahmed and Luza clearly disrupts normative gender roles: he plays child carer simultaneously to performing his paid work, while she plays paid labourer and leaves the child care to him.

Throughout the book, Mernissi resignifies the term *harem*, and also uses these discussions to complicate dominant images of identity categories based on gender, class, race/ethnicity/nationality, geographical locality, and age through intersecting these with one another. The term harem emerges to signify a complex system of meanings: the harem represents borders, frontiers, and power relations. It represents prescriptions about appropriate behaviour, about who belongs, and who is a stranger, it marks out social groups based on gender, marital status, class, or colonial relations. At the same time, however, it does none of these things in a simple manner. *Every person* in Mernissi’s narrative is, at one point or another, a prisoner of a harem, and every person also emerges as dictating frontiers that create a harem for someone else. The women of Mernissi’s
harem, with their constant wars against one another, and against the men, clearly dispute the image of the passive Muslim woman whose experiences are confined to being the objects Islamic oppression – at the hands of backward Muslim men. Indeed, Mernissi tells us that the women “identified strongly with [birds,] those fragile yet adventurous creatures undertaking dangerous trips to strange islands” (208).

The women tend to call on Islam to resist what they perceive as unfair practices, and the young Mernissi is often told by her female relatives never to accept inequality because “Allah made us all equal.” For example, in recounting her mother’s narration of the day Fatima and Samir were born, Mernissi tells us that “he came first... the seventh child of his mother” (9). When Mernissi was born an hour after Samir, her mother, despite her exhaustion, “insisted that my aunts and relatives hold the same celebration rituals for me as for Samir. She had always rejected male superiority as nonsense and totally anti-Muslim – ‘Allah made us all equal,’ she would say” (9). Mernissi’s mother tells her that “the house... vibrated for a second time that afternoon... and the neighbors got confused and thought that two baby boys had been born” (9). Mernissi also reveals that her father had been thrilled and “he immediately decided I was going to be a great beauty” (9). Indeed, Mernissi’s mother is not the only person to call on Islamic tradition in order to refute any perceived inequality between men and women; Chama, Aunt Habiba, and Yasmina also frequently recite that “Allah made us all equal.”

Moreover, when Mernissi speaks of feminism coming into Morocco, she does not refer to Western feminists. Instead, she tells us that “Moroccan women, thirsty for liberation and change, had to export their feminism from the East, for there were no local ones as yet famous enough to become public figures and nurture their dreams” (128).
find this passage, and Mernissi’s subsequent discussion of feminism, especially interesting for two reasons. First, we are told that feminism entered Morocco from the East – more specifically, from Egypt and Turkey. In this way, feminist ideals are “nurtured” by Arab and Muslim women, and Western-European feminists are left entirely out of her conversation. The second interesting point is that Mernissi does not dismiss the existence of Moroccan feminists. Instead, she tells us that none who were famous enough existed as of yet, thereby leaving room for the possibility of there being some at that time who were not yet public figures.

One figure who is referred to throughout the text as nurturing feminist ideals is Scheherazade, the narrator of the One Thousand and One Nights. We are introduced to Scheherazade at the end of the first chapter of Mernissi’s book. Mernissi’s mother, concerned that Fatima “would grow up to be an obsequious woman,” often tells her that she has to “learn to scream and protest, just the way you learned to walk and talk” (9). Her mother also tells her, however, that she needs to be careful with how she uses words, that she needs to think about her choice of words before speaking “because once your words are out, you might lose a lot” (10). Mernissi is further taught that “words could save the person who knew how to string them artfully together. That is what happened to Scheherazade… The king was about to chop off her head, but she was able to stop him… just by using words” (10).

The second chapter of the book, “Scheherazade, the King, and the Words,” begins with the story of Scheherazade as told by Mernissi’s mother. King Schahriar, upon finding out that his wife had betrayed him (i.e. had been sexually involved with another man) becomes enraged against all women. The king begins to marry a young virgin every
evening and to have her executed at dawn. Scheherazade, who is in fact the daughter of the vizier, insists on marrying the king, despite her father’s protests, because she is sure that she will be able to stop his war against women. She is certain “that she had exceptional power and could stop the killing. She would cure the King’s troubled soul ... She would help him see his prison, his obsessive hatred for women” (15). Even in this introduction, when we see Scheherazade convincing her father of her exceptional power; we immediately see her insisting on her agency and taking control of her life.

Memissi (15) includes a particularly interesting footnote here:

I was amazed to realize that for many Westerners, Scheherazade was considered a lovely but simple-minded entertainer, someone who narrates innocuous tales and dresses fabulously. In our part of the world, Scheherazade is perceived as a courageous heroine and is one of our rare female mythical figures. Scheherazade is a strategist and a powerful thinker, who uses her psychological knowledge of human beings to get them to walk faster and leap higher. Like Saladin and Sindbad, she makes us bolder and more sure of our selves and of our capacity to transform the world and its peoples.

Scheherazade thus emerges as a powerful figure who knows how to protest, and who further knows how to bring about social change and justice. For one thousand and one nights, Scheherazade tells the king stories, she weaves narratives with important lessons, and every one of those nights, she “cleverly left [the story] hanging at a most suspenseful part, [so] that [the king] could not bear to part with her at dawn” (15). Memissi tells us that this was almost three years of narration – of negotiating with the king (the ultimate sovereign, the ultimate power in the kingdom) – “until the king... renounced his terrible habit of chopping off women’s heads” (16). Scheherazade is thus able to end an urgent oppressive condition faced by the women in the kingdom. After telling her this story, Memissi’s mother warns her that “all [she] needed to know for the moment was that [her] chances of happiness would depend upon how skillful [she] became with words” (16).
...
Ultimately, the lesson is that women can change the conditions of their lives, that even when the king condemns women to certain death, there is always a way to resist the sentence, and to reverse and change oppressive power relations.

Mernissi’s focus on Scheherazade’s lesson of the possibility of narrating alternatives to one’s current social position by (re)presenting one’s social group to one’s dominant, may be read as an argument for the strategies of autoethnography. King Schahriar is clearly dominant in the situation; he is in fact the ultimate power, the sovereign. He takes the betrayal by his wife as representative of women in general, and his rule is based on an understanding of women inspired by this single experience and representation. Scheherazade has access to this knowledge and she is able to use it over the course of one thousand and one nights in order to resist not only her own death, but the King’s pronouncement against women in general. She is able to enter into and disrupt her dominant’s understanding of her social group (women).

The portrayal of Scheherazade as a role model and figure after whom Mernissi models herself (and is taught to model herself), presents lessons in the impossibility of totalizing power, and in the importance of autoethnographic resistance. This lesson is coupled with another one, as “Scheherazade’s women of A Thousand and One Nights … always succeeded in getting themselves out of trouble. They did not try to convince society to free them – they went ahead and freed themselves” (133). Again, there is an important lesson that emerges here: there are several different ways of changing the world, “but when your situation is hopeless, all you can do is turn the world upside down, transform it according to your wishes, and create it anew” (134). Thus, Mernissi is basically taught by her mother that women should never accept oppressive conditions,
and that they can produce change in the world either through bold actions like the heroines Scheherazade’s tales, or through narration, like Scheherazade herself.

Indeed, narration is represented as an important weapon in fighting oppression, a key instrument of social change, and an important site of political contestation. Aunt Habiba, despite her low status within the harem, is portrayed as an expert story teller who “knew how to talk into the night... Her tales made [Mernissi] long to become an adult and an expert storyteller” (19). We are told that everyone longed to hear Aunt Habiba’s stories, which she narrated on the terrace, away from the gaze of those who had authority in the harem. In fact, she was “so apparently quiescent to the demands of a tough outside world, and yet, she still managed to hang on to her wings. She reassured me about the future: a woman could be totally powerless, and still give meaning to her life by dreaming about flight” (154). Aunt Habiba relies on the harem as an institution which protects her, and gives her a place to stay after her divorce. Consequently, she cannot voice her dissent publicly, under the gaze of authority.

Although Aunt Habiba seems quiescent, outside of the realm inhabited by authority she not only voices her dissent, but also teaches dissent, resistance, and alternative histories, and the children often turn to her with their dilemmas. When Samir and Fatima come to her with their questions about harems, Aunt Habiba encourages their inquiries, and provides them with some important information: “Aunt Habiba ... said something about time and space, about how harems change from one part of the world to another, and from one century to another” (154). She further informs them that

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40 Aunt Habiba’s situation is also compounded by her class position. Unlike Luza, who can go outside and find work, and would likely not be entirely destitute if she were to lose her husband, Aunt Habiba cannot do this. Her class position in fact makes her more dependent on the generosity of her male relatives, who take her into their homes and provide for her.
the harem kept by the Abbasid Caliph Harun al-Rachid in ninth-century Baghdad had nothing to do with our own. His jaryas, or slave girls, were very educated women, swallowing history and religious books as fast as they could... Men of that time did not appreciate illiterate, uneducated women ... However, Aunt Habiba added, the Abbasid caliphs lived a long time ago. Now, our harems were filled with illiterate women, which only went to show how far we had strayed from tradition. And as for power and might, the Arab leaders were no longer conquerors, crushed by the colonial armies. Back when the jaryas were super-educated, the Arab men had been on top of the world. Now, both the men and the women were at the bottom. (154-155)

Aunt Habiba thus suggests that the current conditions under which the women of the Memissi household live represent a straying from tradition, which according to her, places a strong emphasis on powerful women whose intelligence and education matched that of men. Moreover, she links colonial rule with the oppressive conditions faced by women. According to Aunt Habiba, when Arab women were powerful, so too were Arab men; it is only as the harem begins to emerge as a prison for women that the Arab leaders lose their own transcultural power.

Given her status within the harem, Aunt Habiba is unable to declare this knowledge publicly. Yet, she constantly narrates tales of resistance and imparts lessons such as the one quoted above to Fatima and Samir. Her narration of tales of women's liberation, and her secret plots with Fatima's mother and Chama to "induce everyone in the courtyard to grow wings" (204), are surely signs of her subjective agency, resistance, social influence on the children (both male and female), and subversive narration of alternatives to the dominant discourses that surround her.

I hope that several things have become apparent in the above discussion. First, Memissi presents her readers with a redefinition of the harem: the term comes to mean many things throughout the text, and these significations differ drastically from the dominant transcultural discourses of harems outlined in the previous chapter. Second,
Mernissi disrupts identity categories and the subject positions associated with these by overlapping them, and thus drawing attention to the complexity and multiplicity of possible interactions between these. Finally, Mernissi gives a great deal of importance to narration, to the ability to narrate alternative conditions to those experienced as oppressive, and to narrate possible futures.

In the next chapter, I turn to the importance of the reception end of autoethnographic endeavors. I will begin with Jolene Armstrong’s (2002) analysis of Dreams of Trespass in her article, “The Harem, the Veil, and the Beauty Myth.” Armstrong reads the text through dominant understandings of the harem and the victimization and control of Muslim women by Muslim men. In so doing, she safely reconstructs Mernissi’s text within the limits and boundaries imposed by the very discourses Mernissi’s narrative seems to undo. For example, although she tells her readers that Mernissi is specifically speaking about a domestic harem in her text, and that Mernissi differentiates between this harem and the Imperial Harem (which has been the object of so much fascination), Armstrong leaves out Mernissi’s definition(s) of the harem, and provides a definition of an Imperial Harem, which she uses in discussing Mernissi’s text. Insisting that there are many similarities between this type of harem and Mernissi’s childhood home, Armstrong (2002: 91) seeks to “demonstrate [the similarities] by designating which of the characters fit into which position” in an imperial harem (i.e. by categorizing the women making up the Mernissi household). Armstrong also emphasizes the beauty routines of Mernissi’s female relatives. Using Naomi Wolf’s The Beauty Myth, Armstrong imposes a North-Western Euro-American lens from the 1990s on Mernissi’s Moroccan 1940s harem. She further argues that these practices stand
in the way of the solidarity of harem women, and cites these routines as the cause of their inability to throw off the yokes of patriarchal oppression and walk out of the harem.

Armstrong’s reading provides some interesting insights, but ultimately falls back on and reproduces inherited dominant discourses structuring rigid knowledge about Islam, in general, and Muslim women in particular. Moreover, it seems in keeping with the readings to which Mernissi responds in her next book, *Scheherazade Goes West*.

In the second half of the chapter, I offer Mernissi’s responses to such readings, as presented in *Scheherazade Goes West*, and argue that analyses such as Armstrong’s dissolve the autoethnographic potential of Mernissi’s texts. Mernissi’s use of such readings as an autoethnographic resource, however, highlights the location of autoethnographic potential in the interaction between author, text, and audience, as well as the position of autoethnographers as readers of dominant discourses. Mernissi’s use of these readings also emphasizes autoethnographers’ use of dominant representations as further sites/resources of potential resistance.
Fifth Intermission:

I am in Lebanon for my cousin’s wedding. As I walk through the streets of Beirut, I find myself near the American University of Beirut. I enter the university bookstore to search for some reading material and find the feminist section of the bookstore. I approach a shelf of books by Arabic women about Arabic women’s lives which are all either written in or translated into English. I buy several of these books, and among them are Dreams of Trespass and Scheherazade Goes West.

I am familiar with Fatima Mernissi’s work, but have only ever read her more straightforwardly academic texts, so I am curious to read these two books.

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When I return to my cousin’s apartment, I open Dreams of Trespass to skim through it and I am immediately enthralled. I find the book compelling and I have a hard time putting it down. There are times when I am a little unsettled by it, but this is mostly due to the memories it brings back of my grandmother telling me stories from the One Thousand and One Nights. I had forgotten this aspect of my childhood, and I am surprised to recognize aspects of myself and my personal history in a book about a domestic harem in Fez, Morocco in the 1940s.

Yet, in Lebanon, I had lived in a small apartment building owned by my paternal grandparents and inhabited mostly by members of my paternal family. Although I had never thought of this as a harem (we had no gates, no gatekeeper, no explicit restrictions on the behaviors or movements of women, no polygamy), I begin to rethink my distance from the harem as an institution as I read the book. We had no gatekeeper, but family gossip had an interesting way of functioning as a gate-keeping practice. Everyone knew how I spent my days: they knew to whom I had spoken, with whom I had played, if I had said something inappropriate. They simply had to look out a window or stand on the balcony to see and hear me. There was no gate, but there was constant familial surveillance.

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Since unveiling, I had tried not to be Arabic or to seem too Muslim both because of the associations people made with these categories, and because I wanted to shake off many of the experiences that had come with being veiled (and identifiably Muslim). I had just wanted to be “normal” (whatever that may be), to stop having to speak for Islam. When I unveiled, I stopped being “representative.” Instead, I became both anomalous and assimilated. Since September of 2001, however, claiming a Muslim or Arabic identity had become important to me; it was something I suddenly needed to do.

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A few days after the attacks on the twin towers, I am on the bus to McMaster University, and a student from my night class and I are sitting together and chatting about banal things. At some point, she asks where my name is from. Her response to my “confession” that I am Arabic almost makes me fall over: “Don’t worry,” she says, “I don’t hold that against you!!!”

I ask her what she means and she replies that she knows I am not “like those terrorists” (although I have not told her I am Muslim). Besides, she tells me, “You are more Canadian than Muslim” (a sharp reminder of the racialization/ethnicization of Islam), “You aren’t dressed like those women from Afghanistan, and you aren’t like those Palestinians!”

There is clear disgust in her voice, and while I cannot bring myself to tell her that my mother is Palestinian, I savor the look of embarrassment on her face when I say that I had once worn a veil. I further savor the confusion that follows the information that I had done so by choice.

This is one of many experiences that make me painfully aware that by hiding being Arabic or Muslim, I have been complicit in misrepresentations of both, in their conflation, and in their homogenization.

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Calling myself Muslim took on a new urgency then: it became a political act which allowed me to unsettle dominant knowledges about Islam held both by “real” Muslims and by “real” Westerners. I continue to claim the identity strategically, waiting for the right moment, waiting to be sure that my self-identifying as a Muslim woman would be a little unnerving, and if only for a brief moment, make someone doubt what that category means to them.

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As I read Mernissi’s books, it seems to me that she is also unsettling what people may think they know about Islam, Muslim women, harems, and feminism. I find that she leads me in a direction I think I recognize, towards something almost stereotypical, but just as I get angry at her collusion with dominant representations, I am thrown off: she changes direction, she presents me with something that contests dominant understandings.

At this point, I have already decided that I would be studying autoethnography for my MA thesis, but have not found a text I want to analyze. The more I read of Mernissi’s books, the more certain I am that they are perfect candidates for my project: both texts seem to be quite strategic in their tone and subject, and they seem to have autoethnographic characteristics. When I return from Lebanon, and reread the books within the context of autoethnography, I find that they make me rethink some of aspects of the way I had understood autoethnography, and I decide to use them as illustrative examples for my project.
Chapter Six
Reading Autoethnographically: Resisting Epistemologies of Received Categories

In the previous chapter, I focused on Mernissi’s Dreams of Trespass and identified the text as exhibiting important autoethnographic characteristics. First, I argued that the text is addressed to multiple audiences (which include members of dominant populations and members of the speaker’s own groups). Yet, because the text is located at the intersection of multiple power relations, and because people do not neatly fit into single, simple categories of identity, it is difficult to point to a particular group as the dominant and another as the subordinate – people are located differently along the dominant-subordinate continuum if we focus on male-female, colonizer-colonized, adult-child, or rural-urban dichotomies. Nevertheless, it is possible to argue that since the text is addressed to “Westerners” and to Muslim, Arab, women, it is addressed to dominant and subordinate groups. Second, I argued that the text is produced and received within a field of unequal power relations, which enable and restrict its resistant potentials. Third, I suggested that Mernissi’s text both engages and resists dominant significations of Muslim/Arabic women, and that it may be read as an instance of accommodative resistance.

I have argued throughout this thesis that dominant practices of meaning-making are never totalizing (although they may seek to be or may represent themselves as such), and that they contain an inherent ambivalence which reflects their inability to gain total control. In Chapter Three, I argued that this ambivalence leaves room for subordinate

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41 Dreams of Trespass was translated into Arabic in 1998 under the title Nissa’ ʿAla Ajnihat al-Hulmt (Women on the Wings of Dreams) (Mernissi 2002). Although the English and French versions of the book would have been accessible to some Arabs (partly due to a long history of colonization which brought these two languages to the middle East and North Africa, and partly due to the continued need for fluency in these languages necessitated by globalization), its translation into Arabic increases such access (particularly to those who cannot afford to learn English or French). The text’s translation into Arabic more strongly implies an Arabic audience.
peoples to enter into the dominant structures of knowledge. I would like to suggest now that because autoethnographers enter into dominant structures of knowledge through this ambivalence (i.e. through their accommodation of dominant discourses about and representations of them), the resistances of autoethnographic texts may remain ambiguous and in danger of being re-accommodated by or reappropriated into dominant knowledges. Like Bhabha’s notions of mimicry and hybridity, autoethnographic texts contain a double-ness, two (and perhaps more) layers of meaning (Gilroy 1993). These may ensure the safety of public resistance, but they also mean that autoethnographies remain ambiguous.

The ambiguity of autoethnographic resistance highlights the importance of reading with an autoethnographic sensibility. In her writing, Mernissi can resist dominant knowledge, provide alternative knowledges, and complicate our signifying practices, but without structures of reception and reading practices that seek to locate these resistances and disrupt inherited colonialist terrains of signification, her texts cannot achieve their autoethnographic potentials. If we are committed to a project of anti-colonialism, then our responsibility as readers is to acknowledge the power relations inherent in our positions as readers. Indeed, autoethnographic tactics need to be read into a text, and those who have inherited colonialist structures of knowledge, and who embrace (post)colonialism’s desire to break down the remnants of colonial power relations, have a responsibility to look for these potentials and to disrupt discourses and significations which privilege inherited, objectifying knowledge. Our reading of the self-representations of subordinate peoples for their disruptions of dominant knowledges, and in ways that undo the remaining colonialist binary division between us and them, can ensure that the
resistant potentials of autoethnographic texts are realized, rather than dissipated. When speaking of autoethnographic endeavors, the interaction between author, text, and audience is thus an important site of analysis, and it is the main focus of this chapter.

I will begin the present chapter with Armstrong’s reading of *Dreams of Trespass* outlined in the previous chapter to argue that her reading demonstrates what Joanne Passaro (1997: 161) calls “epistemologies of received categories of collective identity.” Relying on a presumed essential difference between “us” and “them” and reading for confirmation of inherited dominant knowledge about Islamic gender relations, Armstrong further entrenches and reifies these differences. Evident in such a reading practice is a flawed epistemology which looks only to confirm already accepted ontologies. Armstrong’s approach seems to fit into a circular logic: only those aspects of the text that meet her expectations (based on dominant knowledge), contribute to the knowledge she creates, and she quickly dismisses those which challenge dominant significations.

After discussing Armstrong’s reading of *Dreams of Trespass*, I will analyze *Scheherazade Goes West*. This is a particularly interesting text because throughout it, Mernissi foregrounds the importance of reading practices, the problem of commonly relying on preexisting knowledges and receiving disruptive texts into these knowledge structures, and the possibilities of using such receptions as further tools of autoethnography. She thereby underscores a dialogic process that may be opened up when we are attentive and responsive to our own reading practices.

Jolene Armstrong (2002) begins her article, “The Harem, the Veil, and the Beauty Myth,” with the assertion that Mernissi’s book is a memoir and a “creative ethnography, a catalogue of a particular moment and instance in a culture that is for the most part
inaccessible to anyone outside of the harem” (89, emphasis added). The designation of
the text as a catalogue seems to imply a list of categories, identified and defined by
certain characteristics. Yet, one of the key aspects of Mernissi’s text is its *complication* of
categories. Armstrong also calls the text a creative ethnography, missing the “auto-” or
self-writing aspect of Mernissi’s text, and perhaps missing the parodic mimicry of
ethnography evident in *Dreams of Trespass*. Although Armstrong’s use of the adjective
“creative” suggests a departure from standard ethnographic practices, she seems to
understand the departure as a matter of (mere) creativity, without paying attention to the
effects of such a departure. Yet, Mernissi’s *creativity* is important; her written activity
disrupts and creates alternatives to the structures Armstrong seeks to retain, and creativity
imputes agency to a creator (which Armstrong’s analysis also seems to erase). Because
Mernissi’s resistances are accommodative, however, because of this autoethnographic
characteristic of her text, there is room for ambiguity. The double-ness of meaning in
Mernissi’s text means it can be read on one level as confirmation of, and on another level
as rejection of, dominant knowledge about Muslim Moroccan women residing in harems.
An autoethnographic sensibility is aware of the duality of meaning, and would highlight
the text as a palimpsest (with several layers of meaning written one on top of the other
and traces of previously established meaning seeping through new, competing ones).

Armstrong’s analysis acknowledges some of Mernissi’s main points, but these are
received and appropriated into (inherited) dominant structures of knowledge. First,
Armstrong represents harem women as entirely under the control of men. Second, and
despite acknowledging Mernissi’s definition of a domestic harem, Armstrong provides an
alternative definition (of the Mughal imperial harem) as authoritative, and she places
each of the characters in Mernissi’s book into a character position from *this* harem (thereby providing a catalogue for readers). Third, Armstrong is quick to dismiss (often declaratively) the women’s subversion of power structures and their acts of resistance, therefore recreating them as the passive objects of male domination.

In fact, several times in her article, and despite her depiction of the harem wars, which suggest a multiplicity of opinions within the harem, Armstrong (2002: 90, emphasis added) makes comments such as “the tradition of the veil, *according the Mernissi household*, has something to do with ancestors and tradition. *But in fact* no one really knows why they wear it.” She then turns to French ethnographer, Germaine Tillion (whose work was mostly about Algeria, not Morocco), to provide her reader with the “real” explanation.42 In this move, Armstrong represents Mernissi’s harem as a monolithic entity—“*the* Mernissi household”—and she further dismisses the many discussions of veiling and arguments about it and its origin that Mernissi provides in the text. Mernissi’s characters and their arguments about the practice of veiling are summarized as a singular explanation about “something to do with tradition,” and this explanation is then differentiated from “fact” (no one knows why they wear it). Any explanation provided in Mernissi’s text is dismissed: Mernissi and her female relatives do

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42 Germaine Tillion was an “ethnographer on an international mission to the Aurès region of Algeria from 1934 to 1940, [who] gathered notes to inspire two later works on Maghrebian societies, notably on the condition of women in the Mediterranean world” (Rice 2004: 162). Tillion wrote books which sought to explain the harem and veiling, not as fundamentally Islamic practices, but as patriarchal and economic ones which served to keep a family’s economic capital firmly within the family by preventing women from contact with, and therefore the possibility of marriage with, men from outside the paternal lineage (Armstrong 2002, Rice 2004). In 2004, Tillion argues that there are no essential differences between Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria, which she calls “a Francophone conglomerate” (Rice 2004). Tillion further argues that a “reconciliation has already taken place [between Algeria and France]! In reality, when an Algerian has had enough of Algeria, what does he do? He comes to France. Directly. I have welcomed here waves of Algerians, waves of all colors” (Rice 2004: 170), thereby equating immigration with reconciliation, and dismissing the continuing racism experienced by Algerian immigrants to France. Although Tillion’s work does provide some interesting insights, and she does advance compelling arguments, her work is decidedly Eurocentric, and constitutes Muslim women as objects of patriarchal control, leaving colonialism out of the picture.
not (maybe even cannot) know why they wear the veil because they do not provide the established explanation/knowledge about veiling to which she turns. After dismissing the meanings given to veiling by the women in Mernissi’s text, Armstrong turns to authorized European knowledge, thereby further authorizing and sanctifying Tillion’s knowledge.⁴³

In speaking of Aunt Habiba, Armstrong (2002: 93) tells us that she is “a divorced woman who is given shelter by the harem as an act of generosity as opposed to a familial duty.” In fact, nowhere in the book does Mernissi tell us that Aunt Habiba is a charity case. One may safely assume, given the paternal lineage constructing this domestic harem— at least in Mernissi’s depiction— that Aunt Habiba is in fact Mernissi’s paternal aunt. As such, she is likely to be Uncle ḌAli and Mernissi’s father’s sister, and Lalla Mani’s daughter, relations which would constitute a familial duty. Consequently, while Aunt Habiba is stigmatized by her social status as a divorced woman (although she is the only person to invoke the stigma), Mernissi clearly does not depict her as a charity case. In Mernissi’s narrative, Aunt Habiba is a powerful figure, who constantly teaches and narrates resistance, and whom Mernissi wishes to emulate: she is a role model, not a victim, and she cannot be as readily and easily reduced to that status as she is in Armstrong’s representation of her.

Armstrong (2002: 93) further tells us, in speaking about Aunt Habiba, that “she must stick to her embroidery and story telling.” Although she observes that Aunt Habiba

⁴³ As I have previously mentioned, Mernissi has published several books about the origin and meaning of veiling in Islam. One may therefore expect Armstrong to have turned to Mernissi’s The Veil and the Male Elite, for example, which actually provides some explanations which are similar to Tillion’s. There are multiple texts and explanations of veiling, some of which are written by Muslim women, but Armstrong’s choice of explanation is one that is an established authoritative and authorized voice, and in turning to Tillion, she re-authorizes her explanation.
performs her acts of rebellion through these two art forms, Armstrong (93) represents her stories as "inspir[ing] thoughts of freedom and liberation from the patriarchal tradition that has kept women in bondage." Again, there are major problems with this formulation. First, Armstrong represents "tradition" as patriarchal oppression. Yet, as I stated in Chapter Five, Aunt Habiba actually redefines tradition: to her oppressive institutions and actions stray from Muslim and Arab traditions, inequality (and especially keeping women in bondage) is un-Islamic. Second, Islam emerges in Armstrong’s discussion as "authentically" and fundamentally patriarchal. The same criticism applies to this point as to the previous one: Memissi’s text complicates notions of tradition and patriarchy. Third, Armstrong represents a monolithic category of "Muslim woman." Yet Memissi’s account provides complex portrayals of women’s social positions – with differences, for example, between Luza (the doorkeeper’s wife), Aunt Habiba, Yasmina, and Tammou (one of Yasmina’s cowives who is a female warrior, involved in battles with the French colonizing armies). Memissi also provides several different interpretations of Islamic and Arab traditions, and contestations of any representation of these as monoliths.

The fourth problem I have with Armstrong’s reductive construction of Aunt Habiba as a victim of traditional patriarchy is that Aunt Habiba’s aforementioned “thoughts of freedom and liberation” are directed at teaching feminist versions of history and tradition to both male and female children in the harem. Given Memissi’s representation of Aunt Habiba as a teacher, and her expressed desire to possess Aunt Habiba’s power of narration, one may perhaps argue that Memissi’s narrative is partially the product of Aunt Habiba’s influence on her. Aunt Habiba’s are not simply “thoughts

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44 Recall that when approached about the harem question by the children, Aunt Habiba tells them that the current living conditions of women in their own domestic harem “went to show how far we had strayed from tradition” (Memissi 1994: 154).
of freedom and liberation;” they are narratives that shape Mernissi’s sense of self and
which “enter fully into the constitution of the world” (Gregory 2001: 107).

Armstrong’s participation in the creation of a binary opposition between the
categories of “us” and “not-us” – which takes the “us” as normative and defines
everything else in relation to that normative position – is most evident in her discussion
of the term harem. Telling us that “Mernissi provides her readers with factual information
on the difference between domestic harems and imperial harems as well as anecdotes that
serve to display the vastness of the concept in terms of the rural harem and urban harem”
(Armstrong 2002: 91), Armstrong goes on to provide K.S. Lal’s definition of a harem,
based on the Mughal imperial harem. It is worth reiterating here that Mernissi’s narrative
includes several definitions of as well as the etymology of the term harem, yet nowhere in
her article does Armstrong quote Mernissi’s definition and etymological explanation.
Instead, Armstrong (91, emphasis added) quotes the etymology provided by Lal, and tells
us that “each harem is almost identical to one another, varying only in the number of
women; the internal caste structure remains the same,” thereby erasing the differences
Mernissi highlights. Here is Lal’s definition, as provided by Armstrong (Lal in
Armstrong 2002: 91):

The Mughal harem... was a queer establishment wherein mothers and aunts,
sisters and cousins, wives and concubines, princesses and minor princes, dancing
girls and maids, besides of course the choicest of beauties for the master’s
pleasure all lived under one roof as in a joint family. Each lady had a distinct role
and each was treated with deference, admiration, adoration and strictness as was
her due. At the apex was the queen mother or the mother of the reigning king,
followed by the chief wife and secondary wives. It is these wives and
concubines... and their entourage of servants, slave-girls and entertainers – that
swelled the size of the harem.

Armstrong (91, emphasis added) goes on to admit that Lal is “referring to ... an imperial
harem and a medieval one at that. However,” she continues, “I do not find very many
differences between the *archaic form* and [Mernissi’s] *twentieth century version.*”

Armstrong can only rely on Lal’s definition by squeezing each of the characters in Mernissi’s narrative into one of the positions in the imperial hierarchy, thereby receiving them into pre-conceived categories. Thus, although Armstrong suggests that Mernissi provides a catalogue of characters, it is, in fact, her own analysis which imposes these categorical identities on Mernissi’s characters.

Moreover, Armstrong also dismisses as insignificant the fact that the Mughal empire, while Muslim, is neither Arabic, nor more specifically Moroccan. Along with this, changes across time are also erased so that a medieval empire’s harem is equated with one existing in the 1940s, in a country struggling against European colonial powers and the growing influence of capitalist imperialism. Armstrong therefore implicitly freezes the Muslim in time, and denies her/him the possibility of coevalness (Fabian 1983: 35): a Muslim harem is a Muslim harem, regardless of its location in time and space. One may read into this an Orientalist influence, with a binary distinction between East and West, wherein that which is not-West is placed into a single discursive category of Other, and approached as constituting the monolith of non-Western, non-self, constitutive outside. Basically, despite Mernissi’s careful distinctions between her domestic harem and the imperial one, which she had specifically told her reader are the ones with which Western observers were obsessed, and against which we can presume she is defining her childhood home – all of which are mentioned but not specifically referred to by Armstrong – Armstrong reverts to the image of the harem that had most obsessed Westerners, and forces Mernissi’s narrative into that framework.
Like Armstrong’s analysis, several reviews of Mernissi’s book seem to rely on and to reproduce dominant knowledges, highlighting Gayatri Spivak’s (1999: 308) contention that “the subaltern as female cannot be heard or read.”45 Some of these authors blatantly add or substitute empirical information about Mernissi’s childhood harem which is not in the book, but which is in keeping with dominant representations of harems. As I have already argued, Mernissi’s use of the dominant discourses defining Muslim women within the transcultural arena leaves room for such readings (although the addition or substitution of information is less about there being room for re-appropriation than it may be about assumptions that the Other is already entirely known). As Lila Abu Lughod (2001: 108) warns, Mernissi’s work, “when it moves between her home in the Arab world and the Western context, in which it is so well received, can be troubling” because it plays on dominant “Western” understandings of Islamic gender relations.

Yet this may well be why Mernissi’s work is well received in a Western context; its disruptions are nevertheless accommodative. Her images are recognizable and she provides her reader with a familiar starting point which makes her seem less alien. In speaking of Dreams of Trespass, Abu-Lughod (108) argues that

instead of refusing to reproduce the old Orientalist stereotype of women in harems, [Mernissi] brings to life the world of women and patriarchal authority in the enclosed household of her wealthy Fez family…. Tradition and Modernity. Harems and Freedom. Veiling and Unveiling. These are the familiar terms by which the East has long been apprehended (and devalued) and the West has

45 Like Bhubanasiwari Bhaduri, whose life and death Spivak (1988, 1999) analyzes, Mernissi is “not a ‘true’ subaltern. She was a woman of middle class, with access, however clandestine to the bourgeois movement for Independence…. [Nevertheless,] woman’s interception of the claim to subalternity can be staked out across strict lines of definition by virtue of their muting by heterogeneous circumstances” (1999: 308). The point is that these postcolonial women (Bhaduri and Mernissi) are muted by the power relations constituting their subject positions. While they may have access to some discourses, and may speak in one way or another, they are also muted. Bhaduri’s attempt to “’speak’ by turning her body into a text of woman/writing” (308) is muted “by her own more emancipated granddaughters: a new mainstream” (309), while Mernissi’s speech is, in some instances, muted by reception of her text in ways that assimilate it into dominant knowledges, and use it as evidence for or an “incidental instrument” (Spivak 1999: 308) of (neo)colonialist knowledge.
constructed itself as superior. These are some of what Said calls the dogmas of Orientalism.

Despite Memissi’s “sophistication, creativity, and political courage,” and her ability to “[conjure] up a rich emotional world and [to capture] exquisitely ... women’s experiences,” (2001: 108) Abu-Lughod is concerned about how Memissi’s text may reproduce Orientalist representations. Again, the danger of reproducing the same discourses one resists seems to me to be inherent in autoethnographic communication precisely because it engages the discourse it seeks to undo. This is a particularly interesting point: it seems one must engage dominant discourses in order to enter into dominant realms of meaning making, but engagement entails a certain degree of reiteration, even if the repetition is potentially radically disruptive.

Any communicative act requires someone on the reception end, and the audience may highlight or dissolve either the disruptive potential of an autoethnographic text or its repetition. One can only communicate with someone else: this is why the audience (and their reception) is important for autoethnography. In Pratt’s (1992, 1994) example, Guaman Poma’s letter to the Spanish crown certainly repeats Spanish discourses about pre-conquest traditions as being “heathen,” and about the goodness and benevolence of Christianity, but its author also utilizes Christian terminology to repudiate the actions of Spanish administrators and clergy. Guaman Poma uses the discourses that construct Andean peoples as inferior and subordinate to call into question the assumed superiority of Spanish peoples. His speech act is rendered impossible by the absence of structures of reception: no one attempted to read his letter for hundreds of years. In Memissi’s case, she repeats discourses about the harem in ways that have the potential to disrupt the equation of feminism with Westernization and Islam with patriarchy. Like Guaman
Poma’s letter, however, her resistance requires structures of reception. Reception is to some degree enabled by the ambivalence of dominant discourses, which guarantees a minimum potential of reception. Nevertheless, the disruptive potential of her speech act can only emerge in the interaction between the reader and the text.

Several reviews of the book seem to highlight those aspects of dominant discourses that her text repeats, at the expense of its disruptive potentials. Such reviews suggest that perhaps we lack adequate structures of reception to make room for the seemingly paradoxical coexistence of accommodation and resistance. The authors of these reviews receive Mernissi’s text into the dominant discourses she engages, but refuse to move outside of them. Susan Woodcock (1994: 146), for example, tells us that Mernissi’s text is “not a denigration of harem life,” but “a useful explanation of the [Islamic] culture.” Woodcock therefore seems to read the text as negating denigrations of harem life, but she takes Mernissi’s account as representative of the Islamic culture. Her use of the definite article (the) is quite telling and it reproduces Islam as a singular monolithic entity. Woodcock (146) even claims that “the presence of the French, the inevitable incursions of the war [World War II], and the Westernization of the country itself exposed the family to much that clashed with the customs of their Islamic culture.” The conflicts Mernissi outlines in her narrative are thus reduced to being the products of Westernization and a clash between cultures: Islam and modernity (read the West).

Although the women in the Mernissi’s text constantly argue about what constitutes Islamic tradition, Woodcock represents their challenges as resulting from the incursion of

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46 In her review of the book, Karen Henry (1994: ¶ 6, emphasis added) makes a similar gesture when she argues that “the power of the oral tradition, a tradition very important to the Arabs is manifest in the book.” Although Henry (¶ 7) argues that the book “opens Western eyes to a world often objectified and trivialized,” and she states that Mernissi “creates a new appreciation and understanding of the varied lives of Arab women,” but in her account, “the Arabs” still emerge as homogeneous monolithic category.
the West. Any challenges to discourses of tradition are thus represented as Western importations.

Rose Cichy (1994: 75) argues that the women in Mernissi’s text “accept their role in society [but] applaud changes in other Muslim nations and admire prominent women who promote these changes.” Such an account is partially true: some of Mernissi’s female relatives do applaud these changes, but they do not simply accept their roles; they constantly contest them. Mernissi’s mother, her cousin Chama, Aunt Habiba, and Yasmina do not simply applaud other women’s feminism, they change some of the conditions of their own lives. Furthermore, some of Mernissi’s aunts who are absent from the particular incidents she narrates are absent because they had convinced their husbands to move out of the family’s domestic harem to form nuclear units outside of its walls.

Cichy’s review of the book erases these facts. Cichy also asserts that “the Mernissi harem is a large extended family in which female members, including divorced aunts and several wives of some males, are confined to their shared home and restricted in their behavior” (Cichy 1994: 75, emphasis added). Mernissi’s childhood home contains two males: her father and Uncle ʿAli. Mernissi tells her readers several times that neither of them is polygamous, and she links their monogamy to the nationalist movement’s call for monogamous marriage. Yasmina’s harem is polygamous, but the Mernissi harem is not (and this is a matter of nationalist principles). The many distinctions between the two harems (Yasmina’s rural farm and Mernissi’s urban upper-middle class one) are thus also erased in Cichy’s review of the book. In her account, polygamy (common in dominant depictions of harems) is transferred from one harem to another.
Patricia Jeffery’s review of Mernissi’s book differs drastically from the two outlined above. Jeffery is attentive to differences between particular harems, recognizes the resistances the female characters undertake, points out the effectiveness of some of these resistances, and avoids homogenizing Muslims or Arabs. Jeffery (1995: 765) describes the book as “a testimony to ... the importance of skill with words: It is a compelling and lively read, a fascinating story, well-told.” Yet, Jeffery (765) bemoans the book’s lack of “direct insight into why Mernissi decided to write in this genre or who she imagines her audience to be.” Overall, Jeffery (765, emphasis added) argues, “the book lacks sociological weight. The reader wanting satisfaction on such scores will be disappointed. Read at another level, though, *Dreams of Trespass* could make a very approachable addition to courses wanting to provide insight on the *dynamics of household life.*” Jeffery’s final judgment on the book as lacking sociological weight seems to derive from what she describes as Mernissi’s failure to be reflexive about “her own choice of career as a sociologist and her selection of episodes in the book.” Jeffery takes the book more seriously for its depiction of household life (although she does not explain what exactly she means by this), but she (dis)misses its representations of Arab feminism; she depicts the book as an *inadequate* sociological text.

For Jeffery, the book’s main focus is gender relations, but she does not pay attention to Mernissi’s intersections of these with other power relations, specifically colonial ones. When multiple power relations are taken into account, however, the book may be read as providing “a multi-layered answer to the unspoken question, ‘How can one be an Arab feminist?’ [and it]... forcefully addresses the aporia under which Arab feminism functions” (Donandey 2000: 85). Moreover, Mernissi’s book is promoted by
her publisher as a memoir, and as Melissa Matthes (1999: 68) states, “by centering the narrative on events and the deeds of others, the memoirist seeks to illuminate the particular context in which history is made, rather than his or her own personal development.” Mernissi’s book is not (directly) about herself or her choice of career. In Matthes’ reading of the text, Mernissi’s non-self-reflexivity is not a failure; the narrative of the text uses her personal life as a segue. It is a narrative about the historical and socio-political context in which Arabic and Muslim feminist women find themselves.

My point in the above discussion of these different reviews is not to find the truth about the book, or the empirical truths reflected in the book. Rather, I want to point out that each reviewer’s approach seems to compel a particular interpretation of the text by highlighting certain aspects at the expense of others. In each of the above reviews, Mernissi’s accommodation or her resistance is highlighted, and little room is made for the coexistence of these elements in her narrative. In Mernissi’s own description of the book, it is “a work of fiction. Publishers promote Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood as memoir, but the book… is a necklace of fairytale vignettes” (Huff-Rouselle 2003: ¶ 6). The stories in the book, “are like the classic and universal fairytales: they provide … a moral framework” (¶ 6). Reading the book as an instance of autoethnography provides room for simultaneous resistances and accommodations, highlights its morality-tale aspects, and makes room for the inclusion of fictive elements (which may be strategic or may impart a lesson).

47 While I have not been able to locate Mernissi’s own words describing the fictive elements of either of the texts I analyze, Huff-Rouselle’s discussion of them is from Mernissi’s personal website. The article is found on the website at a portrait of Mernissi. As such, I have found it useful in attempting to approximate Mernissi’s account of the books, and Mernissi’s selection of the article as a portrait of herself suggests it as a self-description.
Autoethnographers may include fictive elements in their arguments in order to make a point. Guaman Poma ends his letter to the Spanish crown “in a mock interview in which he advises the King as to his responsibilities, and proposes a new form of government through collaboration of Andean and Spanish elites” (Pratt 1992: 2). The letter cannot be dismissed because the interview is imagined; to do so is to lose the lesson implicit in the interview. Rather, Guaman Poma, like Scheherazade, Mernissi, or Aunt Habiba narrates an alternative to current oppressive living conditions. If we read their expressions for empirical truths, for “what is impersonal in history,” or as “eyewitness” testimony in the juridical sense, we may miss the point of the lessons they impart (Oliver 2001). Read with an autoethnographic sensibility, however, what matters is not the empirical truth of such a narrative, but its negotiations of and interventions in power relations using the tools available to the author. The text may then be read for its allegorical (rather than factual) truths. As Pratt (1992: 5) says, autoethnographies need to be read within the context of, and may provide an enriched understanding of, “the dynamics of self-representation in the context of … subordination and resistance.” Because autoethnographers are subordinate, they must be accommodative, to change the oppressive conditions of their lives, they are resistant.

In Matthes’ analysis of the book, for example, the author highlights the links between Mernissi and Scheherazade. As Matthes (1999: 72) points out, Mernissi takes on Shahrazad’s crucial task of addressing a dual audience. Shahrazad told her stories to a sympathetic but powerless sister and a hostile, all powerful monarch; [Mernissi likewise addresses her] ‘own people’ (however constituted) and ‘the West’ (also however constituted)... For the alien audience, these narratives are designed to dispel the fallacies of Western misconceptions, whether such misconceptions take the form of depicting Shahrazad as an exotic belly dancer or of reducing women’s oppression to the presence of a piece of cloth across their face. Thus, [Mernissi’s] memoir is not simply a mirror which inadequately
reflects or explains reality, but rather a prism through which reality is transformed... attempting to mold the living memory of our time.

This depiction of Mernissi's narrative, which is modeled after Scheherazade's tales (Matthes 1999; Huff-Rouselle 2003), calls attention to its autoethnographic characteristics. Mernissi addresses North-Western Euro-American audiences with some difficulty, but she specifically seeks out this audience in order to reframe and diversify their understanding of the lives of Muslim women, and of Islam in general. She is “acutely conscious of her intended audience... [When she writes] in English or French [,] early drafts, not yet scrutinized by a copy editor, will have a riot of mechanical spelling and grammatical errors” (Huff-Rouselle 2003: ¶ 8). Moreover, while Mernissi usually tends to write non-fiction, sociological texts, “she often uses the techniques of a fiction writer” (¶ 7), but does so in anticipation of her audiences' "distrust" of her social location and subject position (Huff-Rouselle 2003). Indeed, Mernissi's "is not a simple-minded argument... Rather it is one ... in keeping with the theses of Hayden White and Edward Said - that narratives shape our identities, configure our world, and are an important medium through which we understand that world" (Matthes 1999: 75).

Moreover, Mernissi resumes her autoethnographic endeavor in Scheherazade Goes West, further narrating the relationships among feminism, patriarchy, Islam and the West. In Scheherazade Goes West, Mernissi responds to readings of Dreams of Trespass which aim to fit her complex narrative into dominant structures of knowledge, and which seem to erase her resistances to the knowledges authorized by these structures. She uses these responses as autoethnographic resources, engaging in dialogue with her dominants. The second book seems to address North-Western Euro-Americans both in its choice of language (originally published in English) and in the texts it engages. It highlights
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Memissi’s determination to disrupt effectively dominant representations of Islam as fundamentally patriarchal, and Muslim women as passive objects. In this text, we see the emergence of an autoethnographic dialogue. Memissi realizes that her resistances to dominant knowledge (particularly her representations of harems) may not have been considered by her dominants, but she uses this as a further opportunity for transcultural communication. She investigates the sources of dominant representations that seem to speak over her, or to prevent her from being heard, and uses them as new entry points to further her autoethnographic endeavor.

Like Dreams of Trespass, Scheherazade Goes West is also constructed as a quest for knowledge, but this time it is “an obsessive inquiry into the nature of the Western harem” (2001: 25) in order to find out if “in their fantasies, Westerners imagine women without wing” (8). The investigation is undertaken by an adult Memissi, and she poses several explicit questions:

What happens to [Scheherazade] when she goes West? What changes do Western artists inflict on Scheherazade in order to make her conform to their fantasies when she crosses their frontiers? What are the seductive powers with which Western artists equip her? Does she become less or more powerful in their fantasy? Does she retain her status as queen or lose it?

Memissi’s quest for knowledge in Scheherazade Goes West seems to approximate a travel narrative. Even the title of the book suggests travel. Memissi begins the tale “at home,” in Morocco discussing her fear of “failing to understand strangers [Westerners]” (1), and argues that she needs to “transform [her] feelings of shock toward … [Westerners] into an openness to learn from them” (2). Memissi then moves the narrative to “the West” with the objective of learning something about Western understandings of women, in general, and their interpretations of Scheherazade, in particular. Memissi’s promotional book tour for Dreams of Trespass forms the motivational force behind her
quest for knowledge. She says: “my book [Dreams of Trespass] starts with the sentence: ‘I was born in a harem,’ and that short sentence seemed to contain some mysterious problem, because everyone [of the Western journalists], without exception’ (2001: 12) began interviewing her by asking if this was true, “as if there were some shameful secret involved” (2001: 12).

The men of whom Mernissi speaks seem to fixate on the first sentence of her text, in which she informs her reader that she was, in fact, born in a harem. In speaking to these men, Mernissi comes to realize that her interviewers’ smiles “had sexual undertones...

... The journalists were perceiving a “harem” that was invisible” (Mernissi 2001: 13) to Mernissi. Asked to explain what they understand the harem to be,

the Westerners referred primarily to pictorial images, such as paintings or films, while [Mernissi] visualized actual places – harems built of high walls and real stones ... [Her] harem was associated with historical reality. theirs was associated with artistic images created by famous painters such as Ingres, Matisse, Delacroix, or Picasso – who reduced women to odalisques (a Turkish word for female slave) – or talented Hollywood movie-makers, who portrayed harem women as scantily clad belly-dancers happy to serve their captors. Some journalists also mentioned operas like Verdi’s Aida or ballets like Diaghilev’s Scheherazade. But whatever image they referred to, the journalists always described the harem as a voluptuous wonderland drenched with heavy sex provided by vulnerable nude women who were happy to be locked up (Mernissi 2001: 14).

Clearly then, while Dreams of Trespass had undertaken to represent women’s activity and thoughts within the harem, the sexualized, eroticized Orientalist representations (discussed in Chapter Four) speak over Mernissi’s (re)presentation of Muslim and Arab women. Ingres, and the women of his Turkish Baths (born out of his hyper(hetero)sexual male imagination), for example, more familiar to “Westerners,” and more in line with their knowledge about the Orient, speak over Mernissi and her women’s voices.

Refusing to be spoken for, Mernissi undertakes to question her interviewers, and to familiarize herself with their images of the harem. She does so at the suggestion of
Christiane, her “French editor in Paris [whom she calls] for a Western woman’s perspective” (13, emphasis added). We are then told that Christiane suggests that Mernissi write the book; and she and Jacques (a French journalist) provide Mernissi with the appropriate readings for analyzing her “harem enigma.” In this way, Mernissi authorizes her voice through ties to members of the dominant group. Such a borrowed authority may be read as an autoethnographic strategy. Mernissi uses her association with members of the dominant group as entry points into a discussion of dominant knowledges/representations of Muslim women, and presents her findings as the products of vigilant study and application (almost an obedient study) of dominant knowledges.

Mernissi tells us that Scheherazade goes West: Different Cultures Different Harems (2001), is thus written in response to the reception of Dreams of Trespass (1994) by Western male journalists, who seemed only to hear that Mernissi had grown up in a harem, but who substituted their own inherited, Orientalist knowledge of the harem for that which Mernissi describes in her text. In Scheherazade Goes West, Mernissi begins with this reception of her last book, and goes on to examine Western representations of the harem. Throughout the text, Mernissi juxtaposes Arab and Muslim women’s experiences of harem life and their multiple resistances to patriarchy with the ways in which harems were represented by European men who visited Northern Africa — which generally appears to be the way they continue to be (re)imagined by Western Europeans and North Americans. As stated earlier, since the harem is, by definition, a female space, forbidden to male “strangers,” these men could not actually have experienced the harem, but rather created these images out of their own Orientalist “knowledge” of the East as exotic and sensual, out of their own imaginations of the unknown. Mernissi adds to this
that these representations also rely on a particular understanding of the feminine as passive. Thus, according to her, these Orientalist images of Muslim women and harems are not only constituted by a particular understanding of the Muslim world. Rather, Mernissi argues that they also arise from Western patriarchal knowledges.

Mernissi’s text makes clear the discursive construction of power and identity categories, but she turns the tables around, placing herself in the position of the person seeking to learn about another culture (i.e. she is the ethnographer). What is particularly fascinating is that she often simply plays the part of the ignorant, passive Arab or Muslim woman, and has Western male characters teach her about their patriarchal or misogynist traditions. A striking illustration of this occurs when Mernissi narrates her trips to art museums in Paris, led by Jacques to meet his harem, composed of “Unveiled But Silent Beauties” (2001: 98). Mernissi relates this story as if it is her first acquaintance with Ingres’ *Turkish Baths*. She observes the painting, looking for what is familiar in it, and is then shocked as she notices the sexual connotations the painting gives to the baths.

Readers who are familiar with *Dreams of Trespass* would realize that this is not Mernissi’s first introduction to the painting. The *Turkish Baths* comes up in *Dreams of Trespass* (1994) where she tells us there that this particular painting, and those of Delacroix (with which she also pretends to become acquainted through Jacques), represent imaginative depictions of “imperial harems... splendid palaces full of... indolently reclined women” (1994: 34). Jacques’s tour of his harem in *Le Louvre* is not Mernissi’s first encounter with these paintings. Nevertheless, on her tour with Jacques, Mernissi (2001: 100) expresses shock at the painting, pointing out that “this connection between the public baths and promiscuity is totally absent in Muslim cultures.” She later
adds that “erotic pleasure in Morocco belongs in precisely sheltered private places” (102). Mernissi thus seems to represent herself in this book as commenting on knowledge provided/taught by Europeans, members of the dominant population: Jacques and Christiane point her in the direction of this painting, and even suggest literature for her to read in order to analyze these images. Again, what matter are not the factual truths Mernissi narrates, but the allegorical, moral tales she wants to highlight.

For example, we cannot dismiss the text because Jacques and Hans (another Western male character to whom Mernissi turns for answers), who comprise her two main Western male informants are fictional characters (Huff-Rouselle 2003). In narrating her argument, Mernissi creates these two characters, “composites of [Western] men she knows… Readers, she felt, would distrust a female narrative voice discussing male perspectives on females in the West, but they would not question a male voice explaining the same perspectives to the female narrator” (Huff-Rouselle 2003: ¶ 7). Mernissi’s reliance on these characters is thus aimed at circumventing North-Western, Euro-American audiences’ mistrust of her social location. Recall, for example, the reception of Edward Said’s Orientalism by Bernard Lewis as “word pollution” based on Said’s social location. Mernissi relies on knowledge provided by characters (real or not) whose social location is less likely to be called into question. Ultimately, in representing these events to members of the dominant population through these characters and Christiane, Mernissi is basically able to say that it is their own Western literature that leads to her conclusions and condemns their texts and knowledges. She very clearly shows herself to be engaging dominant knowledge, providing her readers with North-Western European characters with whom they may more easily identify and whose words they may be more likely to
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heed; Jacques, Hans, and Christiane’s voices are authorized, and Mernissi borrows from their authority in order to make her arguments. In the process, she responds not just to the journalists in question, but also to Ingres’s *Turkish Baths* and to other Orientalist representations of the so-called Arab and Muslim world. She reminds us that we are not dealing with “merely’ representations because they have *practical performative forces*” (Gregory 2001: 107, emphasis in original). They enter into the creation of our social reality, they influence our lives, and they certainly influence what we can know. These representations come to structure future knowledge, forced into their confines.

For example, being only familiar with representations of submissive, passive Muslim women, one may interpret an encounter with a veiled Muslim woman in ways that fit into that knowledge. They may, for example, tell us that she did not meet their gaze in the street, and read this as evidence that Muslim women are timidly passive creatures. There is often little room left for alternate explanations of this action (reinterpreted as a lack of action). As Mernissi (2002: 11) explains in *Scheherazade Goes West*, however, “growing up [she] was taught that a woman should lower her gaze, so that men could never know her thoughts. The so-called modesty of Arab women is in fact a war tactic.” Mernissi seems to be suggesting that the same tactic women use “at home” (in Morocco, for example) against men (denying them access to the thoughts expressed through one’s gaze) are used “abroad” in a new power struggle, a struggle that is not necessarily based in gender relations, but in colonialist, historical and geographical ones.

Dominant, authoritative (and authorized) knowledge structures often define literacy; we read things based on these structures because they frame our experiences of the world. Mernissi’s engagement with the products of their dominants’ accepted form of
literacy both performs these forms of knowledge and disrupts them by the same act. In some subtle ways, Memissi redefines (il)literacy. She does this, for example, in her discussion of her grandmother’s advice not to meet men’s gazes. Memissi suggests that Westerners, who (have) read this act as a sign of passivity, are culturally illiterate. To suggest that Westerners have read a war tactic as a sign of submissiveness, is to turn around the trope of illiteracy. Basically, Orientalists have often constructed Arabs and Muslims as illiterate; in this case, Orientalist Westerners have been in a position of power from which to define their form of literacy (their knowledge) as universally valid. Memissi provides us with a window into a subversive, subordinate discourse. On her terms, it is these Orientalist Westerners who have been illiterate.

Moreover, in Memissi’s formulation, “failing” to meet the gaze of one’s dominant is reinterpreted as an act that is neither lacking nor a failure, but tactical. It is intended to arrest the dominant gaze that searches to create and confirm knowledge about those who are categorized. As bell hooks (1992) argues, “the ‘gaze’ has been and is a site of resistance for colonized black people globally. Subordinates in relations of power learn experientially that there is a critical gaze, one that ‘looks’ to document... [O]ne learns to look a certain way in order to resist” (116). While for bell hooks it is in returning and meeting the gaze that one asserts oneself, for Memissi, one does so by refusing to meet that same gaze, or by inverting the gaze. What both of these authors assert, however, is that looking/seeing has been, and continues to be, of great importance to the colonized.

They also both seem to stress the need for readings that do not rely solely on dominant structures of knowledge and forms of literacy.

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48 I am thinking here specifically of Memissi’s discussion of the Turkish Baths: here, Memissi uses Western scholarship in order to analyze Western art. This can be read as redirecting the dominant gaze at dominant knowledge.
In fact, throughout *Scheherazade Goes West*, Mernissi presents the same information she had provided in *Dreams of Trespass*, but again, in almost every instance, she borrows her authority and legitimates her conclusions by presenting them as the products of collaboration with North-Western Euro-Americans. Mernissi (2001: 187) even concludes that “it really does pay to provoke foreigners to solve your mysteries for you.” This is clearly reminiscent of Pratt’s (1994: 28, emphasis added) argument that autoethnographic texts “involve selective collaboration with and appropriation from the idioms of the ... conqueror... [which] are merged or infiltrated to varying degrees with indigenous idioms to create self-representations intended to intervene in metropolitan modes of understanding.” In *Scheherazade Goes West*, Mernissi emphasizes her awareness of “self-as-another’s-other” and creates an image of “self-as-more-than-another’s-other,” drawing attention to her access to dominant structures of knowledge, and using this access to disrupt dominant discourses. In the process, she makes clear that her point is not necessarily, and not only, to represent Muslim women, or Islamic feminism, but also to call into question dominants’ self-understandings.

She especially does this by drawing on Kantian philosophical traditions to argue that Western women’s harem is “size six:” which emerges as representative of impossible beauty standards and a binary distinction between “beauty and brains.” She contrasts this “unfair” choice to Muslim representations, particularly in Scheherazade’s tales of women’s beauty being inseparable from their cerebral activity. The Western versions of Scheherazade to which Mernissi is introduced by Hans, Jacques, and Jim (an American journalist who lives in Britain) “lacked the most powerful erotic weapon a woman has – her nutq, or capacity to think in words and penetrate a man’s brain by using carefully
selected terms" (2001: 38). Mernissi (39) goes on to say that the Scheherazade of her childhood tales "is purely cerebral, and that is the essence of her sexual attraction. In the original tales, Scheherazade’s body is hardly mentioned, but her learning is repeatedly stressed. The only dance she performs is to play with words late into the night."

In Mernissi’s description of the translation of One Thousand and One Nights from oral Arabic tales (subversive stories told by women to teach their daughters the importance of resisting oppression) into Western languages (which she suggests culminated in a rigid, finalized, written version of the tales), Scheherazade’s body became the focus of her sexual attraction, and given the Kantian distinction between brains and beauty to which Jacques introduces Mernissi, Scheherazade emerges as a simple-minded entertainer. Notice that in these instances what Mernissi calls “the Western Scheherazade” is constituted by Western patriarchy as much as she is by cultural illiteracy. It is Western authors’ understanding of women as sexual objects that is projected onto the tales and substituted for what seems, in Mernissi’s narrative, to be “the real Scheherazade.” The Scheherazade of the original tales, “only survives because she is a super-strategist of the intellect. She would have been killed if she had disrobed like a

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49 At the same time, however, even the Arabic written versions of Scheherazade’s tales (put into writing by males in a masculinist tradition of valuing written knowledge) are represented by Mernissi as straying from the original stories, the ones orally narrated by women. According to Mernissi (2001: 55), “for centuries, the conservative elite scorned The Thousand and One Nights as popular trash of no cultural value... because they were transmitted orally. The male elite considered oral storytelling to be the symbol of the uneducated masses.” For Mernissi, Scheherazade’s triumph over the king represents a triumph of imaginative, narrative interventions in socio-political conditions over the insistence on an objective truth. The King had empirical evidence of his wife’s adultery. Scheherazade does not try to convince him otherwise, and she does not narrate stories with “good pious women.” She does not attempt to use the realm of officially accepted knowledges. Although “her knowledge includes much history and an impressive mastery of the sacred literature, including the Koran, the Shari’a, and the texts of various schools of religious interpretation... [she has a] seemingly unpretentious goal to stick to the world of... fiction” (53). If the text is read as a travel narrative, then the like between Mernissi and Scheherazade is highlighted. Mernissi, like Scheherazade, travels West, but she does so intentionally. Implicitly, then, when Mernissi urges her readers not to understand Scheherazade as a simple-minded entertainer, she is urging us to do the same where she is concerned.
Hollywood vamp or Matisse's odalisque and stretched out passively on the King's bed" (48). Emerging as the ultimate autoethnographer, "Scheherazade manages through an accurate reading of a complex situation to change the balance of power and reach the top" (48-49). Mernissi presents Scheherazade as a role model, as someone she longs to emulate, and she uses her as an argument in favor of her own undertaking. Mernissi's depiction of Scheherazade also seems to explain why Mernissi is not discouraged by the misreception of *Dreams of Trespass*, and instead chooses to use it strategically to further a dialogue with her dominants.

Throughout *Scheherazade Goes West*, Mernissi also calls her dominant's self-understanding into question in parodic ways, mirroring her dominants back to themselves, and reversing the dominant gaze. Highlighting the colonial history of interactions between Muslims and North-Western Euro-Americans, Mernissi (2001: 24-25) says that

> respecting a Westerner is a heroic act for a Muslim... because Western culture is so aggressively present in our daily life that we have the impression we already know it thoroughly... If we could see Westerners as vulnerable, we would feel closer to them. But we confuse Westerners with Superman, with heartless, robotlike NASA architects who invest all their emotions in crafting inhuman, exorbitantly expensive spaceships to discover faraway galaxies, while neglecting their own planet.

There are several tasks this passage performs. Mernissi turns around the direction of the relationship between dominant and subordinate. Just as throughout (neo)colonialist and Orientalist texts, Muslims, Arabs (or, more generally, the colonized) are not accorded respect, Mernissi argues that the same is true in the other direction. In this case, however, she claims that it is the aggressiveness of the presence of Western culture (perhaps a euphemism for colonialist and capitalist invasions) that makes respect difficult. Mernissi also seems to use the image of a totally powerful Western colonizer in order to suggest
that this image of total power, lack of vulnerability, and technological/economic advancement and investment in knowledge has been detrimental to the way subordinate peoples view their dominants. The image of Western technological advancement is blended together with exploration (calling to mind both past and present scientific knowledge) and a neglect of environmental responsibility.

Mernissi (25) uses the above passage to lead up to the assertion that “the most obvious form of barbarism [is] the lack of respect for the foreigner.” Yet, she represents herself as guilty of such barbarism because she has not attempted to understand Westerners in the past. Mernissi is not arguing here that only she is guilty. Rather, she is claiming that anyone who does not attempt to understand or who assumes that they already thoroughly understand others is guilty. She tells us that writing the book is “enriching and therapeutic” (25) because it is an attempt to remedy her lack of engagement with Western knowledges. Her text may parody Eurocentric travel writing, but she simultaneously argues against ethnocentric understandings of others that seek to incorporate them into already accepted knowledge. Implicitly, her text makes an

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50 Mernissi categorizes the journalists according to nationality, playing the role of a modernist or positivist ethnographer who questions Native Informants in order to collect information about “their” monolithic culture. While she distinguishes the way the male journalists smile based on what country they are from, and makes constant distinctions between German, Danish, Parisian, British, or American men (Mernissi 2001: 11-13), she also uses the category of Western as a singular, monolithic category in a binary relationship with Islam. She thus negates the category of Western even as she uses it. For example, she says, “Hans D. helped me with the thoroughness of a German tutor when he commented on the Scheherazade ballet that he had invited me to see, and made me understand that women’s obsequiousness, their readiness to obey, is a distinctive feature of the Western harem fantasy. Jacques, on the other hand, highlighted with the humor and self-mockery that is so unique to Parisians something that is frightening to admit in serious conversation today: What attracts him to a woman, at least on the level of fantasy, is the absence of intellectual exchange. Through his comments, he clarified for me the second distinctive feature of the Western harem: Intellectual exchange with women is an obstacle to erotic pleasure” (26). Thus, while Hans and Jacques have distinctive personality traits based on their “national cultures,” they are still both Westerners who can provide information for understanding their monolithic approaches to women, as evident in their representations of harems. In fact, Hans even tells Mernissi, “Europeans may disagree about elemental things such as beef and chicken... but our harem fantasy contributes greatly to our unification.”
epistemological and a moral argument for the importance of dialogue or the importance of ensuring both address and response in interactions between members of different social groups.

Recall that Mernissi wrote *Scheherazade Goes West* in response to readings/receptions of a previous self-representation (*Dreams of Trespass*) which seem to fall back on preconceived images of harems and Muslim women. The text is therefore dialogic in character; its author responds to an address (in the form of interview questions), but she does so in a way that appears to invite further response (she asks questions and then further engages the responses they elicit). Mernissi suggests that the only way to learn about/from (i.e. to know) another person/social group is to interact through infinite address and response, what Kelly Oliver (2001) calls witnessing other peoples’ subjectivities through allowing/nurturing infinite response-ability and address-ability. Oliver’s formulation highlights the moral and ethical importance of reciprocity in social interactions as well as each subject’s role in the interaction as *both* speaker and listener (or author and reader).

What I hope has emerged in this chapter, but something I now wish to emphasize, is that the interaction between author, text, and audience is an important site of analysis. Mernissi can intentionally, or unintentionally, write resistances to dominant knowledge into her text; she may include alternative knowledges; she may complicate our structures of knowledge. Unless, however, there are structures of reception and reading practices that aim to locate these knowledges, and to disrupt inherited colonialist structures of knowledge – which have often become oppressive structural molds constituting ontological categories – Mernissi’s text cannot achieve its autoethnographic potential.
Indeed, autoethnographic characteristics need to be read into a text, and those who have inherited colonialist structures of knowledge have a responsibility to look for these potentials and to disrupt discourses and significations which privilege inherited, objectifying knowledge. In other words, we need to act as vehicles of reception for potentially autoethnographic texts. In the next chapter, I will discuss in greater detail the interaction between author, reader, and text as a site of possibility for the emergence of autoethnographic potential.
Sixth Intermission:

As I read Scheherazade Goes West, I continually get frustrated with Mernissi. In fact, I put the book down several times because I am simply unable to get beyond my aggravation with how effectively she plays the role of the dumb, demure, Arabic woman. I see the with anger every time one of her Western “informants” suggests a book for her to read with which I am certain she is already familiar as a sociologist. Her surprise at reading about “the gaze,” for example, makes me angry. As I read her book, I worry that audiences who read her as a Native Informant may take this at face value, or may take her as representative of Arabic or Muslim women.

She presents herself as lacking in intellect: Westerners must tell her what to read, she is too lazy to finish reading some of the books, and she needs constant confirmation from the French, American, or German characters in the book (who seem to be there alternately to tell her what to read and think, or to provide her with information as Native Informants).

In the book, Mernissi argues that the intellect of Arabic or Muslim women is extremely important. She says that women’s intellectual capacity is nurtured by Muslim and Arabic cultural traditions. Yet she poses as a dumb woman who is unable to think without Western guidance, and it makes me furious.

Upon my second reading of the book I realize how much she performs her need for Western guidance. When I read the book a second time, I remember that Jacques’ introduction to the Turkish Baths cannot be her first because she had talked about the painting in Dreams of Trespass. This is when I begin to recognize that the role she adopts in the narrative is strategic. Read with an autoethnographic sensibility, her book is less in danger of perpetuating stereotypes of Western pre-eminence in the creation of knowledge.

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Although I find the book more compelling when I read it as an autoethnography, I am left wanting something. I want to somehow circumvent her self-representation because I am afraid that, on some level, it will still be read by some as representative. I am a little selfish in desiring a different representation: I do not want to be identified with Mernissi’s self-portrayal, but I do not have access to the same audience as her. I cannot speak to the same people to whom she speaks, but I cannot help but wonder how I would write my own autoethnography.

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As I write my MA thesis, I decide that it may provide me with the opportunity to attempt an autoethnographic communication, but I am unsure how to include this in an academic thesis.

At first, I decide that I can simply write a preface, but after doing so, I am left unsatisfied. I decide instead to address my readers in my own, personal voice in intervals. I call these
intermissions because I want them to provide a break from the more theoretical or academic aspects of my thesis, but I also want them to reflect on my academic argument. I want to provide readers with yet more windows into the varied lives and experiences of Muslim women, but I especially want to highlight the contradictions involved in being an immigrant, Arabic, Muslim, Canadian woman.

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When I write about veiling and unveiling, I feel like I am laying myself bare. I am giving you some access to my innermost struggles with (constructions of) myself and with my body as the body of a Muslim and of a woman. I know that I have embodied many contradictions in my life, but these are important contradictions which remain fruitful for me to think through. Sharing these contradictory moments, sharing my ambivalence about my multiple social positions, and my constant renegotiations of identity categories opens up windows into my life.

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In writing in a personal register, in writing some of my formative memories and experiences, I give you a window to see how I negotiate my identity. This window allows you to play voyeur. I do not discourage your gaze. Instead, what I ask is that while you look in on me, you remain aware that I am always already looking back at you. I want to highlight the reciprocity of our gaze. I want you to know that even when I have walked away from comments, even when I have been unable to find my voice, even when I have looked down at my feet because I could not meet your searching looks, I was still looking back at you.
Chapter Seven: 
Tying Up Loose Ends

In this thesis, I have attempted to emphasize subordinate peoples’ active agency and resistances to dominant knowledges about themselves, as evidenced in autoethnographic communication. I argued that, particularly within a (post)colonial setting, dominant discourses about subordinate peoples have tended to categorize them as Native Informants and to negate their subjectivities, granting them agency in so far as that agency confirms pre-existing dominant knowledges. Following Joanne Passaro (1997: 161), I suggested that the reliance on these discourses in the construction of knowledge nurtures and relies on “epistemologies of received categories of collective identity.” Such epistemologies authorize as knowledge only that which confirms what is already (thought to be) known, and they impede the reception of contestations of dominant practices of signification. I have also argued that power relations are inherently ambivalent and leave room for contesting the very knowledges they authorize. Dominant discourses may thus be used in order to challenge the very ontologies they construct.

Autoethnographers use the ambivalence inherent in power relations in ways that highlight this ambivalence and reflect fissures in the nexus of power (i.e., the impossibility of total domination). They therefore foreground the disruptive potentials that are made available by the very practices of signification that publicly deny their subjective agency in the first place. Autoethnographers are constituted by discursive constructions within dominant terrains of signification which tend to deny their subjectivity and to define them from the outside in. Autoethnographers are members of oppressed populations who have been constituted as the objects of dominant knowledges about themselves; they speak from a subordinate position in specific fields of power.
incorporate them into their own terrains of signification (a practice enabled by the exteriority of the contextual power relation), the colonized have remained more than the objects of this knowledge; they have been reading and engaging with dominant representations of themselves (as subjects). Autoethnographers can use dominant discourses to enter into transcultural terrains of signification both because power relations are ambivalent and never totalizing, and because subordinate peoples are always already subjects who can read and speak.

In discussing the expansion of Mernissi’s self-representations from *Dreams of Trespass* to *Scheherazade Goes West*, I argued that her second book reflects her position toward the reception end of dominant knowledges (and as the recipient of dominant knowledges) by portraying her dialogue with members of dominant populations (both males and North-Western Euro-Americans). What is explicitly revealed in the transition from one book to another, however, is already implicit in the first communicative expression. In the second book Mernissi *shows* herself reading and engaging dominant knowledges, but her engagement with dominant representations in *Dreams of Trespass* may be read as an implicit demonstration that she is already reading (and therefore able to engage) dominant significations of her social group. Autoethnographic communications emphasize the agency of subordinate peoples within unequal fields of power relations. They also foreground the familiarity of subordinate peoples with dominant knowledges. As such, autoethnographic communication suggests that the autoethnographer is always already on the reception end (of transcultural knowledge): they are simultaneously authors and readers.
They are therefore “in the paradoxical position of having to justify [their] status as subject[s. The paradox arises because] the performance of speaking [to their dominants] proves subjectivity even while the social context calls it into question” (Oliver 2001: 100). The speech acts of autoethnographers reflect “the ways in which bearing witness to your own oppression is paradoxical” (Oliver 2001: 99), but they also highlight the location of autoethnographers as subjects. The self-representations of subordinate peoples to their dominants must be articulated against a background of dominant representations which are already accepted as knowledge, and which define what may count as knowledge. As such, autoethnographers’ self-representations “are always ‘on trial’” (99), and personal narratives become subject to public judgment by and against dominant knowledge (which set the terms of terrains of signification).

Autoethnographers implicitly make the argument that they are more than the objects of dominant knowledges (“more-than-another’s-other”) in two ways. First, as stated above, the speech act itself is a demonstration/performance of subjectivity; to speak is to act as a subject. Second, since the speaker relies on already accepted knowledges in order to articulate their experiences and subjectivities, they highlight their awareness of dominant knowledges about themselves. Their awareness of these knowledges implicitly suggests that they are always already subjects as readers of dominant discourses. Autoethnographic texts may, therefore, “challenge, subvert, and undermine the … hierarchy of colonizer/colonized [by reflecting] the speech and stance of the colonized refusing a position of subjugation and dispensing with the terms of the colonizer’s definitions” (Parry 1994: 176). Autoethnographic texts thus suggest that even while colonizers have attempted to translate local knowledges and identities and to
Mernissi's books helped me to illustrate the disruptive or resistant potentials of autoethnographic texts. I argued that when they are read together, the books demonstrate the ambivalence of colonial power relations as providing opportunities for subordinate peoples' disruptive (but safe) enunciations (i.e., their accommodative resistances). In *Scheherazade Goes West*, however, Mernissi seems to acknowledge the re-appropriation of her speech act into dominant structures of knowledge. She therefore seems to point out and to problematize a circular epistemology that receives her own speech into already accepted ontological categories and reproduce these categories by dismissing or erasing the aspects of her speech which call them and their presumed meanings into question.

Across the two books, Mernissi shows herself renegotiating the discourses which discipline her (and her speech). She does so by switching back and forth between the positions of reader and author. In doing so, she demonstrates the *reciprocity* of the disciplinary gaze (she looks back at her dominants, reading their own reading of her representation of her social group) and provides a model of autoethnographic dialogue.

Autoethnographic endeavors are necessarily dialogic. Their authors read dominant discourses and (re)present them to their dominants. What we see in (post)colonial autoethnography is "the invader's language appropriated by the invadee to address the invader; the invadee's interests expressed in discursive apparatuses adapted from the invader and redirected back at him." (Pratt 1994: 25). As Pratt (25) argues, this is "not an unusual situation historically... but perhaps one that could bear more reflection" (Pratt 1994: 25). Pratt's (1992: 4) conceptualization of autoethnography and the ways in which any given autoethnographic endeavor is received by members of dominant populations provide opportunities for reflecting on "the possibilities and perils"
of transcultural communication undertaken from a subordinate position. The production and reception of autoethnographies cannot be understood outside their contextual power relations and the histories of those power relations.

For example, we have seen that the discursive emphasis on Islamic patriarchal traditions (in dominant representations of veiling, harems, or female seclusion) has played a constitutive role in defining Muslim women within the transcultural arena. These are the discursive constructs through which Muslim women are apprehended by their dominants. As such, they place constraints on Muslim women, but as Mernissi's self-representations show, these same discourses may be used as tools of autoethnographic communication. Mernissi's texts, when read for their disruptive potentials, are not only constricted by their contextual discourses. Instead the discourses become useful tools. Mernissi performs these discourses, but her performance is a simultaneous intervention in transcultural terrains of signification. Recall, however, that some reviewers of Mernissi's first book seem to read the text for its confirmations of dominant knowledges (they assimilate her text through dominant practices of signification), thereby dissipating its disruptive potentials at the point of intersection between text and audience. These reviewers seem to miss the possibility that the text can simultaneously accommodate dominant knowledges and disrupts them. This is where Pratt's conceptualization of autoethnography is perhaps most useful: it recognizes the possibility (or the necessity) of simultaneous accommodation and resistance.

Pratt reminds us that if "autoethnographic texts are read simply as 'authentic' self-expression or 'inauthentic' assimilation, their transcultural character is obliterated and their dialogic engagement with western modes of representation lost" (Pratt 1992: 102).
Mernissi’s texts (as autoethnographic interventions) and their receptions highlight the paradoxical simultaneity of accommodation and resistance. Yet, autoethnographic texts’ “expressive power is anchored in ... intercultural dynamics ... and the history of colonial subordination” (Pratt 1992: 195). We cannot read them with an aim of recuperating some figure of an authentic native or seeking “some mythical aboriginal essence” (Barker, Hulme, and Iverson 1994: 17). To do so is to collude in the coloniser histories that have created a myth of origins and in modernist constructions of disparate categories of identity whose distance from one another is maintained through practices of exclusion. The borders that construct our identity categories are fluid and permeable; Mernissi cannot be categorized as either a feminist or a Muslim because she inhabits these discursive categories simultaneously. To insist on receiving knowledges only into predefined categories or to discipline subordinate peoples’ actions or self-understanding by forcing them into acceptable ontologies is to rely on flawed epistemologies.

Mernissi’s texts, for example, cannot be read for their full potential as relying on or perpetuating either Islamic or Western knowledges. The texts highlight Mernissi’s peculiar subject position, common for many colonized women, of having to simultaneously address members of their own social group and members of the dominant population. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has written extensively about the experiences and effects of colonized women’s being defined by multiple discourses from the outside in. In “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Spivak (1988: 296) argues that colonialism was often justified on the basis of its “benevolence,” as “White men are saving brown women from brown men.” Within such formulations of colonialism, the subjectivities of colonized
women were imaginatively substituted both by colonizing discourses and by traditionalist discourses of nationalist authenticity and independence.

Discussing the debates about the practice of *suttee* (or widow sacrifice) between British colonizers and local Indian men (and collaborations between them), Spivak argues that two major formulations were used in speaking of the actions of the widows. In the first instance, British colonizers claimed they were “saving brown women from brown men.” The women were represented as acting on their own term (as subjects) only if they refused the act of self-immolation (i.e. if they acted in accordance with the desires/orders of the British colonizer). Within this formulation, the women’s subjective agency was limited to their capacity to confirm the benevolence of British rule. In the second instance, Spivak argues that “traditionalists” contended, “the women wanted to die” (1988: 297; 1999: 287). Here, the women can only act as agents when they engage in self-immolation (when they act as the champions of what had become constructed as a site of traditionalist preservation of Indian-ness). In both cases, however, the agency of the women is recognized only to confirm one of the sides in an objectifying debate.

In *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999), Spivak argues that the recognition of subaltern women’s subjectivities (discursively recreated as a singular subjectivity) only as evidence for or against colonization is part of an “itinerary of recognition through assimilation of the Other [which] can be … interestingly traced … in the imperialist constitution of the colonial subject and the foreclosure of the figure of the ‘native informant’” (1999: 281, emphasis added).51 According to Spivak, subaltern women’s subjectivities are only recognized through assimilating the figure of the subaltern woman

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51 Chapter Three of *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999) includes a revised version of “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1986). Spivak makes the same arguments in both pieces, but her conclusion changes in the later piece.
into dominant discourses either as “the object of protection from her own kind” (281, emphasis in original), or as the image of nationalist identity/independence. In both cases, she is assimilated into a discourse (i.e. benevolent colonization or traditionalist preservation and national independence) as the object of that discourse. In the same way that the figure of the Native Informant can only speak as confirmatory evidence of dominant knowledges, so too the figure of the subaltern woman can only act as corroborating evidence. This places the figure of the subaltern woman in a paradoxical subject position. She is the object of dominant knowledge whose subjectivity is substituted by those permitted to act as subjects. In other words, as Spivak (1999: 270) argues (quoting Said), those with “permission to narrate,” do so; they narrate the subject position(s) and desire(s) of the subaltern women who remain silent objects of “two contending versions of freedom” (296) articulated for them. Spivak’s argument is not that one of these versions is correct and the other is inaccurate. Instead, the point is that these discourses speak for the women, preventing them from speaking. Further, these are discourses which search for the recognizable or already familiar.

Like Passaro’s (1997: 161) “epistemologies of received categories of collective identity,” and Spivak’s (1999: 281) “itinerary of recognition through assimilation,” Kelly Oliver’s (1994: 100) “pathology of recognition” highlights the effects of reading people and their actions in ways that look to confirm predetermined knowledges about them. Oliver (1994: 170) reminds us that “some of the … problematic aspects of using recognition as the basis of identity and ethical relations are signaled by its definition: the idea that recognition is always of something already known.” Oliver maintains that social agents must move beyond mere “recognition” of one another’s subjectivity. She argues
that "recognition" still entails a subject-object divide, where the subject has the power to recognize the object. In this way, "the right to speak, the right to claim agency or subjectivity, the right to claim humanity are made the prerogatives of the dominator…

Demands for recognition from the oppressed are the result of their being put on trial" (Oliver 1994: 100). The other sense of "recognition," also signaled by its definition, is that "to confer recognition is to confer validity, existence, and entitlement" (170). On the production end of autoethnographic texts, this sense of recognition is important.

Autoethnographers already exist within power relations which give the dominant the prerogative of recognition. While recognition is clearly problematic, it is a useful autoethnographic tool, and it constitutes autoethnographic accommodation. By providing their dominants with something to recognize, and by drawing on the dominant's power to recognize, autoethnographers are able to force entry into dominant terrains of signification by utilizing the very power relations that have previously excluded them. While the autoethnographer's entry into these terrains does not immediately dissolve their contextual power relations, it is a tactic with the potential to disrupt these relations, but it also requires something on the reception end.

Unsatisfied with recognition, Oliver offers witnessing as a model for dialogic engagement because it assumes an addressee as a subjective agent: "If, as Butler and Honneth maintain, 'I' can only say 'I' in response to an address from another, or as an addressee, it is also true that 'I' can say 'I' only by supposing an addressee, the one to whom I address myself. Without an addressee… I cannot exist" (Oliver 2001: 88). Oliver uses this formulation to argue that subjectivity is enabled by "infinite response-ability," or by being addressed as a subjective agent. She says, "address-ability and response-
ability are the conditions for subjectivity. The subject is the result of a response to an address from another and the possibility of addressing itself to another” (105). Oliver (105) concludes that “restoring response-ability is an ethical responsibility.”

On the reception end of any communicative expression, dialogue and the complications of dominant knowledges can be enabled by nurturing response-ability. When we approach a speech act in a way that preludes response from its speaker, we destroy their subject position as speaker and enact a power relation. When this occurs within the context of a power relation that already denies the Other’s ability to speak (as subject), our foreclosure of their response-ability reiterates the power relation by disciplining their speech. In such instances, a potential partner in dialogue is reproduced as a receptacle of our knowledges; we prevent the Other from speaking.

In *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, Spivak (1999: 308) argues *not*, as she had in “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, that “the subaltern cannot speak!” but that “the subaltern as female cannot be heard or read.” Spivak (309) concedes that her own ability to have read these (not strictly) subaltern women’s lives in order to retell some of their stories theoretically means that they have spoken since “all speaking, even the most immediate, entails a distanced decipherment by another.” Yet, Spivak (1999: 309) cautions that “the moot decipherment by another in an academic institution [i.e. Spivak’s rereading of these women’s actions]... must not be too quickly identified with the ‘speaking’ of the subaltern.” She (309) therefore asks the pertinent question “What is at stake when we insist that the subaltern speaks?” (or when we insist that the subaltern has spoken, or give finality to an interpretation of subaltern speech). She further warns that “it is important to acknowledge our complicity in the muting” (309) of the subaltern.
For Spivak, we need to question how we, as readers or researchers (subjects), participate in constructing Othered subjectivities as objects. She argues that when postcolonial critics or nationalists, for example, take colonizers as a scapegoat (i.e. as the sole reason for or cause of the subaltern’s silence), we further participate in that silencing by covering up other silencing elements of their lives. In her example of *suttee*, to insist that the British rendered it impossible for the widows involved to speak or act as subjects, without also acknowledging the roles played by traditionalists (or by academics who interpret the history of *suttee*), is to condone the latter’s roles in that silencing or objectification. The women are not positioned only in relation to a single (colonialist) discourse; they are not subaltern by virtue of being postcolonial, but their “subalternity can be staked out across strict lines of definition by virtue of their muting by heterogeneous circumstances” (308, emphasis added).

Spivak (1999: 310) reminds her readers that “simply by being postcolonial or the member of an ethnic minority, we are not ‘subaltern.’” This means that autoethnographers, although subordinate in some power relations, are not, by virtue of that fact, subalterns. For example, Mernissi is a Muslim Arabic North African woman; she is postcolonial and she is female. Her texts address her dominants across colonial and gendered fields of power (North-Western Euro-Americans and men). Yet, if class is taken into account, Mernissi cannot be understood as subaltern. In *Dreams of Trespass*, Luza (the doorkeeper’s wife) is mentioned twice – and in both instances to tell us that Luza can leave the harem in order to undertake paid employment, but Luza never speaks. Mernissi does not necessarily speak for Luza, but the fact remains that Luza is subordinate to Mernissi across class lines. The point is that autoethnographic texts may speak over or
silence the experiences of those who have no access to dominant terrains of signification (as opposed to the autoethnographer’s limited access). Spivak asks us to keep in mind the multiplicity of (often contradictory and reinforcing) discourses and subject positions we are constantly negotiating as readers and as authors. For third world women, there are always several of these discourses which function together to create them as subalterns in some arenas, but there are other discourses which do provide them with the opportunity to act as subjects (even if their subjectivity is partially dictated by these discourses).

Spivak (1999: 310, emphasis added) consequently argues that

When a line of communication is established between a member of subaltern groups and the circuits of citizenship or institutionality, the subaltern has been inserted into the long road to hegemony. Unless we want to be romantic purists or primitivists about ‘preserving subalternity’ – a contradiction in terms – this is absolutely to be desired.

The tactic of autoethnography is to establish such a line of communication between dominant and subordinate populations.
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