

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Caring About the Unequal Effects of the Pandemic: What Feminism, Art, and Activism can Teach Us

Remote schooling during a pandemic: Visibly Muslim mothering and the entanglement of personal and political

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Abstract

This experimental double-conscious autoethnography narrates my navigation of remote learning after the COVID-19 outbreak between mid-March and early June 2020 as an apparent Muslim mother at a public school in upstate New York. To this end, using handwritten notes in a daily journal, I first delineated the process of becoming a visibly Muslim mother, which started earlier and reached a head after moving to the United States in 2018. In this way, using an autoethnographic style based on my experience of remote learning as a Muslim mother, I will present a dialog with feminist insights to reiterate that personal experience and cultural experience are incapable of being disentangled, that personal experience matters, and that all experience, however personal or private, is structured in a broader political and historical context.

KEYWORDS

autoethnography, feminist politics, intersectionality, public school, sociological double consciousness, visibly Muslim mother

1 | INTRODUCTION

It is mid-March 2020, 6 weeks since the COVID-19 outbreak; when I read the email from my child's school announcing the move to remote learning, I feel relieved yet a little anxious. I consider the burden this will push me to shoulder, as a second-year doctoral student with terrible term paper deadlines, as a teaching assistant of a social theory class of more than 30 students, and as a mother of a toddler and a first-grader. A week later, I put a desk for my child in our living room, across from the couch. I decorate the wall with artwork collected since kindergarten. He is thrilled with his study spot and posts little signs in the hallway and living room leading to his desk.

Meanwhile, I “attend” my graduate seminars and host discussion sessions via teleconference from another room. I lock the door and mute my microphone. When I leave the door open, my two usual suspects appear on-camera with curious eyes, pointing at the screen, and chime in asking who these people are, what they do, and their names, and I have to ask their father to please find them a more exciting game to play.

When I have a few minutes to spare in the day, I cannot keep my eyes off the news. I look feverishly at statistics, and death tolls, trying to follow news in my home country, Turkey, and also in Northern Cyprus, my second home, which my parents migrated to when I was nine. I read about seasonal farmworkers in California, New York, and New Jersey; the disproportionate number of deaths among people of color, and the care workers who became the essential ones. An op-ed by Alma Patty Tzalin, a farmworker and a member of grassroots organization *Alianza Agrícola*, entitled “I Harvest Your Food. Why Isn't My Health 'Essential'?” in the *New York Times* moves me to tears. I think of all the children who do not have the luxury of homeschooling, let alone clean water. I suffer from insomnia, as I constantly read, watch webinars, listen to macro and microanalyses, and fall asleep in the middle of reading an article or listening to a prominent expert.

In the following days, my daily marathon starts in the morning with my son's remote classroom and continues with the follow-up assignments. I take photos of his classwork and upload them on the app or email them if the app does not work. Simultaneously, while trying to complete the course requirements for my graduate seminars, I schedule virtual office hours, provide feedback to my students, and assure them that we will survive this plague; I smile more, but my face hurts.

My relief at having homeschooling does not last long. Emailing the principal and all my child's teachers becomes a daily routine. Somehow, though, I do not receive the teachers' emails or the notifications on the classroom app about upcoming events, and curiously, I do receive emails from a teacher inviting my child to one-on-one's, but only 2 hours before the meetings.

When I gently inform teachers about problems with the notifications, I receive neither appreciation nor a thank you; I just become one of “some parents” who had a problem with the notifications. However, I read other beautiful “thank you” comments to mothers mentioned by name, who are somehow visible on the teachers' radar, who deserve gratitude and praise for their diligent assistance. I keep writing run-on sentences and outraged essays in my journal and reflect on and try to endure what I experience. As a part of my graduate study, I have been learning to give meaning by placing what I encounter in broader historical and theoretical frameworks. I employ my analytical tools to examine macro, global, world-historical, world-systemic, and micro-level interactionist approaches. However, mostly I find strength in feminist perspectives and politics from a broad spectrum, including Marxist feminism (Federici, 2004; Mies, 1986), standpoint theory (Harding, 2005; Hartsock, 1983), and the intersectionality of oppressive structures (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991; Roth, 2017).

Building on sociological literature on the social theory of double consciousness that highlights the dialectical relationship between social structures and self-cultivation (Bibi, 2020; Islam, 2020; Itzigsohn & Brown, 2015; Rios et al., 2017), I have compiled a double-conscious autoethnography. In this record, I narrate my navigation of remote learning after the COVID-19 outbreak between mid-March and early June 2020 as an apparent Muslim mother at a public school in upstate New York. To this end, using notes handwritten in a daily journal,¹ I first delineate the process of becoming a visibly Muslim mother, which started earlier and came to a head after moving to the United States in 2018. My goal is to present a dialog with feminist insights to reiterate that personal experience and cultural experience are incapable of being disentangled, that personal experience matters, and that all experience, however personal or private, is structured in a broader political and historical context.

2 | BECOMING THE VISIBLE MUSLIM MOTHER

It's a Friday morning in September 2019. I will be teaching in 2 hours, and I strive to speed up everyone, as usual, not to be late. My child approaches as I prepare breakfast and starts to talk about his friends—which is rare. He says, “Mommy, X told me I shouldn't play with Y. Because his mom said they (Y and his family) are men with guns,” he replied.

“Men with guns....” The words hit my brain: “men... with... guns....” I feel a slow-burning increase of blood pressure. I feel nauseous and dizzy and stop for a little, trying to swallow the lump in my throat, “Why do you think he said this to you, honey?” I manage to ask.

“I think because of his skin color,” he utters without hesitation.

My smile freezes. “I think what your friend and his mom said is not correct,” I reply quickly and, trying to swallow and look normal, add, “What you say to him, then?”

“I said they are good people,” he replies, which brings a slight break from the incessant bolts of lightning in my brain.

“I'm proud of you and love you so much,” I say, giving him a big hug. “Now, get dressed; we're running late. The morning ritual continues. I take him to school, give a kiss, say “I love you,” and wave hands. In my office, still nauseated, I try to focus on my notes before class.

“I'm sorry, can you please repeat it?” I urge multiple times during the class. Somehow, I manage to return to my office when the discussion sessions end. Luckily none of my students show up during office hours.

A colleague arrives, and I share the story. After initial shock and astonishment, my friend responds: “Your child is so smart!”

This autoethnographic narrative is rooted in events long before my U.S. graduate studies. The entanglement of personal and political experience that led to my being a visibly Muslim mother during the COVID-19 pandemic began in Istanbul, Turkey, in 2013. My interest in alternatives to formal, traditional education came with the birth of my first child. I was determined to learn about “unschooling” because it was clear to me that schools were “ideological state apparatuses’ to shape little minds and make them proper recipients of the system. When he was two, I was determined to register him at a “nontraditional” private daycare, but that was not possible because of my spouse's work, and we moved to Azerbaijan in 2016.

In Azerbaijan, finding a nontraditional daycare was also impossible. We tried three different places, each time encountering everyday militarism and rampant nationalism, which pushed indoctrination of Armenian hatred into the curriculum at an early stage.

As a Turkish immigrant woman, I encountered the ethno-nationalist politics of collective memory and the educational apparatus at a young age. I had spent my childhood and teen years in Northern Cyprus, a “make-believe” (Navarro-Yashin, 2012) de facto pseudo-state recognized only by Turkey. I endured bloody pictures of Turkish Cypriots killed by Greek Cypriots washed with nationalist propaganda in “history” classes, and I witnessed militarism, which I later learned was similar to that in Southern Cyprus, only with different victims. I understood why “technologies of nationalism” were vital for global capitalism and how disposable the bodies were in bloody wars of “imagined communities” that instilled Greek hatred. Therefore, the rampant militarist ethnonationalism in Azerbaijan² constantly reminded me of my childhood. The army fatigues we wore, the national holidays we celebrated, and the poems we memorized systematically pumped hatred into our blood in the name of nationalism.

Yet, as Baldwin eloquently described, the “paradox of education” is that “...as one begins to become conscious, one begins to examine the society in which he is being educated.” (1985, 325). My education paradoxically raised a “double” consciousness in which I examined the society I was immersed in while questioning my very sense of belonging in an academic milieu. I decided to study these notions of belonging by examining immigration from Turkey to Northern Cyprus and the construction of Turkish Cypriotism. I applied to sociology Ph.D. programs and was accepted in 2017.

Despite my “ideals” for raising children, private schooling was not an option with our limited finances. My university courses started in August 2018. Two weeks later, my son’s classes began, and to my astonishment, everything went well. I had no worries until I heard from my son about playing “army” during recess. He wanted to be a soldier in his classmates’ games and begged us for army clothes. I tried to explain that “it wasn’t a good idea to play army,” and suggested other games to play with his friends.

“But all boys play army,” he said, quoting his “best friend,” the child of a neighbor we had not yet met, whose father we later learned was a veteran. To my dismay, a combination of everyday militarism and gender stereotyping was shaping my son’s gender ideology while I was discussing undoing gender in graduate seminars.

Just as my son’s conception of gender was being formed, I was expanding my knowledge on political economy and world-systemic perspectives on “webs-of-life” (Moore, 2015), grappling with the “violence” of Cartesian Nature and Society dichotomy, and reflecting on “real” or “ruling” abstractions (Patel & Moore, 2017) that fog our understanding of reality. While my son begged for khaki fatigues to play army, my research focus shifted to the political economy of nationalism and the lingering Cyprus issue and the “military-industrial complex.”

While exploring the “school to prison pipeline,” alongside feminist theories on militarism, and trying to grasp the nuances between different approaches to intersectionality, I was simultaneously trying to explain to my five-year-old why militarism was detrimental and how he could find better games that initiate more collectivity and joy. Furthermore, I was constantly trying to keep up-to-date with the new immigration laws and regulations in the U.S., such as “the Muslim ban,”³ which, by targeting Muslim-majority countries, began to create a new “violent”⁴ setting (Abdelnour & Abu Moghli, 2021) for the everyday interactions of the immigrant communities and “Muslim Americans” with the larger populace. Anti-immigration politics and its hegemonic discursive currency, incited by far-right populism, reached a peak under the Trump administration and heightened my anxieties of schooling and parenting.

My son’s fascination with the army, military, and guns grew through the 2018 school year. He tried everything to avoid exclusion, believing his friends without question, making silly jokes, and interrupting classmates. While his efforts at school to be included and become “one of them” came at the expense of his being labeled as disruptive by teachers and administration, my efforts to be seen as a bona fide parent also failed. I was only visible as one of those parents whose visibility as Muslim precluded any other perception of them. My greetings hung in the air, and smiles froze when I said “good morning,” “hello,” or “how are you?” No one even looked at me when I tried my best to have basic communication with his classmates and other parents. In theory, there were acts of inclusion, such as birthday party invitations from classmates, but in practice, the constant and penetrating gazes from the other parents, as they scanned me from head to toe, were deliberate enough to show my supposed place.

Thus, I had flashbacks of childhood memories in Northern Cyprus. I had been like my son, constantly trying to make friends, explaining that my parents and I were *good people*, not “invaders,” not *Gaco*, *Kabaskal*, not “looters” or “lazy, dirty Turks.” I was uneasy and oftentimes felt helpless. Like my child now attempting to navigate as an outsider in elementary school, I had tried then to make sense of intersecting structures of oppression on my being a girl from Turkey, with a headscarved mother, whose father taught “Islamic religious culture and moral ethics” in the secularist de facto space of Northern Cyprus.

The school year progressed, and my concerns grew as the “army” game devolved into a more brutal “gladiator” game. I tried to schedule a meeting. The teachers and principal had been prompt and diligent with notes, phone calls, emails, and in-person meetings to discuss how my five-year-old “was distracting classmates by laughing, standing up, and doing funny/silly things.” However, when I had a concern, they were quite unwilling to meet and listen to the challenges my son had to endure. I was immediately informed about “bad decisions” my son had made “individually,” as if in a vacuum devoid of any classmates and with no political and historical context. When I tried to talk about the gladiator and army games he learned while playing at school, the teacher half-smiled and, using a dark post-9-11 innuendo, commented on “how my child was into jets” and denied such army games existed at school; all of which forced my decision to move and change his school for the upcoming school year.

At a new public school in September 2019, my child’s interest in army fatigues and guns shifted, and he began to talk about skin color, ethnicity, and religion. He still struggled for inclusion and tried hard, albeit with mixed feelings,

with a particular classmate, a bully who was aggressive to both friends and teachers, pushing—sometimes even kicking other children and laughing too much during class. As bullies do, it did not take long for my son's so-called friend to move to isolate and bond with my son. The result was that Friday, September 2019 conversation, when he repeated his mothers' words and told my child "not to play with Y" because "they were men with guns." Even for a child, the nuance was clear: with the bully, my son could be "good," but with Y, my son would be "bad." In this context, the bullying was emblematic of systemic racism and Islamophobia. Yet, instead of *facing* it and *naming* it, the school wanted to strip any political, historical context and reduce it to an individual issue.

At that time, I was reading Du Bois (1989), and his notion of "double consciousness" came up in a sociology discussion session I led. His veil metaphor hit me deeply. My veil differed from Du Bois's veil. For me, as a symbol of modesty and self-cultivation, my veil made manifest an ontological issue, which was a private relationship between the creator and me. However, I felt my identity divided due to the double or triple consciousness that I was simultaneously acquiring eternally and developing internally. First, I was struggling ferociously to determine how I was to be seen through "their" eyes, as a Muslim, as a woman, as a Muslim woman, and as a Muslim mother. Second, as I struggled to navigate and equip myself to cope with those perceptions, I also attempted to reconcile my own self-perception, my subjecthood by measuring everything I possessed: my garments, my body, my words, my "everything."

Entangled with this double consciousness of how I was perceived and my self-perception was the third consciousness as a visibly Muslim mother. I was trying to protect my child and prevent his premature awareness of political conjuncture. I was attempting to help him as he developed his consciousnesses, and I was trying to cooperate with school, teachers, and counselors.

I sought the advice of experienced colleagues. I tried to give time and not rush, but before I was able to talk to his teacher about the "incidents" we had been dealing with, as I was invited "to a short conference including the principal and counselor" to discuss the "negative behaviors my son had been exhibiting." We were given a chart with stickers for resolutions, which included goals to be achieved, such as "not distracting my friends" and "not touching the walls." A couple of weeks later, I received a disconcerted and over-anxious voicemail from the teacher claiming that my son "scratched inside the mouth of another child," which turned out to be incorrect after incessant inquiry. On the contrary, it was my son who had been scratched by his "friend," the bully.

After urging for meetings with the teacher, principal, and counselor, all of which were delayed or changed multiple times at the last minute, we were able to meet 5 weeks after the falsely claimed "scratching incident." No one even stooped to give any explanations, although I asked if an adult supervisor had witnessed the incident. Unsurprisingly, the principal was not present. Instead, before we started, the participants of the meeting, who already knew what and that we wanted a classroom change, tried to absolve themselves, noting how our son "was making bad decisions even though he was *in charge of himself*."

I had prepared many times over the course of the 2 months, done research on bullying, and found parent advocacy groups. I had decided to switch from being a passive observer to being a participant and a critical one and to *act* no matter what. I tried to explain that what my child had been exposed to was even beyond bullying. "We know *what* our child does, but maybe you do not know *why* he does those things," I uttered, and questioned if they had any policy for parents who directly label some students as "not to be played with" since the ones who shouldn't be played with had now grown to include not only children like Y but also children like mine.

The counselor acknowledged speaking to both children and agreed that the other child's mother had encouraged her son's divisive and marginalizing behaviors but did not take stereotyping seriously. I had expected the school to send a clear message of "No; within school boundaries, we're here to learn to play together no matter what." I explained how acceptance of the labeling of those not-to-be-played-with-children displayed a message obvious to even a six-year-old child: that the visibly Muslim—parents *and* children—were "others." However, I only received a tokenistic diversion: "Oh no, we have a teacher who wears a *hijab*⁵ all the time!"

It took almost 2 months to change my son's classroom, while the classmate kept telling my child that his mother did not want them playing together. My son began to urge me not to wear a headwrap in public while I patiently explained that we all must learn how to live together. Finally, the classroom was changed, and the next 6 weeks with

his new primary teacher proceeded without a note of complaint, email, phone call, or incident about my child. Almost everything changed with the arrival of the pandemic and a new form of education, requiring intensive daily communication with the teacher, became our new normal. Consequently, I somehow found myself in the virtual classroom of my son.

3 | 'ZOOMING' INTO THE VIRTUAL CLASSROOM AS A MUSLIM MOTHER

It is the first week of tiresome remote learning. My son has been asked to write some sentences on a future profession and submits, "I would like to become an astronaut and construction worker. I want to build cities in space. So, people can live there. I can't wait to go to space!" Soon after, he is invited to a short videoconference with the teacher to discuss the assignment and explain why he wants to build a city in space. The teacher asks about the city my son wants to create but is too impatient to even listen to the answer. While my son, an English as a second language student, is trying to find the words to speak, the teacher repeats the words my son has written. The teacher puts my child's sentences into his mouth but accompanies them with incredulous facial expressions.

This presumption of inauthenticity triggers childhood memories of Northern Cyprus and the reactions of my teachers and classmates. Whenever I received a good grade or was successful in a math or essay contest, the first reactions were always, "So, how did you get prepared?" "Are you taking private classes?" As a daughter of a perceived uncivilized, uneducated family from Turkey, whose mother wore a headscarf and whose school uniform was longer than her peers, I shouldn't have excellent grades in Physics and Math classes; I wasn't supposed to win the national math Olympiad; I wasn't supposed to be an essay contest winner. I only belonged in a realm of suppression where the religiosity of my parents necessitated my constant subordination, and any success story was too good to be true. I blame myself for being here.

Online education requires parents to be active participants at every stage of the learning process. Given this story's background of otherization and Muslimization, for me, the virtual classroom meant extra care, extra attention, and extra labor—the "second shift" (Hochschild & Machung, 1989) or maybe even the third one considering the emotional recuperation of my family and I needed. During the virtual trimester, the endless efforts of my son, supported by ours, did not garner much attention from the teacher. Notwithstanding the hours, my child and his father worked to build a three-dimensional vowel city, create an artistic piece, or ace the Phys-Ed teacher's virtual classroom work out, his efforts went unnoticed. He was unseen, an "other behind a veil," and the best thing received was a brief "it's interesting" comment.

The invisible veil made manifest through Du Bois's skin color existed between him and the world. My veil was a tangible headcover that created a different aperture in people's eyes that tinted their view of me/us and created a picture of my family and me as "other." Cognizant of that picture, I was constantly explaining myself, my family, and my veil. For me, the headcover, a tool for cultivating my personal and spiritual subjecthood, was intended to render me less visible and more moderate. Ironically, my veil made me hypervisible and reduced me to only a female body. Paradoxically, therefore, the invisibility of our efforts to prove that "We are good people; we are well educated" crystallized our Muslimness both symbolically and practically.

I was offended when the teacher, asked "Who is celebrating Easter?" and then put my child under a spotlight, feigning ignorance by asking and mispronouncing Eid, saying, "Are you celebrating "eed" or "ayd"?" in front of the entire class. After my child found a book on Ramadan, I had to ask for feedback, recorded a passage in his voice as a reading assignment, and wrote a piece that ended with "Do you celebrate Eid?" and received not a single comment for his efforts. Ironically though, at the same time that I was challenging my students to question the very notion of "normal," by asking "Whose norms are normal?" in my home, I was also trying to manifest "normalcy" (Bibi, 2020; Ryan, 2011) by hiding candies for an Easter egg hunt or studiously examining the background of the camera before virtual classes.

Furthermore, I deliberately chose not to cover my hair during the virtual report card meeting and tried to explain my dismay at the lack of communication. My son's first trimester low grades had not increased, but there was no mention of the classroom change or his improvement, even though he was now answering math questions well and had made great progress in reading, sight word recognition, and writing. And, of course, the scores showed no progress on the so-called behavioral components.

Thus, I diligently explained why it was significant for us to see the progress in the report card and why it would have been significant to see the reasons for the classroom change written in the report. I wanted to point out that a report card without that context becomes a disciplinary and punishment tool, but the teacher cut me off: "Well, my own son was unable to be in class with a best friend, you know that sometimes personalities just don't match." This kind of explanation was echoed in many similar meetings, which ignored any context for my ongoing concerns and reduced them to a personal or a psychological issue.

Each time I wanted to elaborate and say, "This is neither a psychological issue nor an individual one, but rather quite systematic and structural." However, I faced that old dilemma: agency versus structure. Do I adhere to the norms of motherhood? Or, with my growing double consciousness, do I risk antagonizing the "school?" I was capable of verbalizing the structural constraints I saw and the intersecting forms of oppression with which they were entangled. However, I chose to end all the virtual meetings, emails, and messages only with "Thank you so much's," and "Sincerest regards,"

4 | PERSONAL STORIES AND FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES: WHERE TO NOW?

At the outset, I feel like I surrender with my epistolic emails; hence, my very notion of agency becomes paler if not tainted. However, when I take a closer look at Du Bois's notion of double consciousness, his eloquent articulation on twoness, second sight, and the veil (1989) illustrates that the very notion of agency is fluid and double consciousness entails the potential to resist while embracing vulnerabilities. Likewise, it becomes apparent that the very dichotomous understanding of vulnerability versus resistance might be misleading (Butler, 2016) in both the complex and multilayered process of self-cultivation and in seeking collective agency. Thus, "sociological double consciousness" (Rios et al., 2017) highlights self-formation while astutely shedding light on the sociohistorical context of the marginalized individuals and their seemingly contradictory "self-presentation" as a complex process.

In the multilayered contexts of a parent, a researcher, a social scientist with different knowledge layers, the double consciousness provides me with the tools not only to navigate the everyday encounters but also to contextualize them from a sociological perspective and open a dialog for intellectual and political transformation. Thus, on top of my daunting unpaid care work and my not shying away from but diligently reflecting on these experiences, my double consciousness encourages me to create solidarity networks by disseminating this experience with other parents, colleagues, and broader audiences to reiterate the dicta "mothering is political" (Collins, 1994, 2005; Fuentes, 2013; hooks, 1990; Naples, 1992, 1998), and *personal is political*.

And at its core, what is "mothering" if not social reproduction? Since the 1970s, feminists have been complicating and complementing Marxian "blind spots" relating to the extent to which capitalist society was retained and reproduced by women and domestic work (Weiss, 2021), and Marxist feminists have placed due emphasis on social reproduction (Bhattacharya, 2017; Ferguson, 2017; Fraser, 2016; Hopkins, 2017) and vitalized the value of the unpaid work at home (Dalla Costa & James, 1975; Federici, 1975; Mies, 1986). The investigation of such rifts and crux points in the reproduction of the capitalist society has been revitalized (Kisner & Federici, 2021) with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Exploration of social reproduction theory has broadened to encompass mothering and the value of at-home work and expanded its scope regarding support and care work and how inequality is reproduced in society (Weiss, 2021). It is this revitalization that connects me as a mother to the farmworker who states that her health and my health are essential and what we do—my work at home and her work in the fields—creates "value." Therefore, the recent emphasis and revitalization of discussions on the "labor theory of value" and care work

crystallizes the astute intervention of the feminist political economy and praxis, which have criticized and complemented the notion of the creation of value in the capitalist world economy.

Feminist standpoint theory and discussions on its Marxist origins (Collins, 1997; Hartsock, 1995; Smith, 1997) emphasize that situated knowledge based on experience entails emancipatory power for specifically marginalized voices. Furthermore, intersectional feminist activism and scholarship, by zeroing into the particularities of the spatial, historical context, provide the ground for the revolutionary political transformation at micro levels via sharing, amplifying, and encouraging the sharing of experiences to avoid shallow abstract analysis for the sake of analysis. So, the “value” of care work, which is the same as the value of essential work, is the link that connects, both intellectually and empirically, the reality of an immigrant woman who is a graduate student who also works at home and another immigrant woman who works in the fields to produce the food we consume every day.

5 | CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this experimental autoethnographic journey, drawing on sociological double consciousness, I tried to revivify the “personal is political” feminist dictum with a *thick description*. Through feminist perspectives, I zoom in to capture personal encounters, and then to make sense of those skirmishes, I zoom out. Then again, I zero into words, dialogs, emails, and observations and then out again to concepts and theories to render them understandable and bearable. To cope with questions like “What am I living?” I employ multiple analytical tools to conceptualize systemic racialization and the function of state apparatuses. Yet, I also question: How do we/I claim agency?

For sociologists conducting an ethnographic study or participant observation of everyday lives of “ordinary people” (Burawoy et al., 1991), “fieldwork is carried out by immersing oneself in a collective way of life for the purpose of gaining firsthand knowledge about a major facet of it” (Shaffir & Stebbins, 1991, 5). Yet, in my case,⁶ the field immersed itself on me or I rather fell into the “field” without having any prior questions or curiosities, intellectual or otherwise. In this sense, the insistence of autoethnographers on “beginning by personal life, paying attention to physical feelings, thoughts, and emotions” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, 737) while employing “systematic sociological introspection” (Ellis, 1991) echoes what feminist scholars and activists (Collins, 2000; Hanisch, 1970; hooks, 1984; Lorde, 1984) have long argued: that lived experiences matter, and they are political.

The very act of writing this article, exposing myself (and loved ones), makes me vulnerable. Still, daring dialog with feminist scholarship on the interlocking structures of oppression is a claim of agency. Instead of offering analytical, objective “undebatable conclusions,” I dare to raise questions about my experiences, seek “further conversations,” and build “companionship” “rather than abstract loneliness” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, 744). In other words, I ask, “Does this story contain examples of ‘symbolic’ violence?” “Do these stories resonate with readers’ experiences?” Can this experimental autoethnography offer readers active involvement? Is it possible to create the subject as “us” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000), ultimately leading to political transformation through this writing and reading process?

It is mid-September 2019. We opt for a hybrid classroom with in-person instruction 2 days a week and the rest online. This entire process of writing, reflecting, and trying to analyze my experience gives me grief and adds to my burden. However, this writing act simultaneously empowers and convinces me that I have done something meaningful. I realize that, as Angela Davis maintained:

“The personal is political”—not only that what we experience on a personal level has profound political implications, but that our interior lives, our emotional lives, are very much informed by ideology. We ourselves often do the work of the state in and through our interior lives. What we often assume belongs most intimately to ourselves and to our emotional life has been produced elsewhere and has been recruited to do the work of racism and repression” (2016, 142).

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ For the significance of diaries as a data source in qualitative research see (Harvey, 2011).
- ² For decades, the Nagorno Karabakh conflict has fueled rampant ethnonationalism in the post-Soviet nation states of Azerbaijan and Armenia. The modern phase of the conflict has origins in 1923 when Stalin, to ensure anti-nationalist communism (and to placate Turkey), established the Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) within the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic. Nagorno Karabakh, populated predominantly by Armenians, existed as a minority enclave within Azerbaijan under the firm control of the Soviet Union (Derluguian, 2021). Before the dissolution of the USSR, Nagorno Karabakh Armenians made multiple attempts to unite with soviet-Armenia, and by 1988, the national Karabakh (Artsakh) movement was openly advocating the transfer of the region and armed conflict ensued. After the dissolution of the USSR, violent clashes on both sides accelerated. Although Azerbaijan and Armenia became nation-states, the 1991 Nagorno Karabakh declaration of independence has not yet been recognized by Armenia or any member of the U.N. In 1992, Armenia's occupation of seven regions within the territory of Azerbaijan around Nagorno-Karabagh as a buffer zone, was condemned by the UN. Thousands were killed and displaced in the ensuing war, and although relative stability had been established, the low-intensity conflict escalated again in September 2021 into full-scale war. With the intervention of the Russian Federation, the war was halted (Derluguian, 2021, 26), with Russian and Turkish peacekeeping forces residing in the region and the Armenian occupied districts returned to Azerbaijan, which also retains a substantial part of Nagorno-Karabakh itself.
- ³ The "Muslim ban" refers to the controversial executive order by US President Donald Trump named Executive Order 13,769, titled Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States which temporarily prohibited citizens of Muslim majority countries' from entering US.
- ⁴ Building on Abdelnour and Abu Moghli's insights on the importance of self-reflexivity, I refer to "violent contexts" which foster the development of an atmosphere conducive to aggression and violence and a *potential* for anti-immigrant and more specifically anti-Muslim violence. Their research focused on overt and brutal "violent contexts" such as "apartheid, civil war, genocide, military invasion, military occupation, political violence, settler-colonization, and terrorism as well as post-conflict or post-war settings (e.g., displacement, humanitarian settings, and refugee camps)" (2021, 2).
- ⁵ In this paper, I confine hijab references to the context of my parenting experience as viewed through the lens of double-consciousness, because the literature exploring the etymology, and sociological underpinnings of the Islamic *hijab*, is abundant. Furthermore, politics and the political economy of the head-covering and the nonpolitical or theological meanings adhered to by the believers very much depends on local and global contexts (Gocek, 1999; Gole, 1996; Hoodfar, 1993; Korteweg & Yurdakul, 2014; Siraj, 2011).
- ⁶ For a more overt example of autoethnographic research experience see (Zempi, 2017; Zempi & Awan, 2017).

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- [Correction added on 14 March 2022, after first online publication: References "Patel, Raj, and Jason W. Moore" and "Roth, Benita" are updated in this version.]

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