From the Politics of Representation to the Ethics of Decolonization: What MENA Social Research Can Learn from the "Indigenous Turn"

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I argue that despite becoming a buzzword appropriated by many, "decolonizing" is an intellectual and political project with which social researchers, including those who work on the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), should reckon. Sampling from a particular strand of decolonizing work, which came to be labeled the "Indigenous turn" in anthropology, the essay looks for what might be relevant for the ethics and practices of current social research on, and in, MENA. I also consider some cautions voiced by scholars who – with no illusions about the possibility of value-free social science or scholarship – are wary of the risks of too quickly collapsing politics and academic scholarship into each other.

Anthropology prides itself on being the most reflexive social science, the one whose direct engagement with the people and communities it studies forces it to reflect on and defend its purpose and to attend to ethics in ways that go beyond the formal and bureaucratic.[1] The discipline has been rocked over the past decade by articles like "The Decolonizing Generation: (Race and) Theory in Anthropology since the Eighties," "The Decolonial Turn 2.0: The Reckoning," and Akhil Gupta's 2021 presidential address to the American Anthropological Association, published in the flagship journal of the field under the title "Decolonizing U.S. Anthropology."[2] This address was preceded on November 17, 2021, by his formal apology on behalf of the Association for its historic research practices. The apology began:

> Since its inception, the history of American anthropology has been intertwined with a record of extractive research conducted on Indigenous communities. Anthropologists have often assigned themselves the status of "expert" over the cultural narratives and social histories of the first cultures of the Americas. As "experts" many anthropologists have neither respected Indigenous knowledge systems and community contribu-

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tions nor addressed the intended and unintended impacts of anthropological research on those communities.[3]

If "decolonizing" has become something of a slogan or buzzword, this does not mean that it is not an intellectual and political project with which social researchers, including those who work on the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), should reckon. In this essay, I sample from what might be called the "Indigenous turn" in anthropology to look for what might be relevant for the ethics and practices of current social research on and in MENA.[4] I also consider some cautions voiced by scholars who – with no illusions about the possibility of value-free social science or scholarship – are wary of the risks of too quickly collapsing politics and academic scholarship into each other.

Middle East studies has a long history of critical self-examination, much of it inspired by Edward Said's analysis of the power/knowledge formation of *Orientalism* (1978).[5] In his classic article "Representing the Colonized: Anthropology's Interlocutors" (1989), Said's specific charge against an earlier wave of cultural critique in anthropology is that it failed to take seriously the context of U.S. empire.[6] Later, building on Said's insights, articles in the *Annual Review of Anthropology* traced the patterns and politics of representation of the region, showing how the subjects around which prestigious social theorizing clustered had the effect, perhaps deliberate, of eclipsing other topics that were socially, culturally, and politically significant in this region.[7] Lara Deeb and Jessica Winegar followed this analysis of the patterns of representation by studying empirically and through archival research how anthropologists had been socially disciplined by formal and informal pressures of racism, sexism, and Zionism in the academic fields in which they worked, whether in teaching, employment, or the other professional institutions of the discipline, including publications.[8] The practices, ethics, and political economy of anthropological research came under special scrutiny with Mayssoun Sukarieh and Stuart Tannock's work first on "over-researched" communities and later on what they term "subcontracted" ethnographic research, in the first case on Palestinian refugees and the second on Syrian refugees in Lebanon.[9]

Although the situations in which postcolonial theory (colonial and postcolonial contexts) and decolonizing theory (Indigenous and diasporas in settler colonial contexts) emerged are markedly different, Akhil Gupta and Jessie Stoolman suggest there could be a "productive frisson and synergy between the two."[10] The decolonial turn shifts the focus from power/knowledge formations and the question of representation toward the ethics of social research itself, noting the silences on the political contexts that shape research and make research possible. In particular, the decolonial turn prioritizes those being researched, condemning "extractive" research that does not benefit the communities being studied. On principle, it tends to insist on collaborative methodological and research prac-

tices, often driven by activism. It also calls for institutional transformations regarding exclusions of those being researched, as well as hierarchies of value in types of research and colleagues. What is most compelling is the ethical focus on responsibility.

It is useful to lay out some of the ways this decolonizing move in Indigenous studies has been theorized before reflecting on what might be useful to the field of MENA studies. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, a Māori scholar from Aotearoa/New Zealand, begins her now classic *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (1999) by positioning herself in relation to social research: "From the vantage point of the colonized, a position from which I write, and choose to privilege, the term 'research' is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The word itself, 'research', is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary."[11] Research "told us things already known, suggested things that would not work, and made careers for people who already had jobs."[12] Tuhiwai Smith admits a traffic between the Indigenous or decolonizing critique and the postcolonial Foucauldian critique of the power/knowledge nexus. She quotes Said. But she goes beyond in relating this to the Indigenous contexts where she identifies research "as a significant site of struggle between the interests and ways of the knowing of the West and the interests and ways of resisting of the Other . . . namely *indigenous peoples*."[13] She shifts the emphasis from representation to practice: "Part of the project of this book is 'researching back', in the same tradition of 'writing back' or 'talking back', that characterizes much of the post-colonial or anti-colonial literature."[14]

Tuhiwai Smith insists that she is not antiresearch. She does not say that non-Indigenous scholars cannot do research in and on Indigenous communities. The challenge for them, she notes, is how to work together in ongoing and mutually beneficial ways. The ethical and practical questions being "debated vigorously" in Indigenous communities today are: Whose research is it? Who owns it? Whose interests does it serve? Who will benefit from it? Who has designed its questions and framed its scope? Who will carry it out? Who will write it up? How will its results be disseminated?[15]

> There are diverse ways of disseminating knowledge and of ensuring that research reaches the people *who have helped make it*. Two important ways not always addressed by scientific research are to do with "reporting back" to the people and "sharing knowledge". Both ways assume a principle of reciprocity and feedback. Both of these are long term commitments for indigenous researchers.[16]

Ty P. Kāwika Tengan elaborates on responsibility and reciprocity in a personal essay on his ethnographic work with a men's group in 'Õiwi/Hawai'i to which he belonged. Without romanticizing or simplifying his identity, he introduces him-

self as "someone whose own identity and *kuleana* ('rights and responsibilities') have been formed at the intersection of indigeneity and anthropology."[17] He describes how the experience of a fellow participant taking offense when Tengan shared his dissertation with the group had opened him up to a series of conversations about his work, identities, and responsibilities. He had already been careful to get the permission of this group to do the research and write about it, had consulted them on what they thought would be useful, and felt accountable to them as his primary audience. He involved them in every stage of the research and presented his work "through emails, drafts in hard copy, informal and formal talk, and PowerPoint presentations."[18] He notes that "for anthropologists who claim a native identity, as well as others who collaborate as allies with indigenous causes, this [responsibility] may be felt more keenly because of the multiplicity of obligations, responsibilities and audiences they are held accountable to, especially given the stakes riding upon their work."[19] The political context is crucial: "Those working with peoples, such as Māori and ʻŌiwi, who struggle against settler colonialism must conduct ethnography as a process of unsettling those conditions that maintain and reproduce settler ideologies and denials of indigenous *kuleana* [rights and responsibilities] to place."[20]

In Bolivia, proponents of decolonizing knowledge and research have been more explicit about the emancipatory political potential of such efforts. The bilingual part-Aymara scholar in Bolivia who cofounded the Andean Oral History Workshop in 1983, Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, is best known in the English-speaking world for her 2012 translated essay, "*Ch'ixinakax utxiwa*: A Reflection on the Practices and Discourses of Decolonization."[21] In a two-part article on her work and the oral history project she helped found, journalist and expert on Latin America Benjamin Dangl explains the research methodology of the bilingual Aymara university students who went back to their villages to interview their elders. He points to Cusicanqui's description of the project as "a collective exercise of disalienation, as much for the researcher as for the interlocutor. . . . The interviewees themselves decided on the research approach and topics, how the interviews would be formatted and conducted, how the transcriptions would be returned, evaluated, and discussed by the community, and how the final product would be used."[22]

Dangl notes that there was a connection between research and ongoing Aymara political activism:

> While Indigenous movements were struggling in the streets, in between barricades, for political power and rights, the THOA was fighting intellectual battles to put Indigenous people on the historical map of the country. THOA members used oral history techniques to recover the silenced and fragmented past of Indigenous people, and produced histories for political action in an era of Indigenous resurgence.[23]

In Turtle Island/North America, Audra Simpson's concept of refusal has been influential in rethinking ethnographic work.[24] In her 2014 work *Mohawk Interruptus*, she advocates refusal to reveal ethnographic knowledge because such knowledge has historically been used, and could be used now, for further domination and governance by settler colonial states (in the case of the Kahnawà:ke in the United States and Canada). Zoe Todd's 2016 analysis of the "whiteness" of anthropological public space and exposure of the systemic silences on Indigenous theorizing about topics such as climate and approaches like ontology that *should* be in conversation with Indigenous thinkers working in and with their own cultures and communities also focuses squarely on institutional factors, from citation practices to the hierarchical structures of the academy, in the case she knew well, of Britain.[25]

Adjacent to and sometimes in tension with the Indigenous turn in U.S. anthropology has been an earlier discourse on decolonizing based on race in the wake or long aftermath of the enslavement of Africans for plantation labor in the colonies. Another diasporic stream focuses on the underclass of differently racialized immigrants from elsewhere in the Americas. Jafari Sinclaire Allen and Ryan Cecil Jobson draw attention to a pivotal generation of decolonizers in their reflection on the "cohort of Black, allied antiracist, feminist, and political economy–oriented scholars" that gave rise to the landmark 1997 volume *Decolonizing Anthropology: Moving Further Toward an Anthropology for Liberation* edited by Faye Harrison.[26] These anthropologists used ethnography for "political and epistemic decolonization" and are characterized as having an "activist habit of mind." Allen and Jobson admire them especially for the ways they interrogate "their own subjectivity as field-workers conducting research in hotbeds of American political and military hegemony."[27] The lessons they draw from these pioneers are "that we not only continue to conduct ethnography on sensitive topics and in times and spaces of political volatility but also that we assume responsibility for the representations we produce as activist ethnographers and intellectuals."[28]

If we were to transpose these practical ethical questions about the methods and purposes of social research to academic social science in the MENA region, imagining our research subjects as analogous to "Indigenous" people in settler colonial states insofar as they are living *in the region* or coming *from the region* under study – despite their diversity of location, class, ethnicity, religion, social capital, political power, living conditions and possibilities, not to mention experiences of displacement, coercion, and violence – how would the decolonial impulse translate?

In the published 2021 presidential address to the American Anthropological Association, Akhil Gupta and Jessie Stoolman cite Charles R. Menzies's concession:

> While skeptical of the reductive claim that anthropologists and anthropology functioned simply as the "handmaiden of colonialism," it is indisputable that U.S. and

> British anthropologists worked in the slipstream of colonial and imperial power. They benefited from this global order in numerous ways: it helped them obtain funding for fieldwork, underwrote their "freedom" to travel to faraway places under the sign of their imperial passports, structured their interactions with informants in the field, and ensured their safety. For the most part, they did not acknowledge that their race and location mattered to the work that they did, that their very presence among the "natives" served as a reminder of colonialism.[29]

If, as Gupta and Stoolman note, "The premise of a decolonizing project is that one begins with the issues that emerge from the power asymmetries of colonization that are most important to the people and communities where we study," then for contemporary social research on and in MENA, we would have to begin with the power asymmetries of the U.S. empire and the history of its military and political economic interventions in the region, along with the well-known colonial legacies.[30] Not a single region or country in the Arab Middle East and North Africa has escaped these effects, whether through direct colonization, military intervention, or the implications of strategic power politics; development or humanitarian aid; governance reforms; or the global hegemony of neoliberal economic policies, to name a few. This entangled history and asymmetry of power is no "inert fact" for social science research, whether conducted by Americans and Europeans, those with roots in the region, or those within Arab universities and research centers shaped by national and international agendas, paradigms, or standards.[31]

To drive their points home, Gupta and Stoolman's presidential address engages in a speculative history, asking what could have been relevant subjects of social research on Indigenous people in the Americas at the birth of U.S. anthropology. Similarly, we could consider what subjects could have been, but only rarely have been, the subjects of social science research in/on the contemporary Arab Middle East and North Africa: genocides; displacement; social disruption; environmental destruction connected to colonial and postcolonial "development"; impoverishment through wars and neoliberal policies; suppression of popular protests and democratic impulses; political interventions for "regime change" or to crush dissident or anticolonial political movements; superpower conflict and proxy wars; resource extraction and capitalization; militarization and occupations fueled by and fueling arms sales and resulting in catastrophic social, environmental, and health consequences; promotion of sectarian identities; securitization and the "War on Terror"; and what Rashid Khalidi has described so aptly as "the hundred years' war on Palestine" by those who abetted the militarized settler colonial state of Israel that has stubbornly blocked any possibility of peace or justice.[32]

Following the Indigenous turn would lead us to ask Tuhiwai Smith's questions: What would local communities, however defined and of diverse sorts, want researched? What research would serve their efforts to resist and redress the

harms of these historical and contemporary assaults? Would they want to unpack the NGO industrial complex? The silences and moral harms of humanitarianism? The causes and effects of their immiseration and displacements? Of rampant inequality? The erosion of social welfare? The human price of wars and political violence, including state violence? The political economies of extraction and corporate greed, including through academic research funding? And more positively, forms of resilience and resistance that perdure?

And if we were to follow Tengan's lead, who would the people themselves want as researchers if not those "primarily accountable" to them and responsibly committed to them for the long term – researchers whose methodologies begin with listening to how their subjects frame their problems and recognizing them for their participation in the production of knowledge? The task for those who would see themselves as belonging to or allies in solidarity with the people and communities with whom they work, and those who want to decolonize academic disciplines built on principles that do not take seriously their values or traditions of knowledge, would be to refuse the ways social research serves rather than challenges Euro-American political interventions that deform and undermine the lives and livelihoods, not to mention the academic institutions, of those whose worlds we are studying.

It is not just about how research questions are framed – what is asked and what is not – but about the ethics of research practices themselves.[33] The lessons from the Indigenous turn are about our responsibilities as researchers to those who help us do our research. These are generous gifts that deserve to be acknowledged and that obligate us to be responsible to those we "study."[34] What would happen in MENA social research if we tried to craft research to serve the interests or priorities of those we study and with whom we work, knowing that these two might not be the same? Granted, it is no easier to determine who counts as "the community" than to determine who counts as "local," especially in the complex terrain of this vast and varied region.[35] Nor can calculating benefits ever be straightforward; some research and analysis may not directly serve or benefit particular individuals or a particular community but could nevertheless be of value in illuminating their circumstances in ways that could lead to changes, either through "speaking truth to power" or by enabling recognition and respect for the marginalized and their struggles.[36] Or, as some scholars have recently argued and I discuss below, by the mobilization of the critical skills and structural freedom to dissent that, at its best, the space of the academy affords.

As scholars doing academic research, whether in this region or elsewhere, we cannot ignore the larger context of the conditions of the current academy within which many of these debates about decolonizing are occurring. In his commentary on "decolonizing U.S. anthropology," Ghassan Hage flagged a lingering problem that the calls for decolonizing knowledge and politicizing ethics of "the Indigenous turn" have not perhaps addressed adequately.[37] In a different register but not unrelated way, Wendy Brown's Tanner Lectures on the present predica-

ments of the academy, in the context of what she characterizes as the nihilism of our times, speak to the same issues.[38]

Both Hage and Brown are speaking from and within the Western academy, whether in Australia or the United States, rather than the Global South. Neither speaks from the perspective of Indigenous or marginalized communities within settler states, though both are well aware of and sympathetic to the issues marginalized groups face. Yet both offer cautions worth considering as we think more broadly about what it might mean to decolonize the social or human sciences. While Hage, an anthropologist of Lebanese origin based in Australia who has also done some research on Lebanon, seeks to preserve the value of the discipline of anthropology, Brown's concern, as a political theorist based in the United States, is for the preservation of the value of rigorous scholarship and thought, and of the academy as a protected space for study, critical thinking, and freedom of the imagination.

Hage titles his commentary on the American Anthropological Association presidential lecture "The Anthropological and the Consequential." He takes issue only with one proposition in this address: the call to make anthropological theory more "consequential for the world" by "keeping a sharp focus on what is politically and socially most important" rather than "chasing novelty." Hage reads this opposition as being made

> at the expense of a valorization of both the pure science-like pursuit of knowledge for knowledge's sake from within anthropology and the politics and consequentiality that derive from this pursuit. An anthropology that is interested in pursuing a distinctly innovative and specifically anthropological program of research . . . ends up paradoxically producing a much more consequential contribution to social and political problems than an approach that foregrounds those problems and assigns to the social sciences the role of servicing them.

Put another way, he refuses to reduce the *raison d'être* of the discipline to its ability to confront sociopolitical problems, arguing that we might worry that the political itself "can become a colonizing machine, reducing the academic to an inconsequential political moment."[39]

Somewhat unexpectedly for someone who has done ethnography on racism and white supremacy and has a book called *Alter-politics*, Hage urges us to protect the distinctive professional core of the scholarly discipline, an anthropology "for itself." This is because he sees the bigger threat as the increasing devaluation of the academic profession by "a governmental culture infused with neoliberal criteria of 'usefulness' fused with an intolerance for the tradition of academic autonomy that has generated much of the Western tradition of critical thinking."[40] Given that the humanities and social sciences have borne the brunt of this devalorization, he warns against us contributing further to this trend with the excuse that "what makes it valuable is something that comes from outside of it, such as

'important' social and political issues."[41] For all of us who have devoted ourselves to the vocation of anthropology or academic scholarship, this defense of the intrinsic value and consequential possibilities of our labors makes sense, even as we now seek vigorously to change the terms.

If Hage warns that the danger of "the political" is that it colonizes, Brown in *Nihilistic Times* warns of the colonization of the academy by the economic as well. Thinking with Max Weber's classic paired essays "Politics as a Vocation" and "Science as a Vocation," she reconsiders the "moat" he recommends maintaining between politics and academic/scholarly inquiry. After laying bare the limits of his arguments and particularly his insistence on the possibility that science or knowledge could be free of values or politics, she redeems from Weber's tortured efforts a lesson for the present. The lesson echoes Hage's hesitations about the politicizing of anthropology implied by the calls to decolonize it. Brown writes eloquently that Weber

> aims to protect the academy's singular promise and purpose, its unqualified commitment to knowledge uncorrupted by power or interest of any kind, which paradoxically requires limiting the promise of what knowledge is or can offer. . . . Yet in charting the world we inhabit, it is more than a pile of dusty facts. Without this charting, there is no hope of understanding, hence directing or re-containing powers otherwise dominating or threatening our existence. Moreover, knowledge production, including its challenges and limits, are at the heart of human intellectual development. Essential for individual self-crafting, this development is also indispensable for any possibility of crafting our lives together.[42]

In a move again surprising for someone whose scholarship and theorizing has been about deeply consequential political matters, from tolerance to sovereignty, racism to sexism, the promises of democracy to the dangers of authoritarianism, Brown concludes that even while we know that

> knowledge and politics are in no way free of each other, he [Weber] reminds us of the many reasons for protecting an interval between the political (and political-economic) and academic spheres, for not confusing or melding them. Intellectual analysis, discovery, critique, and reflection are fundamentally different from political action, legislation, and dicta: they mobilize different subjects and subjectivities; they draw on different languages, temporalities, aims, and ethoi; they have different requirements for realizing their potential. . . . Preserving the scholarly realm for the relative autonomy and integrity of thought, indeed for thinking itself, means resisting both hyperpoliticization of knowledge and its structuration by relations of political economic dependence – state, economic, or philanthropic.[43]

By drawing attention to different forms of colonization than those historical and geopolitical forms that the decolonizing project challenges, both Hage and

Brown confirm what some of the Indigenous studies scholars sampled above have insisted: that we need to think institutionally about where knowledge about the world is produced and where people test paradigms and theories and debate research practices and ethics. If, as Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang insist, "decolonization is not a metaphor," we need to think hard about what decolonizing the institution of the academy itself would entail.[44] Coming into this discussion from MENA studies, I suggest that we have to think more globally about these institutions of knowledge production and thought. We also have to think more historically, since there are multiple sites and institutions where social knowledge is produced, some having displaced others.

We might have to take seriously the arguments Zoe Todd foregrounded about opening up opportunities for social research to groups previously excluded or marginalized within the academy as it exists now – in the metropole and the postcolonial world, and in relation to each other. This is not just about recognizing alternative and suppressed modes and values of knowing that they would bring, as many who advocate for taking Indigenous knowledge seriously suggest. It is about addressing the grossly unequal conditions of possibility for pursuing research and developing thought in various regions of the world. These inequalities are a consequence of historically produced and violently enforced forms of extraction, de-development, and cultural imperialism. There can be no innocence about the complicity in the present of the academies and scholars of the Global North in reinforcing these inequalities insofar as they benefit from the hierarchies.

Across the Middle East and North Africa, institutions have been colonized, decimated, devalued, underresourced, and not been protected as independent spaces of thought and scholarship. If the absence of "moats" between universities and repressive governments has been the subject of much liberal Western political criticism about authoritarian regimes, less attention has been paid to neoliberal governance and the appropriation of Middle Eastern (and African) academic institutions as sources of subcontracted intellectual labor at the service of grant-funded or government research projects driven by metropolitan security or economic interests, what Sara Ababneh likens to raw material like diamonds or rubber.[45] The glaring international inequities in institutional power and academic resources extend even to access to colonial archives that might enable scholars working on their own formerly colonized regions and their own communities to expose truths about colonial violence and demand accountability, as Ali Abdullatif Ahmida has shown for Libya/Italy and Shay Hazkani for Palestine/Israel.[46] Ann Stoler speaks of French aphasia about Algeria, although this is being contested actively now by decolonial groups like Les Indigènes de la République (the Indigenous of the Republic).[47]

Some in Indigenous studies have argued for radically envisioning institutions in the Global North to enable the previously excluded and undervalued (women, minorities, and so forth) to have the opportunity to pursue research, theorize, and

make knowledge on an equal footing. Some Indigenous scholars note that this would involve changing the structures of those institutions to accommodate different kinds of lives and circumstances and to value rather than dismiss knowledge produced about communities by researchers from those communities. This knowledge might not look the same. Yara Sa'di-Ibraheem's consideration of the dilemmas and strategies of Palestinian students struggling within "the Leviathan" of the Israeli academy brings in an analogous situation in a settler state in our region.[48] More broadly, the region has multiple deep traditions of learning and social thought, and alternative institutions, including Islamic, that are disregarded or disparaged as theological, and thus not considered relevant to social science.

What these Indigenous scholars have not had to reckon with, however, is how even the modern academic institutions established in the MENA region are now underresourced and undermined by conditions of war, neoliberalism, poverty, state repression, and foreign interference. When it comes to the humanities and social sciences, these academies cannot provide the kinds of opportunities for developing critical intellectual work, never mind independent social research, that Hage and Brown idealize and beseech us to defend in the increasingly beleaguered academic institutions of the Global North. In her argument about politicizing ethics and decolonizing Iraqi studies, Zahra Ali deplores the inequalities.[49] She argues that a first concrete step that should be taken is

> to direct resources towards supporting Iraqi research institutions and scholars so that an organic and independent research agenda might emerge from there. . . . U.S.-based scholarship needs to be provincialized and located, but recognized for what it is: scholarship emerging from a global imperial power that has played a central role in dismantling the very possibility of scholarship in Iraq.

Iraq is not alone. The destabilizing consequences for research and knowledge about MENA societies of the critiques and recalibrations that this sideways look at the "Indigenous turn" opens up cannot be predicted. Yet any reflection on research ethics can benefit from taking them seriously.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

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ENDNOTES

[1] One can compare the IRB with the Code of Ethics of the American Anthropological Association. American Anthropological Association, "AAA Statement on Ethics," https://www.americananthro.org/LearnAndTeach/Content.aspx?ItemNumber=22869&navItemNumber=652 (accessed September 2, 2024).

[2] Jafari Sinclaire Allen and Ryan Cecil Jobson, "The Decolonizing Generation: (Race and) Theory in Anthropology since the Eighties," *Current Anthropology* 57 (2) (2016): 129–148; Zoe Todd, "The Decolonial Turn 2.0: The Reckoning," *Anthro{dendum}*, June 15, 2018, https://anthrodendum.org/2018/06/15/the-decolonial-turn-2-0-the-reckoning; and Akhil Gupta and Jessie Stoolman, "Decolonizing U.S. Anthropology," *American Anthropologist* 124 (4) (2022): 778–799.

[3] American Anthropological Association, "AAA Apology to the Indigenous Community," https://www.americananthro.org/StayInformed/NewsDetail.aspx?ItemNumber=28239 (accessed September 2, 2024).

[4] I am grateful to Paige West, Oswaldo Hugo Benavides, and Akhil Gupta for sharing materials, unpublished and published, that gave me insights into a range of debates about decolonizing anthropology.

[5] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Random House, 1978).

[6] Edward Said, "Representing the Colonized: Anthropology's Interlocutors," *Critical Inquiry* 15 (2) (1989): 205–225.

[7] Lila Abu-Lughod, "Zones of Theory in the Anthropology of the Arab World," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 18 (1989): 267–306; and Lara Deeb and Jessica Winegar, "Anthropologies of Arab-Majority Societies," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 41 (2012): 537–558.

[8] Lara Deeb and Jessica Winegar, *Anthropology's Politics: Disciplining the Middle East* (Stanford University Press, 2015); and Lara Deeb and Jessica Winegar, "Middle East Politics in U.S. Academia: The Case of Anthropology," interview by Lila Abu-Lughod, *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 37 (1) (2017): 103–112. Beyond anthropology, Timothy Mitchell and Zachary Lockman have shown the influence of U.S. and Zionist interests in Middle East social science. See Timothy Mitchell, "The Middle East in the Past and Future of Social Science," in *The Politics of Knowledge: Area Studies and the Disciplines*, ed. David Szanton (University of California Press, 2004); and Zachary Lockman, *Field Notes: The Making of Middle East Studies in the United States* (Stanford University Press, 2016).

[9] Mayssoun Sukarieh and Stuart Tannock, "On the Problem of Over-Researched Communities: The Case of the Shatila Palestinian Refugee Camp in Lebanon," *Sociology* 47 (3) (2012): 494–508; and Mayssoun Sukarieh and Stuart Tannock, "Subcontracting Academia: Alienation, Exploitation and Disillusionment in the UK Overseas Syrian Refugee Research Industry," *Antipode: A Radical Journal of Geography* 51 (2) (2019): 664–680.

[10] Akhil Gupta and Jessie Stoolman, "Decolonizing U.S. Anthropology," *American Anthropologist* 124 (4) (2022): 779.

[11] Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (Zed Books, 2012), 3.

[12] Ibid., 33.

[13] Ibid., 31. Emphasis in the original.

[14] Ibid., 40.

[15] Ibid., 43.

[16] Ibid., 52.

[17] Ty P. Kāwika Tengan, "Unsettling Ethnography: Tales of an 'Ōiwi in the Anthropological Slot," *Anthropological Forum* 15 (3) (2005): 247.

[18] Ibid., 251.

[19] Ibid., 247.

[20] Ibid., 253.

[21] Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, "*Ch'ixinakax utxiwa*: A Reflection on the Practices and Discourses of Decolonization," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 111 (1) (2012): 95–109.

[22] Benjamin Dangl, "The Andean Oral History Workshop: Decolonizing Historical Research Methods in Bolivia, Part 1 and Part 2," Blog of *The Oral History Review: Journal of the Oral History Association* (n.d.), https://oralhistoryreview.org/interview/oh-bolivia-part-one and https://oralhistoryreview.org/interview/oh-bolivia-part-two (accessed September 2, 2024); and Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, "El potencial epistemológico y teórico de la historia oral: de la lógica instrumental a la descolonización de la historia," in *Teoria crítica dos direitos humanos no século XXI*, ed. Alejandro Rosillo Martínez, Amilton Bueno de Carvalho, Antonio Carlos Wolkmer, et al. (Edipucrs, 2008), 171.

[23] Dangl, "The Andean Oral History Workshop: Decolonizing Historical Research Methods in Bolivia, Part 2."

[24] Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus* (Duke University Press, 2014).

[25] Zoe Todd, "An Indigenous Feminist's Take on the Ontological Turn: 'Ontology' is Just Another Word for Colonialism," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 29 (1) (2016): 4–22.

[26] Allen and Jobson, "The Decolonizing Generation," 129–148.

[27] Ibid., 136.

[28] Ibid. In a later reflection spurred by the inattention to the climate crisis so evident with the wildfire smoke that filled the air at the 2019 Annual Meetings of the American Anthropological Association in San Jose, California, Ryan Cecil Jobson turns to Deborah Thomas's argument that the anthropologist's responsibility is to "bear witness," as elaborated in her *Political Life in the Wake of the Plantation*. This entails producing "affective archives of violence that call forth an 'ethical disposition beyond the political, one that seeks to probe and acknowledge the extent to which we are complicit in its reproduction.'" He also echoes the call by Roseann Liu and Savannah Shange for a thick solidarity that "layers interpersonal empathy *with* historical analysis, political acumen, and a willingness to be led by those most directly impacted." Outside of anthropology, the language of the decolonial runs through brilliant work including Katherine McKittrick's foundational "Plantation Futures." Ryan Cecil Jobsen, "The Case for Letting Anthropology Burn: Sociocultural Anthropology in 2019," *American Anthropologist* 122 (2) (2020): 259–271, quote on 266; Roseann Liu and Savannah Shange, "Toward Thick Solidarity: Theorizing Empathy in Social Justice Movements," *Radical History Review* 131 (2018): 189–198; and Katherine McKittrick, "Plantation Futures," *small axe* 17 (3) (42) (2013): 1–15.

[29] Charles R. Menzies, "Reflections on Research with, for, and among Indigenous Peoples," *Canadian Journal of Native Education* 25 (1) (2001): 28, cited by Gupta and Stoolman, "Decolonizing U.S. Anthropology," 782.

[30] Gupta and Stoolman, "Decolonizing U.S. Anthropology," 782.

[31] As Edward Said put it in *Orientalism*, "For if it is true that no production of knowledge in the human sciences can ever ignore or disclaim its author's involvement as a human subject in his own circumstances, then it must also be true that for a European or American studying the Orient there can be no disclaiming the main circumstances of his actuality: that he comes up against the Orient as a European or American first, as an individual second. And to be a European or an American in such a situation is by no means an inert fact. It meant and means being aware, however dimly, that one belongs to a power with definite interests in the Orient, and more important, that one belongs to a part of the earth with a definite history of involvement in the Orient almost since the time of Homer." Said, *Orientalism*, 19.

[32] Rashid Khalidi, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonial Conquest and Resistance* (Macmillan, 2021).

[33] In a working group document, Rabab El-Mahdi in 2021 framed the purpose of our REMENA working group as to examine the ethics and politics of research questions, and to pose questions like: "Can we determine patterns in the research questions asked in Middle East social scientific work? If so, can we reflect seriously on how and why certain research questions get to be asked more than others, and why some questions remain unasked?" She later elaborated on and extended her inquiry in "Politics of the Middle East: Fetishizing Taxonomies and Enumeration," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 44 (3) (2024): 413–417.

[34] See Lila Abu-Lughod, "Ethnography's Values: An Afterword," in *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society*, 30th anniversary ed. (University of California Press, 2016), 261–298; and Lila Abu-Lughod, "Acknowledgments of an Anthropologist," Keynote Address to the Association of Brazilian Anthropologists, August 28, 2022.

[35] See Reem Saad, "Hegemony in the Periphery: Community and Exclusion in an Upper Egyptian Village," in *Directions of Change in Rural Egypt*, ed. Nicholas Hopkins and Kirsten Westergaard (American University in Cairo Press, 1999), 113–129.

[36] See Abu-Lughod, "Ethnography's Values: An Afterword." And on trust and the ethics of social research with Muslim communities under suspicion and surveillance in Europe, see Nadia Fadil, "The Ethics and Pragmatics of Ethnographic Refusal/Acceptance: Making Sense in Common," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 44 (3) (2024): 396–401.

[37] Ghassan Hage, "The Anthropological and the Consequential," *American Anthropologist* 125 (1) (2023).

[38] Wendy Brown, *Nihilistic Times: Thinking with Max Weber* (Harvard University Press, 2023), 89.

[39] Hage, "The Anthropological and the Consequential," 168–169.

[40] Ibid., 169.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Brown, *Nihilistic Times*, 89.

[43] Ibid., 97–98.

[44] Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," *Indigeneity, Education and Society* 1 (1) (2012): 1–40.

[45] Sara Ababneh, "Ethics of Knowledge Extraction and Production: Reflections on So-Called Decolonial Research Projects," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 44 (3) (2024): 423–427; Mayssoun Sukarieh, "Ethics for Data Ownership in Social Science Funded Research," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 44 (3) (2024): 428–432; and Mayssoun Sukarieh and Stuart Tannock, "Subcontracting Academia: Alienation, Exploitation and Disillusionment in the UK Overseas Syrian Refugee Research Industry," *Antipode: A Radical Journal of Geography* 51 (2) (2019): 664–680.

[46] Ali Abdullatif Ahmida, "Confronting Silence and Cover Up of the Colonial Genocide in Libya: Researching Italian Fascism from the Standpoint of Its Victims," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 44 (3) (2024): 391–395; Ali Abdullatif Ahmida, *Genocide in Libya: Shar, A Hidden Colonial History* (Routledge, 2020); and Shay Hazkani, "Israel's Vanishing Files, Archival Deception and Paper Trails," *Middle East Report* 291 (2019).

[47] Ann Stoler, "Colonial Aphasia: Race and Disabled Histories in France," *Public Culture* 23 (1) (2011): 121–156. For a discussion of their marginalization in ironic accusations of racism from the mainstream, see Zakia Salime, "Decolonizing the Race Debate about North Africa," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 44 (3) (2024): 407–412.

[48] Yara Sa'di-Ibraheem, "Producing Rooted Knowledge: Predicaments of Palestinians Positioned in Israeli Universities," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 44 (3) (2024): 402–406; and Khaled Furani and Yara Sa'di-Ibraheem, eds., *Inside the Leviathan: Palestinian Experiences in Israeli Universities* [Arabic] (Van Leer Institute Press and Dar Laila Publishing, 2022).

[49] Zahra Ali, "Politicizing Ethics: Decolonizing Research on Iraq," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 44 (3) (2024): 418–422.