LISTENING TO THE VOICES OF OUR SISTERS

On notions of sameness and notions of otherness
in feminist discourses on saving women

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Introduction

'live loud and proud like you deserve
and reject their bullshit definition
of what a woman should look like'

- Rupi Kaur (2020: 160)

The message of this poem is one that I couldn't agree with more. No one can decide for another woman what a woman should look like. In fact, I am convinced that no one can even decide what being a woman means for another woman. When I look at the women around me, I see a wide collection of definitions of what it might mean to be a woman. No two women are the same, so a fixed definition of being a woman can't be given.

This is in stark contrast to the idea that women from the West need to save women who live in other places in the world. The assumption of feminist discourses on saving women is that, since women who live in other places in the world have no rights or are not developed, they must be oppressed and need to be saved from this oppression (Stout 2008: 734). The goal of these discourses is to save women from the lives they are living and to help them develop to the same level as where the feminists who formulate these discourses are. This is in contrast to the idea that the meaning of being a woman differs for every woman since the feminists who have formulated discourses on saving women argue to know what other women need and that what those women need is the same as they need themselves.

It is this idea of development that first caught my attention when reading about these discourses. I remember very vividly how the concept of development was problematized during the first year of the bachelor program. The terms developed and underdeveloped are often used as static concepts that form a dichotomy. However, these concepts are not static, they are fluid; what is considered to be developed and what is considered to be underdeveloped changes over time and space (Willis 2011: 2). Also, whether or not development is always better is another question that needs to be asked. From the Eurocentric point of view that notions of development and what it means to be developed are based on, it might seem better. Eurocentrism means that Europe or the West are seen as the center of importance, what leads to considering ideas from Europe or the West to be the best (Willis 2011: 18). This often means that European societies are seen as the example of what others should want and need to live up to. In the context of the Eurocentric view of development, this means that others should take Europe as an example and strive to achieve the same level of development as could be seen in Europe. However, imposing a Eurocentric view of development onto others might have very negative consequences like the vanishing of cultures, languages and religions and the pollution and devastation of nature and the environment (Willis 2011: 32). Development is therefore a

concept that should be problematized, especially when people assume to know what is best for others. Since feminist discourses on saving women are based on notions of development and underdevelopment, these discourses and their effects and consequences should be critically examined.

However, it is not notions of development and underdevelopment alone that should be critically looked at when thinking about feminist discourses on saving women. The classifications that are used in these discourses are also food for critical thought. Feminist discourses on saving women are based on notions of otherness and sameness. On the one hand, there are notions sameness: the women who have to be saved according to these discourses have some shared characteristics with the feminists who want to save them. These shared characteristics lead to the urge to save women. But on the other hand, there are notions of otherness involved, notions of otherness show in what aspects feminists who want to save other women differ from the women they want to save, and indicate what the women might need saving from according to feminist discourses on saving women. Notions of sameness and otherness are the basis of feminist discourses on saving women because these notions lead to establishing who needs saving and who doesn't need saving. However, different feminist discourses on saving women target different groups of women who are supposed to be in need of saving. Therefore, how the notions of sameness and otherness occur in feminist discourses on saving women might differ in every feminist discourse on saving women. This is what I want to explore further with the research question 'How do notions of sameness and notions of otherness shape feminist discourses on saving women?'

I consciously choose to use the plural form of 'discourse', 'discourses', in the research question to emphasize that even though all feminist discourses on saving women have the same goal, namely to save women, all these discourses differ slightly in the specific group of women that should be saved and why this specific group of women is in need of saving. I use the word 'shape' to give emphasis to the fact that differing notions of sameness and otherness eventually define what women need saving from according to a feminist discourse. By notions of sameness I mean the ways in which women are categorized as the same as each other or as similar to the feminists who formulate discourses on saving women. By notions of otherness I mean the ways in which women are categorized as different from each other or as different from feminists who formulate discourses on saving women.

In order answer the research question, I will start by exploring how notions of sameness could be seen. In what ways are women seen as similar to each other or similar to feminists who formulate discourses on saving women? Then I will move on to exploring how notions of otherness could be seen. In what ways are women seen as others? Why are women seen as different from each other or different from feminists who formulate discourses on saving women? After this, I will explore if there are notions of sameness and otherness that might not be incorporated in feminist discourses on saving women. Are women sometimes seen as similar while they should be seen as different? And are women sometimes seen as different when there are also similarities? Next, I will look into how

women who need saving according to feminist discourses on saving women see themselves. To they also think that they need to be saved? And finally I will explore possible side effects of the use of notions of sameness and otherness as could be seen in feminist discourses on saving women. Do these classifications have unintended consequences?

To explore feminist discourses on saving women, I will be looking at three main sources: Abu-Lughod (2013), Mohanty (1988) and Stout (2008). In all three works, feminist discourses on saving women can be found, but the authors all look at different feminist discourses on saving women; each author discusses a different group of women that is in need of saving according to a feminist discourse on saving women. Abu-Lughod (2013) provides counter arguments to the popular opinion that all Muslim women are oppressed by their religion and need to be saved from this. She argues that Muslim women living in the Middle East are indeed often oppressed, but that Islam is not the only source of this oppression (Abu-Lughod 2013: 74; 221). She contends that more attention needs to be paid to the context in which women live because their lived experiences are strongly influenced by historical, political and cultural processes, and thus not just by their religion (Abu-Lughod 2013: 43; 87; 221). Mohanty argues that women living in the third world shouldn't be homogenized and placed in one category because the social, cultural and historical contexts of all these women differ too much to be seen as comparable to each other (Mohanty 1988: 79; 80) . An important part of her argumentation is that this homogenization of women living in the third world is a form of colonization because the homogenization of women into one category of 'the third world woman' structurally oppresses the differences between the lives of these women (Mohanty 1988: 61; 63; 79). Stout (2008) shows that there is a dichotomy in how Cuban feminists and Western feminists look at and think about sex workers in Cuba: Cuban feminists see Cuban sex workers as victims of capitalism, while Western feminists see Cuban sex workers as victims of socialism (Stout 2008: 727; 730; 731'733-734). Stout argues that there is a middle way in this dichotomy by contending that Cuban sex workers do not see themselves as victims of prostitution or poverty, but are trying to make the most out of the circumstances they are in (Stout 2008: 738-740).

Before I continue, I want to place Mohanty (1988) in a broader context because of the use of the term third world. She uses this term often, and I've chosen to use this term as well when discussing her arguments to stay true and as close as possible to her arguments. Nowadays, we see this term as aged or outdated and no longer use it in academic writing. However, at the time of writing, the terms First, Second and Third World were still commonly used since all three 'worlds' were still in place. It was only after the fall of the Second World, with the communist USSR as its center, that this way of classifying countries was no longer correct (Willis 2011: 16-17), which happened shortly after the publication of Mohanty (1988). Even though the term 'Third World' might be outdated, the use of this term does not detract from the arguments Mohanty (1988) presents for it's not the name of the classification that is important, but how classifications are used to label others as same or different. Besides, the resemblance of the classifications that are part of Mohanty (1988) in relation to the

classifications found in Abu-Lughod (2013) and Stout (2008) also make clear that Mohanty (1988) is still relevant.

Sameness

Even though notions of sameness and otherness are often interlaced with each other, it is easier to understand how these notions occur and how differences between different feminist discourses on saving women come to life when looking at notions of sameness and notions of otherness separately. An understanding of the different notions of sameness makes the notions of otherness more comprehensible. For this reason, I start with exploring notions of sameness that can be found in feminist discourses on saving women. These notions of sameness are often based on universalism. By this I mean that it is assumed that there are characteristics that all women worldwide have; these characteristics are universal. In feminist discourses on saving women, these universal characteristics create a feeling of being connected to other women. It is this assumed connection with women who live in other places in the world that creates the urge in feminists who formulate discourses on saving women to want to save women who live in other places in the world.

A shared sisterhood

Notions of sameness and universalism occur very clearly in the assumption of a shared sisterhood. This assumption is based on having the same gender: because we are all women, we all face oppression, and this oppression creates a bond among women, a certain kind of sameness (Mohanty 1988: 65-66). Even though Mohanty is critical of statements like these, she shows that women are often seen as 'all sisters in struggle' (Mohanty 1988: 65). Women are homogenized and thought of as the same as each other because they all face certain forms of oppression. In this idea of a shared sisterhood, not only the women who need to be saved according to feminist discourses on saving women are included, the feminists who formulate these discourses are part of this sisterhood as well because of the shared gender of all women. This shared sisterhood was even observed by former United States president George W. Bush, who called Muslim women living in the Middle East 'our sister "women of cover"' (Abu-Lughod 2013: 29).

In Abu-Lughod (2013), the notion of a shared sisterhood is not only visible in the way that people like former president Bush speak of Muslim women as sisters, but also in the discussion of the pulp-nonfiction genre on abused, underdeveloped or oppressed women who mostly happen to be Muslims (Abu-Lughod 2013: 87). Even though the women whose lives are portrayed in the books of this genre live very different lives from women in the West, they seem to value and want the same as women from the West (Abu-Lughod 2013: 101). Wanting the same in life and wanting to live by the same values creates a sense of similarity and leads to women from the West thinking of these Muslim

women whose lives are portrayed in books of the pulp-nonfiction genre as sisters, not because their current lives are the same, but because they want the same in life and have the same needs. Examples of the values that create this bond are freedom, choice and love, also in combination with each other in the value of sexual freedom (Abu-Lughod 2013: 101). In this genre of books, and in the feminist discourse on saving women that is voiced in the books of this genre, the sameness of women and their shared sisterhood cannot only be found in a shared gender, but also in the assumption of universal values and universal goals of what a woman's life should be like.

The notion of sisterhood can also be found in Stout (2008). Though in Stout (2008) this notion is a bit more complicated, as it involves three groups of women where there are two groups of women in Mohanty (1988) and Abu-Lughod (2013). The two groups we find in Mohanty (1988) are the feminists who have created the category of third-world women and the women who, according to these feminists, belong to the category of third-world women. The women who belong to the former are the ones who want to save others, the women who belong to the latter are the ones who are believed to be in need of saving. The same dichotomy is made by Abu-Lughod (2013): feminists who feel the need to save Muslim women living in the Middle East make up one group, the women who supposedly need to be saved, Muslim women living in the Middle East, form the second group. In Stout (2008), the women who are believed to be in need of saving are Cuban sex workers. There are two groups who want to save Cuban sex workers: Western feminists and Cuban feminists. These Western feminists and Cuban feminists have different motivations for wanting to save Cuban sex workers and have different opinions about what Cuban sex workers need to be saved from (Stout 2008: 727; 729-730; 733-734; 742). But what these Western feminists and Cuban feminists have in common, is that they both feel connected to the Cuban sex workers because they are women; this shared gender creates a sense of a shared or global sisterhood, what leads the Western and Cuban feminists to the idea that they need to save the Cuban sex workers (Stout 2008: 729; 734). So in this case, the sameness of Cuban sex workers and feminists who want to save them is based on gender, as is also the case in Mohanty (1988) and Abu-Lughod (2013).

However, just as the notion of sameness in Abu-Lughod (2013) differs from the notion of sameness in Mohanty (1988), since the values that are assumed to be universal in Abu-Lughod (2013) aren't mentioned in Mohanty (1988), the notion of sameness that can be found in Stout (2008) also differs from the notions of sameness that are found in Abu-Lughod (2013) and Mohanty (1988) through the double claim of sisterhood; two differing groups, namely Cuban feminists and Western feminists, argue to be connected to and share a sisterhood with Cuban sex workers. This shows that notions of sameness are different in different feminist discourses on saving women.

All under the same umbrella

Notions of sameness also occur in another way, namely in the idea that all women that need to be saved are the same as each other. In these notions of sameness, the women who need saving according

to feminist discourses on saving women are homogenized. Where feminist discourses on saving women included the feminists who want to save other women in the previous notions of sameness, these feminists are left out of the notions of sameness that I will address next.

Mohanty uses the classification of the 'third-world women' to explain how the women who need to be saved according to the feminist discourse on saving women she discusses are seen as the same as each other (1988: 66-74). She shows how all women who live in the third world are homogenized and brought together as one analytical group, even though the lives of all these different women are not necessarily comparable. A popular thought is that these women are powerless, so they can't save themselves, and that they are victims of the systems they live in (Mohanty 1988: 66). What the women are victim of does seem to differ; some are seen as victims of physical male violence, some of kinship structures and others might be seen as victims of their economic situation or religion (Mohanty 1988: 66; 68-70; 70-71; 71-73). But what they all have in common, is that they are victimized. Here a contrast can be seen with the notion of the shared sisterhood that included feminists who formulate discourses on saving women. These feminists argue that all women are oppressed, themselves included. But they see a victimhood in the third world women that they don't see in themselves.

The homogenization of women is also clearly noticeable in what Abu-Lughod calls 'IslamLand' (Abu-Lughod 2013: 69-71). IslamLand consists of all countries where Islam is the main religion and it is supposed to be the place where women are most oppressed (Abu-Lughod 2013: 69). All countries where people believe in Islam are seen as similar because these countries have one shared characteristic: the main religion is Islam. Not only the countries where Islam is the main religion are seen as similar, all Muslim people are seen as similar. This means that all Muslim women are also seen as similar to each other, despite the fact that, in reality, these countries and their people differ greatly. So because of a shared religion, all Muslim women are homogenized and seen as similar to each other. This is also why the feminists didn't include themselves in this notion of sameness in the way they did include themselves when they contended that shared oppression creates a shared sisterhood: they don't live in countries where Islam is the main religion.

Even though women who need to be saved according to feminist discourses on saving women are all seen as similar and therefore homogenized and placed in one category, what these homogenizations are based on does seems to differ for different feminist discourses on saving women. Victimhood can be the factor that a homogenization is based on, but so can religion. Each feminist discourse has a specific group of saviors and a specific group of women who need to be saved. The homogenizations that are made to place people in the same category, to see them as similar to each other, differ for every individual feminist discourse on saving women. So again, notions of sameness might differ in different feminist discourses on saving women.

Otherness

So far, I have explored how notions of sameness occur in feminist discourses on saving women. These notions of sameness show similarities between feminists who formulate discourses on saving women and the women who need to be saved according to these discourses, and among the women who need saving according to feminist discourses themselves. However, there are also differences between feminists who formulate discourses on saving women and the women who supposedly need saving according to these discourses. In feminist discourses on saving women, the women who are supposed to be in need of saving according to these discourses are seen as others in relation to the feminists who formulate discourses on saving women. The differences between the feminists who want to save others and formulate discourses on saving women and the women that need saving according to these discourses indicate what those women need saving from. In other words, notions of otherness in feminist discourses on saving women imply what women might need saving from.

Not really sisters

Just like notions of sameness and sisterhood occurred in two ways in Stout (2008), the Cuban feminists and Western feminists have different perspectives on why Cuban sex workers should be seen as others. From the perspective of some Cuban feminists, Cuban sex workers are victims of capitalism, and this capitalism endangers the Cuban socialist system (Stout 2008: 727; 730). Other Cuban feminists don't see the sex workers as victims, but argue that their choice to work in the sex trade is a sign of a 'crisis of moral and social values' (Stout 2008: 731). In other words, they are bad socialists for wanting more consumer goods than they could afford with the government determined wages (Stout 2008: 735). Both views argue that Cuban sex workers are different from the Cuban feminists in their choice to engage in the sex trade.

Western feminists see themselves as different from Cuban sex workers in another way. They place Cuban sex workers in systems of poverty because of the socialist system, arguing that Cuban sex workers need sex work to make enough money to survive (Stout 2008: 733-734). In this context, the other is defined as the victim of a socialist system. Not only are Cuban sex workers victims of the poverty or scarcity they experience due to the socialist system, they are also seen more directly as victims of their government since the government spreads propaganda that 'prevents them from recognizing how they are forced into prostitution' (Stout 2008: 740). From this point of view, Cuban sex workers and Western feminists differ from each other not only in the choice of Cuban sex workers to engage in the sex trade, but also because the Western feminists see Cuban sex workers as victims of poverty and the socialist Cuban government that they are not part of themselves.

In the case of the Afghan women that Abu-Lughod (2013) describes, there is one practice that makes the difference between the feminists who want to save others and the women they believe to be in need of saving easily noticeable. That is the practice of veiling (Abu-Lughod 2013: 35-40). For

these Afghan women, the practice of veiling is associated with liberty while remaining modest, respectable and protected from unwanted interactions with men (Abu-Lughod 2013: 35-36). However, in Western countries the practice of veiling is often interpreted as an absence of agency or as a sign that women don't have freedom (Abu-Lughod 2013: 39-40). The practice of veiling is seen as a sign of oppression since it is believed in the West that women don't choose themselves to wear some type of veil. So according to this feminist discourse on saving women, women who wear a veil should be saved from this practice so they can reclaim their agency and freedom. The idea that women who wear a veil don't have agency over themselves is what leads the feminists who formulate this discourse on saving women to think of themselves as different from Afghan women who wear a veil because these feminists consider themselves to have the agency and freedom they don't see in women who practice veiling.

Violence against women, and particularly honor crime, is interpreted as part of the culture of places where Islam is the main religion and is also used to show how feminists who formulate discourses on saving women and the societies they live in differ from the Muslim women they want to save. Honor crime encompasses all kinds of violence that are committed by family members against women of the family who, in their eyes, didn't conform to rules, mainly rules about sexuality (Abu-Lughod 2013: 113). Honor crime is seen as different from other types of domestic violence in the sense that culture is often blamed as the cause of honor crime (Abu-Lughod 2013: 114). So violence against women is seen as inherently cultural or as an integral part of a community (Abu-Lughod 2013: 114). Honor crime occurs in communities where honor is an important value. Since honor and modesty are important values in Islam, Muslim communities are seen as prone to violence against women, and are therefore thought of as communities where honor crimes occur (Abu-Lughod 2013: 116-118; 128). Muslim women not only need to be saved from this kind of violence, according to feminists who formulate discourses on saving Muslim women, but living in a society that uses this type of violence against women also makes Muslim women very different from these feminists.

Lastly, from Abu-Lughod (2013) it becomes clear that feminists who formulate discourses on saving Muslim women see Muslim women who live in the Middle East as different from themselves in the sense of rights. The widespread idea is that Muslim women who live in the Middle East don't have any rights (Abu-Lughod 2013: 146). The concept of universal human rights is an important building block in this idea (Abu-Lughod 2013: 82). Human rights are promoted as women's rights, emphasizing that women should have the same rights as other humans, thereby arguing for gender equality (Abu-Lughod 2013: 84). But since the view of feminists from the West is that Muslim women living in the Middle East are not equal to the Muslim men in their societies and are oppressed by these men, it is also believed that these Muslim women don't have any rights. This lack of rights and inequality form the difference between the feminists who want to save Muslim women and the Muslim women that need to be saved according to these feminists since these feminists believe that they do have rights and are more equal to the men in their societies.

In these different feminist discourses on saving women, different notions of otherness occur. These differing notions of otherness do not only show how feminists who formulate discourses on saving women differ from the women they want to save, they also indicate the different structures and processes that the women who need saving according to these discourses need saving from: Cuban sex workers differ from the Cuban and Western feminists who want to save them by engaging in sex work, sex work is what Cuban sex workers need saving from; Afghan women differ from the feminists who formulated the discourse on saving them by the practice of veiling, this practice of veiling is what Afghan women need saving from; Muslim women differ from the feminists who have formulated the discourse on saving them by living in societies where violence against women occurs, this violence is what Muslim women need saving from; and Muslim women living in the Middle East differ from the feminists who want to save them because they don't have rights, this lack of rights is what Muslim women living in the Middle East should be saved from.

Women versus men

Another way in which otherness can be applied to women, is in the dichotomy between men and women. The male-female divide is assumed to be a natural one, just as the divide between nature and culture is assumed to be a natural one that can't be argued with (Mohanty 1988: 77). This male-female divide leads to a dichotomy between men and women. Because women are seen as a group, and that group happens to be seen as victims, powerless and exploited, men are considered the ones with power since men form the opposite of women (Mohanty 1988: 72-73). This leads to notions of male dominance and female exploitation (Mohanty 1988: 74). The sexual division of labor is an example that makes the difference between men and women clearer. Sexual division of labor means that some types of work are seen as women's work, while other types of work are considered to be for men. The work men do and the work women do does not only differ, but the work that is done by men is often valued more positively than the work done by women (Mohanty 1988: 76). Since this sexual division of labor shows that the work that women do is valued more negatively compared to the work that men do, this division of labor is often used to prove that women are oppressed by men (Mohanty 1988: 76). The knowledge of the sexual division of labor is not used to change the circumstances that women are in, it only points out the differences between men and women and proves that women are oppressed, therefore it also proves the dichotomy between men and women (Mohanty 1988: 73).

In the case of the Cuban sex workers that Stout (2008) describes, the difference between men and women becomes clear in a more practical way. In Cuba, the government organized eradication and rehabilitation programs that provided schooling and financial support to provide opportunities for sex workers to get back into socially acceptable jobs (Stout 2008: 726-727). Remarkable is that these programs focused on women engaging in the sex trade, not on men engaging in the sex trade (Stout 2008: 727). Women had to condemn sex work (Stout 2008: 727), but the male sex workers are not mentioned. Even though men performing sex work are also disapproved of (Stout 2008: 728), all

measures for discarding sex work focused only on women doing sex work. This leads to 'the use of the female body as a bearer of national purity' (Stout 2008: 728), what means that the bodies of women and what women decide to do with their bodies become a symbol for the state of the country, women are watched closely and carefully to make sure they don't do anything that might harm the image of the country. It forces women to carry a burden that the men don't even have to think about, what contributes to an even bigger disadvantage for women and therefore an even less equal position for women compared to men.

These notions of otherness are about differences between women and men, rather than differences between feminists who want to save other women and women who need to be saved according to these feminists. Still these notions of otherness that I described above indicate what women need saving from according to feminist discourses on saving women: feminist who formulate discourses on saving women want to save women who live in other places in the world from oppression by men, these feminists want to create more equality between women and men who live in other places in the world.

Not all in the same boat

So far I have shown how notions of sameness and notions of otherness can be found in feminist discourses on saving women. I have explained the different ways in which women are seen as similar to each other and to feminists who formulate discourses on saving women, and I have explained how women are seen as different from feminists who want to save them according to feminist discourses on saving women. However, there are more notions of sameness and notions of otherness to be found in feminist discourses on saving women, notions of sameness and otherness that these discourses and the feminists who formulate them don't pay attention to. These notions of sameness and otherness can be found when critically examining claims of universality and homogenizations that are made in notions of sameness and notions of otherness in feminist discourses on saving women. The women who need to be saved according to these discourses differ from each other in more ways than visible in feminist discourses on saving women, but unexpected similarities between women who need to be saved according to feminist discourses on saving women and feminists who formulate these discourses can also be found.

The idea that all women are sisters, an idea that is based on the assumption of an universal gender identity, is the first example of a claim that is made in feminist discourses on saving women that should be critically looked at. As Mohanty shows, by homogenizing and seeing women as a universal group, all context is taken from the lives of women (Mohanty 1988: 72-74). No attention is paid to the political, cultural or historical context of the places women live in, while it are these contexts that shape and give meaning to the lives of women. Because the lives of women in different places in the world are shaped by different things and are therefore all different, an universal gender

identity does not seem to exist. Due to there not being an universal gender identity, there also can't be a global sisterhood (Bettie 2014: 204), for a shared gender is not enough to assume a sisterhood. In order to speak of a shared sisterhood, there needs to be at least a shared historical, political, cultural or religious context (Mohanty 1988: 67). Since there is no shared historical, political, cultural or religious context between the women who need to be saved according to feminist discourses on saving women and the feminists who formulate and use these discourses, there can't be an actual sisterhood between these two groups. This lack of a shared context is also the reason why not all women who need saving according to feminist discourses should be seen as similar to each other; the contexts these women live in differ too much to homogenize them and place them in one group of women who need saving.

Abu-Lughod (2013) supplements the argument of Mohanty (1988) that women are often unjustly homogenized. The idea that more attention needs to be paid to the context in which women live because the lived experiences of women are not only influenced by religion but also by historical, political and cultural processes occurs in every chapter and is therefore a key point in her argumentation (Abu-Lughod 2013: 43; 74; 87; 136; 157-158; 176). Even though in some cases women do suffer because of their religion or because of how Islamic law is used, religion or Islam is never the only cause of a woman's suffering, as Abu-Lughod illustrates with stories of women she met during her fieldwork, for example the story of Amal (Abu-Lughod 2013: 74-78): with her husband saying he might need to take an extra wife since Amal's long recovery of a free surgery and insufficient medical attention caused her to not be able to work for a long time, Amal seems to be a good example of a disadvantaged Muslim woman. Yet, as her story also shows, this situation had nothing to do with Amal being a Muslim woman. The insufficient medical attention was the result of poverty, and while her husband indeed mentioned having to take another wife, this was a joke stemming from the exhaustion of the constant hard work they were both doing while not getting out of poverty (Abu-Lughod 2013: 76-77). So even though this story might be framed as an example of the oppressed Muslim woman, it in fact shows that there is more to the suffering of Muslim women than what meets the eye at first glance, and therefore that notions of sameness that are based on homogenizations should be complemented by notions of otherness that encompass the different contexts that shaped women's lives.

This leads me back to the notion of IslamLand that I previously mentioned. While it is assumed that all countries where Islam is the main religion are very similar to each other and could be seen as one big homogeneous country, IslamLand does not actually exist (Abu-Lughod 2013: 73). Phrases like 'from Islam to America' (Abu-Lughod 2013: 69) imply that IslamLand is indeed a place since phrases like this give the impression that one can go from place A, Islam, to place B, America. But as Islam is not a place, it is a religion, IslamLand is also not a real county but a made up one. Abu-Lughod invented the notion of IslamLand to show the weirdness of this idea of Islam as a place (Abu-Lughod 2013: 69). IslamLand or the idea of Islam as a place implies that all countries where Islam is the main religion are very similar to each other, while these countries and the people living in them are

in fact not similar at all. Yes, they share the same religion, but all differences because of geography, history, politics, culture, language and also differences within the religion are not taken into account when thinking of Islam as a place (Abu-Lughod 2013: 70-71). This is why one homogeneous IslamLand cannot exist, what makes the assumption that all Muslim women could be seen as similar to each other very unlikely to be true (Abu-Lughod 2013: 73). So again, notions of sameness, the homogenizations based on a shared religion, should be supplemented by notions of otherness that recognize that there are also many differences between countries where Islam is the main religion.

While women are not always as similar to each other as notions of sameness in feminist discourses on saving women make it seem, women might also be more similar to each other or to feminists who want to save them than is recognized in notions of otherness in feminist discourses on saving women. As I have showed, women who live in societies where Islam is the main religion are seen as different from feminists who formulate discourses on saving women because these women live in societies where honor crimes occur. In the case of honor crime, violence against women is interpreted as caused by ethnicity, culture or religion. This stigmatizes entire groups of people and communities instead of only the individuals who commit violence against women (Abu-Lughod 2013: 114). These communities are seen as underdeveloped and uncivilized because they commit violence against women that is based on values that deviate from values like freedom, agency and equality that are considered to be important in the West (Abu-Lughod 2013: 115; 125). However, 'honor cultures do not have a monopoly on violence against women' (Abu-Lughod 2013: 126). Violence against women occurs everywhere and is not exclusively part of Muslim societies or other societies where honor is an important value. When violence against women occurs in Western societies, the individual who commits violence against women is blamed, while culture, religion or ethnicity are blamed when violence against women occurs in societies where honor is an important value (Abu-Lughod 2013: 127-128). But also in societies where honor is an important value, violence against women is the result of an individual that commits this violence. This means that women everywhere can become victims of violence, regardless of the place or societies they live in. So the women who are seen as others because they live in societies where honor crimes occur are not necessarily different from feminists who formulate discourses on saving women just because these women live in societies where honor crime occurs, for violence against women also occurs in the societies where these feminists live.

Another example of similarities between women who need saving according to feminist discourses on saving women and feminists who formulate these discourses can be found when looking closer at the rights of the Muslim women that Abu-Lughod (2013) describes. She describes how the argument that Muslim women don't have any rights and are therefore different from feminists who formulate discourses on saving these Muslim women can be refuted. The Muslim women that are described by Abu-Lughod (2013) do have rights, even according to systems of Islamic law (Abu-Lughod 2013: 146; 164). The problem is that their rights are not always respected. However, this is not an Islamic problem, but rather a personal one. Abu-Lughod shows this with the story of Fayruz

(Abu-Lughod 2013: 143-145): even though she should inherit land according to Islamic inheritance law, the refusal of her religious brother to give her the land she is entitled to is not based on religion but on his own greed. So even though Fayruz has to fight to claim her land, Islam is not the reason that her brother is trying to deny Fayruz her inheritance. For the problem that women's rights are not respected, there are many local initiatives that are working on educating people on this problem and finding solutions for it. Even though the methods and degree of religiosity of organizations like this differ, initiatives like Musawah, Sisters in Islam and WISE all strive to bring more equality and justice to the lives of Muslim women (Abu-Lughod 2013: 177-185). Notions of otherness that argue that Muslim women differ from the feminists who want to save them because they don't have rights are thus not entirely correct. The Muslim women that are described by Abu-Lughod (2013) do have rights, just like the feminists who formulate discourses on saving women have rights. The assumption that is made by feminists who formulate this feminist discourse on saving women that Muslim women don't have rights is therefore not enough to substantiate the notions of otherness as they are used in this feminist discourse on saving Muslim women from their lack of rights.

The last notion of otherness I want to refer back to, is the difference between men and women. The dichotomy between men and women is often seen as universal (Mohanty 1988: 77), what creates the impression that it is this dichotomy that mainly shapes what it means to be a woman. Nevertheless, this is not the only way in which the experience of being a woman is given shape. As Bettie (2014) shows, girls are not only worried about coming across as masculine or feminine, they are also worried about not seeming too alike to girls from other social groups (Bettie 2014: 4). Even though they are all girls, there are also profound differences in how they identify themselves and give shape to their femininity (Bettie 2014: 189). This shows that what it means to be a woman isn't only shaped in opposition to men, but also in opposition to other women (Bettie 2014: 5). Girls' understanding of themselves is created in contact with other girls by seeing differences in how femininity is performed through being part of certain social groups, through dressing certain ways, through notions of sexuality and through obtained levels of school performance (Bettie 2014: 196). This is similar to the argument that Eriksen (2002) makes about ethnicity: ethnic groups are only created in contact with each other when those groups consider themselves to be different from each other, for it is not possible to see differences between groups when those groups have never interacted (Eriksen 2002: 16-17). The sense of self of the school girls in Bettie's ethnography (2014) is created more by interacting with other girls and seeing the differences between them, than by seeing the differences between themselves and the boys in their school. She argues that the different versions of femininity that are performed by different groups should be understood as differences that result from belonging to different social classes, ethnicities and races, since these versions of femininity are not created in interaction with boys, but in interaction with other girls who identify themselves differently (Bettie 2014: 186). In this argument, a notion of intersectionality can be found. The idea behind the notion of intersectionality is that social categories are not only related to each other, but also form and define each other (Yuval-

Davis 2006: 205). This means that notions of intersectionality are to be found in the fact that Bettie (2014) contends that the way femininity is performed is created by the interaction of gender, class, ethnicity and race. So notions of otherness, when it comes to categorizing women, are not only to be found in the difference between women and men. Notions of otherness that can be found among women are also important for it are these notions of otherness that give shape to the identity of women. If what it means to be a women gets meaning in interaction with other women, it is important to not homogenize women so these differences are maintained.

Besides seeing notions of intersectionality at work in Bettie (2014), notions of intersectionality can also be linked to the idea of sisterhood, or actually used to undermine the argument of a global sisterhood. I previously contended that there is no such thing as a global sisterhood because there is no such thing as a universal gender identity. There is no universal gender identity because the meaning of being a woman is not based on gender alone, the meaning of being a woman is shaped in interaction with other women and through interaction of all the different social categories that a woman belongs to. Because all women belong to their own unique set of social categories, their lives and what being a woman means to them differs, as a result of which claims of universality can't be made. So notions of intersectionality problematize the idea of a shared or global sisterhood.

Voices of the 'victims'

So far I have shown how notions of sameness and notions of otherness occur in feminist discourses on saving women, and where those notions might be incomplete. What stands out in feminist discourses on saving women is that the women who need saving according to these discourses are not heard; no attention is paid to how these women see themselves and what they have to say about their own lives. Listening to the voices of women who need to be saved according to feminist discourses on saving women creates different images of these women and their lives than the notions of sameness and notions of otherness that can be found in feminist discourses on saving women create.

Listening to the voices of sex workers creates a different image of why women decide to work in the sex trade. As discussed above, Cuban sex workers are seen as victims of either capitalism and bad morals, or communism and poverty. This contradicts the way the majority of sex workers in Cuba sees themselves. Even though the essence of sex work remains the same, there is a difference between pre-revolution prostitution and post-revolution 'jineterismo' that Cuban sex workers engage in nowadays that plays an important role in how the sex workers see themselves (Stout 2008: 738). In pre-revolution prostitution, the sex workers were seen as victimized prostitutes, but in post-revolution jineterismo, the sex workers are not denied of their agency in the same way as in pre-revolution prostitution, and their free choice to engage in the sex trade is emphasized (Stout 2008: 738). Also, jineterismo is an umbrella term for multiple ways to make an income on the black market, so this doesn't only include sex work (Stout 208: 738-739). The sex workers don't see themselves as

prostitutes without agency but as jineteros, they see themselves as hustling, struggling or fighting to get ahead (Stout 2008: 738-740). Presenting themselves as fighters and trying to provide for a better life for themselves shows the agency they have to give shape to their lives. Cuban sex workers are not mere victims or lacking in morals as the Cuban and Western feminists who have formulated this discourse on saving Cuban sex workers argue, but they are consciously choosing to do what they need to do in order to create better lives for themselves. The otherness that Cuban feminists and Western feminist see when looking at Cuban sex workers is based not only on engaging in the sex trade or not, but is mostly based on what these feminists think drives Cuban sex workers to engage in the sex trade: capitalism and bad morals or being victim of socialism and poverty. However, listening to the voices of Cuban sex workers shows that the assumptions that are made by Cuban and Western feminists who want to save the Cuban sex workers about why these women engage in sex trade are most often not the actual drive to engage in sex work. This means that notions of otherness as they are used in the feminist discourse on saving Cuban sex workers don't reflect the lived experiences of Cuban sex workers.

Abu-Lughod (2013) also puts forward female voices that show that women who are in need of saving according to feminist discourses on saving women see themselves differently than they are seen in those discourses. Abu-Lughod (2013) shows that life of Muslim women living in the Middle East is complicated and that struggle is part of life, but she also shows that these struggles and hardships are not caused by Islam, the assumed reason of oppression and struggle. Zaynab for instance, who is shocked when Abu-Lughod suggests that Muslim women are oppressed because of their religion, clearly voices that many Muslim women are indeed oppressed, but by the governments of the countries they live in or that they struggle because of poverty and not because of their religion (Abu-Lughod 2013: 1). For many Muslim women, Islam is of great importance, their religion is part of their identity and strongly influences their sense of self (Abu-Lughod 2013: 4). Consequently, they don't see themselves as oppressed by their religion. Muslim women actually feel supported by Islam, since rights that are given to women by God are written down in the Qur'an (Abu-Lughod 2013: 167). So while feminist discourses on saving women argue that Muslim women are oppressed by their religion, Muslim women actually draw strength from their religion.

Also interesting, is that Abu-Lughod (2013) shares how the Muslim women from Egypt that she met during her fieldwork see women from the United States. She describes how these Egyptian women see women from the United States as 'bereft of community, cut off from family, vulnerable to sexual violence and social anomie, driven by selfishness or individual success, (…) participant in imperial ventures that don't respect the sovereignty or intelligence of others, or strangely disrespectful of others and God' (Abu-Lughod 2013: 46). What makes this quote interesting is that the Egyptian Muslim women see the feminists and women from the United States as victims of their own society. They are pointing out what, in their eyes, is wrong with the society of the United States. This is in clear contrast with feminist discourses that argue that Muslim women are victims of Islam and of their

societies: while the feminists who have formulated discourses on saving women want to save others from oppression and help those others to develop to the same level as themselves, the Egyptian Muslim women who need to be saved according to one of the feminists discourses on saving women see possibilities for the development of those who want to save them. This shows that how the Egyptian Muslim women think of themselves and their own lives differs greatly from how these women are seen in feminist discourses on saving women.

These examples of how women who need to be saved according to feminist discourses on saving women see themselves show that the way they see themselves differs from how they are seen in these feminist discourses on saving women. It also shows that the women who need saving according to feminist discourses on saving women do not necessarily think of themselves as in need of saving, and that they do not necessarily understand why the feminists who want to save them think they are authorized to do so. As I have explained before, the notions of otherness that are used in feminist discourses on saving women indicate what women might need saving from. But these notions of otherness don't correspond with how the women who need saving according to feminist discourses on saving women see themselves; the women who need saving according to feminist discourses on saving women don't think they need saving, at least not from the things that these feminist discourses argue that they need saving from. This problematizes notions of otherness in the way they are used in feminists discourses on saving women and feminist discourses on saving women in general, for women who need to be saved according to these discourses don't see themselves as in need of saving.

Unintended side effects

Because of the gap between how women who need saving according to feminist discourses on saving women see themselves and how they are seen by these discourses, some side effects of notions of otherness and sameness occur. As I showed before, Egyptian Muslim women who are described by Abu-Lughod (2013) see feminists from the West who formulate feminist discourses on saving women as 'participant in imperial ventures that don't respect the sovereignty or intelligence of others' (Abu-Lughod 2013: 46). As the Egyptian Muslim women have correctly observed by this statement, the discourse on saving women is based on 'a sense of superiority' and the idea that the feminists know better what is good for others than those others themselves (Abu-Lughod 2013: 47). This superiority doesn't only occur in the case of feminists from the West that want to save Muslim women from the Middle East. This sense of superiority or hegemony occurs more generally in feminist discourses on saving women as well (Mohanty 1988: 64). This is often interpretated by the women who are supposed to need saving according to these discourses as imperialism (Mohanty 1988: 64; 77), and I have to agree with them. Unjustly homogenizing women, by which I mean homogenizing women when there are too many differences to be found to justify the homogenization, is a sign of exerting power over others, since the person that homogenizes decides what the identities of these women are

reduced to without consulting the women in question (Mohanty 1988: 79). This amplifies the idea of women as powerless victims that I have mentioned before (Mohanty 1988: 79). Through the exertion of power over others, the agency and autonomy of those women is taken away. The discourse on saving women could then be seen as imperialism, or even colonialism, since feminists from the West feel superior to and exert power over women living in other places in the world (Mohanty 1988: 63; 79). So an unintended consequence of notions of otherness as they are used in feminist discourses on saving women is that they attest a sense of imperialism in feminists who feel the need to save others.

This, then, leads back to the notion of intersectionality that I've discussed before. Feminists who formulate discourses on saving women assume to know what is good for the women who they want to save, because these feminists assume that the women who need saving according to these discourses need the same as they want for themselves. This is part of the Eurocentric view on development that I discussed in the introduction. However, what isn't taken into account in feminist discourses on saving women, is that things like class, race, ethnicity, religion, culture, geography, language and political situations influence what being a woman means to women and therefore also influences what women might need or benefit from (De Jong 2017: 6). These other classifications or factors that influence someone's identity need to be taken into account to make feminism more inclusive: yes, gender inequalities are very present, but the problem of inequality can't be solved if the ways in which these other classifications intersect with each other are not taken into account (De Jong 2017: 29). These notions of intersectionality that are important to understand the lived experiences of women, are missing from the feminist discourses on saving women that I have analyzed here in the phrasing of notions of sameness and notions of otherness. An example of this that I've discussed before is wanting to save Muslim women from Islam while Islam is of great importance to these women and not the source of their oppression. It is the intention of the feminists to help women who live in different circumstances than they live in themselves. But by not taking the different contexts in which these women live into account, by not understanding the lived experiences of the women they want to save, the feminists who feel the urge to save other women are unlikely to accomplish what they have set out to accomplish. In order to help women, feminists who want to save other women need to pay more attention to the different contexts the women that they want to save live in, the lived experiences of these women should be better understood. This is all likely to be achieved by the act of listening to what the women who they want to save have to say about their own needs.

Conclusion

How can this all be used to answer the research question 'How do notions of sameness and notions of otherness shape feminist discourses on saving women?' As I have tried to show, there is not one feminist discourse on saving women. The idea that women who live in other places in the world might need saving is wide spread, and it is this idea that discourses on saving woman are formed around. For

every individual group of women that might need saving, and also for every group of feminists that wants to save others, there is a different discourse on saving women, for these different groups need saving for different reasons and because every group of feminists has different ideas of what they want to save other women from. For example, what the Cuban sex workers in Stout (2008) need saving from differs from what Muslim women in Abu-Lughod (2013) need saving from, and the Western feminists who want to save Cuban sex workers that Stout (2008) describes have different motivations for saving Cuban sex workers than the Cuban feminists that she describes who also want to save those same Cuban sex workers. These different feminist discourses on saving women are based on notions of sameness and notions of otherness. These notions explain how feminists who want to save other women come to the idea of having to save these women; notions of sameness lead to relating to women who are supposed to be in need of saving, relating to these women then creates the urge to save them, while notions of otherness indicate what the women who are supposed to be in need of saving need to be saved from. As I have tried to show in this thesis, notions of sameness and notions of otherness differ according to the feminist discourse on saving women that they are applied to. This is because notions of sameness often create the urge to want to save other women, while notions of otherness indicate what these women need saving from. I tried to show this in the feminist discourses that I discussed. In all these discourses, notions of sameness can be found in the idea of a shared sisterhood based on a shared gender, this assumed sisterly bond motivates feminists who want to save others to pursue this. What these sisters need to be saved from, depends on why feminists who formulate discourses on saving women see them as different, for instance because these sisters live in societies where honor crime occurs, as I discussed previously. So notions of sameness and notions of otherness shape feminists discourses on saving women because these notions are the building blocks that feminist discourses on saving women are based on.

However, notions of sameness and notions of otherness as they are used in feminist discourses on saving women, and feminist discourses on saving women in general as well for they are constructed using these notions, need to be handled with care. This is because the notions of sameness and notions of otherness as they are used in the feminist discourses on saving women that I have explored in this thesis are not always complete. Sometimes the notions of sameness that are used discard the differences between women, for instance when homogenizing and seeing women as one universal group while there are many differences among the women that are categorized in this universal group (Mohanty 1988: 72-74). In this case, notions of sameness should be given a little more nuance by adding notions of otherness. Sometimes the notions of otherness that are used discard similarities between women who need to be saved according to feminist discourses on saving women and the feminists who want to save these women, for instance when it is argued that Muslim women living in the Middle East differ from the feminists who want to save these women because they don't have any rights, while they in fact do have rights (Abu-Lughod 2013: 146; 164). Another reason why notions of sameness, notions of otherness and feminist discourses on saving women in general should

be handled with care, is because the women who need saving according to these discourses often do not think of themselves as in need of saving. As a consequence of this, women who need saving according to feminist discourses on saving women but who don't see themselves as in need of saving interpret the feminist discourses on saving women as imperialism because the feminists who formulate discourses on saving women feel superior to and exert power over the women they want to save.

So even though notions of sameness and notions of otherness are what shape feminist discourses on saving women, one should always remain critical of how these notions are used. The best way to do this, in my eyes, is by paying more attention to the different contexts that women in other places in the world live in, by working on creating a better understanding of the lived experiences of women who need to be saved according to feminist discourses on saving women, and by respecting that women who live in other places in the world might want different things from life. All that is needed to accomplish this, is listening to the voices of women who decide to speak up about their own needs.

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