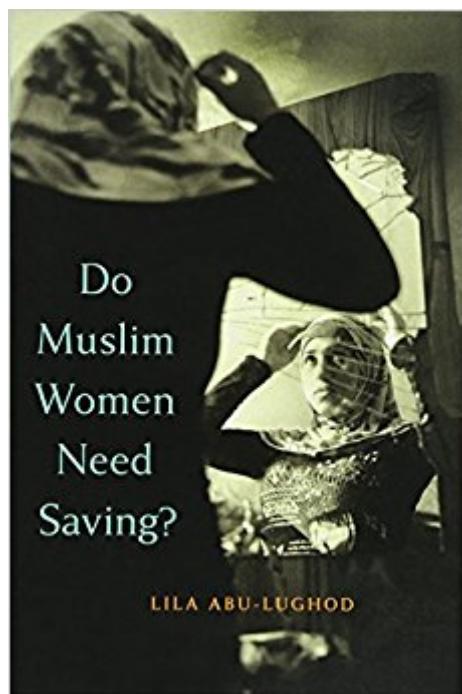


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# Do Muslim Women Need Saving?



## **Synopsis**

Do Muslim Women Need Saving? is an indictment of a mindset that has justified all manner of foreign interference, including military invasion, in the name of rescuing women from Islam. It offers a detailed, moving portrait of the actual experiences of ordinary Muslim women, and of the contingencies with which they live.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Focusing here on stories of individual women, Columbia University social scientist Abu-Lughod (Veiled Sentiments) deconstructs the idea of saving oppressed Muslim women and takes a sobering look at issues including the honor crime, arranged marriages, the burqa, and veiling. In accessible, lucid prose, Abu-Lughod explains how sensationalized memoirs, or pulp nonfiction, have perpetuated stereotypes and made Muslim women a symbol of an alien culture. The author dispassionately points out the hypocrisy of colonial feminism, and how more often than not, there is a clear political agenda behind the liberation of the women of cover and how the role of the U.S. is often overlooked. The women presented here see their Islamic faith as a source of strength to fight injustice, not the cause of it. They're not asking to be rescued from their religion, the author contends, but from the discriminatory legal system, poverty, outdated patriarchal family traditions, and border controls that continue to inhibit their freedom. While offering no easy solution, the author recommends observation over moral crusades, stating: Anyone seriously interested in Muslim women's rights must follow them as they move. This book is an excellent place to begin. (Nov.)

--This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

[A] beautiful bookâ | It is a riveting account by an academic who has spent many years observing women in the Middle East and the West, and adeptly wears several hats as an anthropologist and professor in womenâ ™s studies. Abu-Lughod is a great listener and a sharp observer of everyday life. She understands the struggles, joys and jealousies of Middle Eastern women and has an ear for the stories that do not make headlines. Refusing to treat Muslim women as a category, she focuses on nuances and complexities. Where others see an undifferentiated mass of individuals, she sees real women with real storiesâ | There are Islams, just like there are Judaisms, Christianities and Hinduisms. We need to make the word plural to understand the wide variety of practices and power relations. And Lila Abu-Lughodâ ™s *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* does precisely that with its captivating approach. (Elif Shafak Literary Review 2013-12-01) Saving Muslim women is now a global undertaking in which the participants are both Muslim and non-Muslim. Lila Abu-Lughodâ ™s book is a critical reflection on this mushrooming industry, and its representatives, representations and bureaucracyâ | Abu-Lughod succeeds inâ | exposing several stubbornly persistent myths. She critically assesses the vast number of sensational representations of women, written by Muslims and others, about the general repression in a so-called IslamLand. She follows the trail of global feminism in the extensive bureaucracy, institutions and non-governmental organizations that have emerged since the 1990s, all claiming to save Muslim womenâ | Her focus on analyzing how individual Muslim women experience freedom, rights and constraints brings a much-needed perspectiveâ | She offers a panoramic view of womenâ ™s multiple experiences in their own contexts, thereby dismissing sweeping generalizations about these women being a homogeneous oppressed mass. She urges us to look at contexts shaped by global politics, international capital and modern state institutions that all contribute to changing landscapes of family and community. Abu-Lughod reminds us that rights may be universal but above all they are projects bounded by political contexts, institutions and languageâ | This book is destined to unsettle the convictions of those concerned with saving Muslim women. Many will find it shocking for its uncompromising critique of recent moral crusades, while careful readers will doubtless find in it enough ammunition to deconstruct projects that may seem worth pursuing, but ultimately are not as focused on improving womenâ ™s lives in faraway places as they first appear. Abu-Lughod dissolves geographical boundaries, exposes the limits of global morality, and deconstructs the international power context that allows Muslim women to remain that distant voiceless other, awaiting intervention. It invites us to think not only about dominant representations of Muslim

women in images and words, but also about our own engagement with the other, which has always taken place in an unequal context. (Madawi Al-Rasheed Times Higher Education 2013-11-07)In accessible, lucid prose, Abu-Lughod explains how sensationalized memoirs, or â ^pulp nonfiction,â ™ have perpetuated stereotypes and made Muslim women a symbol of an alien culture. The author dispassionately points out the hypocrisy of colonial feminism, and how more often than not, there is a clear political agenda behind the liberation of the â ^women of coverâ ™ and how the role of the U.S. is often overlooked. The women presented here see their Islamic faith as a source of strength to fight injustice, not the cause of it. Theyâ ™re not asking to be rescued from their religion, the author contends, but from the discriminatory legal system, poverty, outdated patriarchal family traditions, and border controls that continue to inhibit their freedom. While offering no easy solution, the author recommends observation over moral crusades, stating: â ^Anyone seriously interested in Muslim womenâ ™s rights must follow them as they move.â ™ This book is an excellent place to begin. (Publishers Weekly 2013-08-12)Tracing connections from human rights groups and international feminist NGOs, to philosophy and anthropology, to best-selling memoirs of Muslim women and titillating pulp fiction accounts of Muslim women's suffering, Abu-Lughod argues that the West's perception of Muslim women as creatures in need of rescue is shaped by a confluence of powerful forces. Incisively argued and often sharply critical, Abu-Lughod's book--which will surely spark debate--is essential reading for anyone interested in women's rights in the Muslim world. (Leila Ahmed, author of *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence from the Middle East to America*)In this passionate, sharply articulated, and engaging argument, Lila Abu-Lughod describes how Islam has been transformed into a homogenized geography 'somewhere out there' and how its women, different as they are diverse, have become the excuse for political and military interventions. In place of the simplistic arguments that are bandied about on the global stage, this book reminds us to ask more important questions: who are the saviors of Muslim women and how did they acquire the right to be the saviors? Every thinking individual should read this book. (Urvashi Butalia, author of *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*)This is a provocative and astute challenge to the received wisdom of our time that Muslim women need to be saved by the liberated West. Abu-Lughod not only offers an insightful critique of the remedies offered to combat violence against Muslim women but also helps us see their lives differently. We are forced to confront the shared humanity between 'us' and 'them' that is both unsettling and instructive. No one interested in questions of gender, Islam, and human rights can choose to ignore this book. (Saba Mahmood, author of *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*)There is no one better qualified than Lila Abu-Lughod to take on difficult

questions about Muslim women and their portrayal in the global media. Her answers shake up some fundamental assumptions held by liberals and conservatives alike and raise new questions. This book persuades us to consider new and more productive ways of thinking and acting. (Mahmood Mamdani, author of *Saviors and Survivors: Darfur, Politics, and the War on Terror*)Lila Abu-Lughod lays bare the many factors that can collude to produce an unhappy woman in a Muslim society: abusive father, distant husband, bad personal decisions, and restrictive codes of conduct, yes, but also poverty, neoliberalism, politicized NGOs, war, and occupation. Her book tells larger, transnational stories, bringing together activists, publishers, and women from all over the world. (Elora Shehabuddin, author of *Reshaping the Holy: Democracy, Development, and Muslim Women in Bangladesh*)There is an ethical dimension to [Abu-Lughod's] attention to the particularities and complexities of difference between women of different countries, social backgrounds and cultures, and even within cultures sheâ™s always attuned to the differences brought about by class and economic backgroundâ |Through her in-depth demolition of the new moral crusades brought on by the genre of â™gendered Orientalismâ™ in the pulp nonfiction of books by â™insiders,â™ i.e., Muslim women who threw off their shackles or who tore off their veils and ran away from their oppressive Muslim homes in order to live the precise kind of life lived by a certain class of Western woman in urban areas, Abu-Lughod zeroes in on the treacherous hypocrisy of the seemingly well-read and well-educated class of progressive Westerners. (Subashini Navaratnam PopMatters 2014-02-21)The bookâ™s principal strengths lie in skillfully deconstructing the symbolic significance of a range of high profile â™moral crusadesâ™ involving Muslim women which have captured the global imagination. Abu-Lughod highlights how the most basic conditions of these womenâ™s lives are set by political forces that are often national or even international in origin even if they are local in effectâ |She argues that concepts such as â™oppression,â™ â™choice,â™ and â™freedomâ™ are blunt instruments for capturing the dynamics and quality of Muslim womenâ™s lives in these places. In addition to revealing such characterizations as overly simplistic, Abu-Lughod also analyses the politics and the ethics of the international circulation of discourses about â™the oppressed Muslim woman.â™ She shows, for example, how debates on the veil and discussions of honor crimes are deployed as 21st century political projects. She writes passionately about the salacious and voyeuristic way in which such crimes are recorded, pointedly asking why knowing about the â™cultureâ™ has been seen as more important than exploring the story of the development of repressive regimes in the region. Equally, she highlights how in the West such discourses are unashamedly linked to xenophobic immigration policies. She warns of the risks entailed in such polarizing â™saviorâ™ discourses whereby feminism and even secularism

are only seen as Western conceptsâ |This book represents a necessary if uncomfortable intervention for those who may uncritically engage in the diverse range of clarion calls to save Muslim womenâ |Abu-Lughodâ ™s book provides a richly evidenced and easy to read deconstruction of simplistic culturalist explanations of any phenomena which pertain to Muslim women in all their diversity. As with other postcolonial feminists such as Mohanty and Narayan her approach represents a useful analytical tool to explore contemporary controversies about the experiences of Muslim and other Other women in all their complexity. (LSE Review of Books Naaz Rashid 2014-02-19)Every page contains a fresh riposte to easy cultural or religious explanations for womenâ ™s oppressionâ | Do Muslim Women Need Saving? is the result of many yearsâ ™ rumination over contemporary feminist debates in the developing worldâ | In this volatile debate Lila Abu-Lughod frequently reminds her readers that she writes â ^as an anthropologist.â ™ In keeping with this role, she offers no simple remedy for female suffering abroad; nor does she condone the shrug that dismisses distant injustices as â ^just their culture.â ™ Instead, she offers an injunction to look and listen carefully for suffering at home as well as overseas, and to examine â ^our own responsibilities for the situations in which others in distant places find themselves.â ™ (Nabeelah Jaffer Times Literary Supplement 2014-04-25)Sharply observed take on the Western impulse to save oppressed Muslim women and the wider political, legal and cultural issues at stake. (Marc Lynch Washington Post blog 2014-06-30)One of the bookâ ™s great accomplishments is to present readers with concrete examples of women who explain their actions and justify their choices, instead of caricatured victims to be pitied and saved by enlightened others. (Joan W. Scott Journal of Middle East Womenâ ™s Studies 2015-03-01)Some of the most rewarding material in Do Muslim Women Need Saving? examines the obsession with constraint that counterposes perceptions of Muslim women to Enlightenment ideals of freedom and autonomy, connected to theoretical work by Wendy Brown, Judith Butler, and Saba Mahmoodâ |While she is hardly alone in critiquing the flattened stereotype of the abject Muslim woman, Abu-Lughod brings refreshing new observations to this well-trodden groundâ |Abu-Lughod provocatively suggests that American feminism shares with older imperial agendas the political imperative to see Muslim women as particularly oppressedâ |This book is a great service to those of us who have long wanted for a resource we can recommend to explain why Muslim women do not need saving. Persuasive, generous, and insightful, Abu-Lughod asks us to bring our careful analysis, critical self-reflection, and constant recognition of our common but also differently expressed humanity to the table. (Leti Volpp Public Books 2015-08-01) --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

In trying to understand the complexities of human rights in a global world Lila Abu-Lughod brings many experiences and insights to helping the Westerners learn and understand these dilemmas. With many examples from Egypt and even Palestine the reader sees the complexity of issues and how difficult the prognosis of remedying the perceived problems can be. Although I did not agree with everything in this book that the author brought up many great points that are worthy of contemplation. The most powerful lesson learned in this book is one of humility, patients, and taking the time to listen to other cultures before we engage in trying to fix what we don't fully understand. And as those born in affluent countries we need to understand the power that we have and the responsibility that comes with it. Lila Abu-Lughod would challenge us to not be hasty with our conclusions and to try to understand where women in other cultures come from. Far too often outsiders come in trying to fix perceived problems in ways that may actually hinder those who are trying to be helped. Instead we must come in with humility seeking to learn first and asking important questions to those who we are trying to help. I would recommend this book to anyone who has the desire for humanitarian work or helping others.

One of the most insightful books I have ever read.

Thought me how systems are in place that we do not even think about. We talk about stuff that is over hyped without even understanding it.

-Although the people in my discussion group were very critical of this book, I rate it highly because it gives a very different perspective, and we all need to look at serious subjects from different angles.-My peers' concerns seemed to be mainly two-fold: one was a distaste for the complex and confusing sentence structure with the overuse of semi-colons and one was a strong disbelief that women in any culture would hold values other than theirs.-Since I am a Christian woman living in the Southern USA, " saving" implies to me Christian conversion. That is not at all what Lila Abu-Lughod means. She is referring more to liberal women's libbers wanting to save Muslim women from oppressive male-dominated societies. Her contention is that, although all people ( men and women) in all cultures crave safety and respect, we also value such things as community, family, religious norms, etc.-If I understand correctly, this author advocates finding more options than the two opposites that seem to be generally proposed. That is one being Muslim extremism and the other being Western individualism.-My major disappointment was that I had expected we would have Christians, Jews, Muslims and agnostics in our discussion group and that we might have

opened the door to cross-cultural dialog. That did not happen.

Lila has always been one of my favorite academics on the issue of Muslim women in modern day society, both in the West and the Middle East and how this relates to the recent wars. She takes a very relative approach to the argument and yes some of her points are a bit far stretched but overall she presents an argument that makes you think twice about oppression and judging someone's freedom status based on their style of dress and religious beliefs.

Ms. Abu-Lughod's book is really awesome. "Humanitarianism in the new colonialism." She is really spot on. It was really refreshing to read something that was not superficial in its analysis and with true research to back it up.

Please allow me to preface my comments: I have read the book start to finish. I have also read the footnotes. Other comments on this book, are not well acquainted with the work and have little ability to shed light on the book or its merits. Indeed, references to Hitler without having read the book are laughable. Please see "Huffman's Hitler Hypothesis" or "Godwin's Law" to see how little credibility or usefulness such claims have on an intellectual argument. They do, however, help to make Abu-Lughod's arguments that there is a gendered orientalism at play in how we think about Muslim women and their 'bondage' in an imaginary place, "IslamLand." the author has done 20+ years of field work in Egypt and other places, and she speaks based on her rich and varied field research. She takes to task the "pulp non-fiction pornography" peddled by many mostly journalists speaking on behalf of 'other women' in the last 20 years. In assessing this genre she laments the focus on the individual and the ways in which that focus on one, 'horrible' story fills in for the whole of the Muslim Woman's experience authorizing the West and 'governance feminists' (page 79) to intervene via 'honor tote bags' and other feel good capitalist ventures. It might be useful for people to watch Chimamanda Adhichie's TedTalk, "The Danger of a Single Story," The [...] to gain a sense of the need for multifocal stories, community knowledge and longterm, rich ethnography that Abu-Lughod is working from and arguing for in her work. The book ultimately explores the political work done and allowed to be done on 'behalf' of women when we make claims on behalf to be universal at the expense of actual women's lives and experiences. Indeed what are the investments of NGOs as varied as the Women's Global Fund and the foundational work done by Laura Bush in the lives of 'suffering Muslim Women' in whose name the US has intervened in Afghanistan and waged a 10+ years long war? What violence--structural and immediate-- has happened because we in the west

sent military operatives to Afghanistan? She notes that "women's rights provide a useful conduit for foreign intervention and government involvement" in the reordering of the social fabric of Muslim communities (page 171). Moreover, she works against the violence occasioned when we fight for justice as a removal from culture, as rights an a prior rather than culturally constructed and situated framework. She challenges feminists, NGOs, and various western to governments that "We should want justice and rights for women, but can we accept that there might be different ideas about justice and that different women might want, or even choose, different futures from ones that we envision as best?" (page 43) She cautions that "secularism has not brought about women's freedom or equality in the West." (page 19) and that it secularism in the Middle East or elsewhere would displace kinship bonds and framings that might prove more useful, and liberatory for many women.Ultimately poverty and globalization seem to be powerful forces that are tearing apart communities and leaving them vulnerable to forms of predation and exploitation. How do we women and their communities reposed in the face of multi-national corporations and elites who upend traditional patterns of sustainable life? (p.176, 194, 196)The book is admirable in its analytical abilities, but it is not without fault. One wonders what would have happened had she engaged her ethnographic subjects in more sustain dialogues about what they wanted their rights and freedoms to entail. Time and again her subjects dismiss notions of their repression, and invoke a narrative of progress--better access to education, more opportunity to have their rights protected both at the local/familial level, and by some government laws and regulations--but what more did these women want or need? We don't know. Additionally the issue of female genital cutting/mutilation is left unexamined--a small reference, but it is the elephant in the room. If choice and consent is a fraught concept as Abu-Lughod argues, then how should we frame our understanding of this practice that too often is performed on young women and girls without their consent without a clear choice of "no" being available to them? How might we have a conversation about this practice that allows us to critique the rhetoric of 'women held in bondage of IslamLand' as so many 'pulp non-fictions' do without resorting to the othering and rescue narratives she decries? It feels as if she left us in the lurch without a clear way through this issue.I should say that throughout the work she challenges us to look at the violence experienced by women in what we might call the Global North and she may respond that FGC/M are less prevalent than the domestic violence, rape, child sexual abuse, etc. faced by women in the Global North, but that answer would feel too trite and unpersuasive.In sum, the book is a terrific and learned critique of "women's rights are human rights" discourse and the work done in the name of rescuing muslim women.

the quality of the product was good, but the delivery took almost 1 and 1/2 months!

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