

“They Do That to Foreign Women”: Domestic Terrorism and Contraceptive Nationalism in *Not Without My Daughter*

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Iran was a nightmare for Betty Mahmoody. Rather than forfeiting her child to divorce, she had agreed to visit her husband's family on what she thought was an extended vacation. In Tehran, Mahmoody found herself trapped, told she was now her husband's property and would never return to the United States. Forced to feign affection for her husband to see her child and leave the house, Mahmoody bartered her body for mobility. Once on the city's streets, she endured harassment and assault at the hands of strange Iranian men. Her sister-in-law dismissed these incidents, explaining that “they do that to foreign women,” and warning Mahmoody to tell no one else if she ever wanted to leave the house unaccompanied again. Ultimately, she risked rape and losing her daughter to child-marriage during their perilous escape to Turkey. Again and again, Mahmoody professed her willingness to endure sexual trauma at the hands of savage Muslim men, to use her body as a “tool...to fashion freedom.”¹

Withstanding sexual harassment and assault is a leitmotif throughout the controversial best seller *Not Without My Daughter* (1987). The abuse Mahmoody endures at her husband's hands mirrors the abuse she receives from his family and men throughout the Islamic Republic of Iran. Muslim men present a constant threat of sexual violence and physical assault throughout this account. Mahmoody's story cautions American readers about the alleged dangers of Muslim men and what they do to “foreign women.”

That scholars and former acquaintances alike have criticized Mahmoody's narrative as misleading, inaccurate, and racist does little to mitigate its lasting influence on Americans' understandings of Islam and Iran. Despite its questionable content, Americans frequently read *Not Without My Daughter* not merely as a personal memoir of domestic

¹ Betty Mahmoody and William Hoffer, *Not Without My Daughter* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), 258.

discord, but as an authentic account of contemporary Iranian life.² Literature and gender scholar Farzaneh Milani argues that “no book about Iran has achieved the phenomenal success of *Not Without My Daughter*.”³ In the relative absence of other depictions of Islam and Iran during the 1980s and 1990s, the book and film (1991) “enjoyed a monopoly in circulating [their] perspective on Islam and Muslims to a broad popular audience.”⁴ Mahmoody’s account has indelibly shaped American popular imaginings of both Iran and Muslim masculinity.

I read *Not Without My Daughter* as a cautionary tale about what I term “domestic terrorism.” In this formulation, “domestic” signals both the private (home, family, American normative sexuality) and the public (sovereign national identity). The author describes her husband, Dr. Bozorg Sayyed Mahmoody, as abusive, irrational, and consumed by religious fanaticism – but the expressions of his religiously-motivated rage and violence are limited to the domestic sphere, directed toward his American wife and daughter. This domestic violence mirrors the hostility, irrationality, and fanaticism that Mahmoody insists are inherent to Iran and Islam. Her accounts of interactions with other Muslim men portray them as abusive, sexually predatory (particularly toward white women), and religiously fanatical. Mahmoody elides her husband’s abuse with the men of post-revolutionary Iran and invites her audiences to make similar cognitive leaps, persuasively presenting Muslim masculinity as an intimate threat to America and its women.⁵

More than one woman’s account of a harrowing escape from captivity and abuse, *Daughter* functions as a cautionary tale against exogamy. *Daughter* pits the frustrated religious and sexual excess of Bozorg Mahmoody against the sexual exceptionalism of his American wife. Dr. Mahmoody’s uncontrollable religiosity and sexuality resist and finally defeat all his attempts to Americanize himself, rendering him incontrovertibly, essentially foreign. At the same time, Betty Mahmoody’s embodied resistance to Islam—despite her dalliance with a hypersexualized and racialized religious outsider—finally redeems her and allow her to escape from Tehran. Mahmoody wins her freedom only when she has fully and finally rejected her illicit liaison with a racially and sexually perverse religious outsider.⁶ *Daughter* narrates not only Mahmoody’s captivity and domestic terror, but also her atonement and redemption.

² Farzaneh Milani, *Words, Not Swords: Iranian Women Writers and the Freedom of Movement* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2011), 233, 217.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Margaret Ruth Miles, *Seeing and Believing: Religion and Values in the Movies* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 71. Milani also notes that the *New York Times* Best Seller list included no books about Iran until 1981; after the publication of *Not Without My Daughter*, the *Times* listed five books on Iran as best-sellers (3 non-fiction, including *Daughter*). See Milani, *Words, Not Swords*, 208.

⁵ See Milani, *Words, Not Swords*, 217. See also Miles on the ways the film rewards audiences for sympathizing with Betty Mahmoody: Miles, *Seeing and Believing*, 91.

⁶ Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), xiii.

Not Without My Daughter presents Islam as a specific, bodily threat to white American womanhood and urges the embodied rejection of Islam as fundamentally anti-American. As such, *Daughter* exemplifies what I call “contraceptive nationalism.” Narratives of contraceptive nationalism reject religious difference as fundamentally unacceptable—unincorporable—within the American body politic. Such narratives are prophylactic, meant to defend the body politic from insemination by dangerous outsiders, who readers should assume pose sexual and often racialized perils to the nation. In tales like *Daughter*, (white) American women are always already liberated by virtue of their very American-ness.⁷ Religious outsiders, foreign men, seduce these women away from their own freedoms; these seductions risk not only individual liberties, but national integrity.

Throughout *Daughter*, Mahmoody portrays Muslim masculinity as an explicit sexual threat – savage, perverse, and essentially un-American. The sexual manipulation of her husband, especially through her covert use of contraception, and her willingness to endure public sexual harassment and assault are Mahmoody’s victories over the Muslim men and Islamic state that would control her and women like her. Mahmoody’s indictment of her husband and his religion encapsulates a pre-9/11 suspicion of Islam as fundamentally un-American. Indeed, ethnic studies scholar Sylvia Chan-Malik has suggested that *Daughter* is “perhaps the most well-known American story of a woman suffering under Islamic Terror, a cautionary tale of the *dangers of cultural and religious mixing* and the rampant misogyny of ‘fundamentalist Islam.’”⁸ *Not Without My Daughter* articulates a persistent American anxiety regarding the incompatibility of Muslim piety with bodily autonomy – rhetoric that is still discernible in 21st century public oppositions to American Islam.

Hostage Narratives⁹

The challenge of stories like *Not Without My Daughter* is their persistent influence, despite their dubious claims and discredited accounts. Betty Mahmoody’s harrowing tale of rescuing her daughter, Mahtob, from captivity and abuse remains beloved by

⁷ See Betty de Hart, “Not Without My Daughter: On Parental Abduction, Orientalism, and Maternal Melodrama,” *European Journal of Women’s Studies* 8, no. 1 (February 1, 2001), 53. deHart insists that Mahmoody’s exceptionalist rhetoric constructs white American women as “the most liberated and superior group of women on earth.”

⁸ Sylvia Chan-Malik, “Chadors, Feminists, Terror The Racial Politics of U.S. Media Representations of the 1979 Iranian Women’s Movement,” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 637, no. 1 (September 1, 2011): 134, emphasis added.

⁹ I borrow this term from Milani, who identifies hostage narratives as a “new literary subgenre,” one that depicts Iranian women flat, static stereotypical characters, “the ultimate prisoners in a giant gulag the size of Iran.” Milani notes that these narratives are exceedingly popular with western readers, but not elsewhere. My broader project considers these stories in the context of American captivity narratives, which chronicle the white women’s unique susceptibility to capture by sexually menacing religious outsiders and extraordinary resistance to same. See Milani, *Words, Not Swords*, 25.

many Americans. In this 1987 international best-seller, Betty Mahmoody narrates her husband's rapid deterioration from an industrious and thoroughly Americanized medical doctor into an abusive, impotent lunatic shortly after their family's arrival in Tehran. Dr. Bozorg Sayyed Mahmoody allegedly held his wife and daughter captive, refusing to let them return to America and beating them when they voiced their dissent. When the American State Department failed to rescue Mahmoody and her daughter, they braved the icy mountains of northwestern Iran to escape into Turkey and freedom. *Not Without My Daughter* made Betty Mahmoody an international feminist icon, poster girl for women's liberation from oppressive—and notably religious—patriarchal abuse.

This contentious tale of captivity and liberation sold 15 million copies internationally and has been translated into 20 languages.¹⁰ Mahmoody also told her story to Barbara Walters, Larry King, Phil Donahue, Sally Jessie Raphael, and Oprah Winfrey – and through them, to millions of American viewers.¹¹ The book was selected as a Literary Guild alternate and nominated for a Pulitzer Prize in 1987.¹² Sally Field portrayed Mahmoody in the poorly reviewed but oft-referenced 1991 film adaptation of *Not Without My Daughter*, which still regularly airs on the OWN network.¹³ Mahmoody was celebrated as Outstanding Woman of the Year by Oakland University and as Woman of the Year in Germany. Her alma mater, Alma College in Michigan, awarded Mahmoody an honorary doctorate of letters. The US State Department appointed Mahmoody as an advisor “on the plight of American women and children held against their will in foreign countries.”¹⁴

Yet Mahmoody's account is not uniformly accepted. As film scholar Nacim Pak-Shiraz notes, “on the Iranian screens, the victim was Mahmoody [sic] and not his wife.”¹⁵ In the Finnish documentary *Without My Daughter* (2002, originally titled *Ilman Tyttärentäni*), Dr. Mahmoody, family members, and acquaintances refute a number of Betty Mahmoody's assertions.¹⁶ “I am a beast and a criminal in the eyes of the world,” Dr. Mahmoody told his documentarians.¹⁷ “I have been portrayed as a liar, a woman-beater,

¹⁰ Milani, *Words, Not Swords*, 215.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 214.

¹² *Ibid.*, but see also Alexander Abad-Santos, “Journalists, Please Stop Saying You Were ‘Pulitzer Prize-Nominated,’” *The Atlantic Wire*, June 26, 2012, <http://www.theatlanticwire.com/business/2012/06/journalists-please-stop-saying-youre-pulitzer-prize-nominated/53926/>. According to Abad-Santos, “all it takes to be ‘nominated’ for a Pulitzer is a \$50 and an entry form.”

¹³ Regarding the significant cultural influence of Oprah and her media efforts, see Kathryn Lofton, *Oprah: Gospel of an Icon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

¹⁴ Miles, *Seeing and Believing*, 71.

¹⁵ Nacim Pak-Shiraz, *Shi'i Islam in Iranian Cinema: Religion and Spirituality in Film* (London; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 1.

¹⁶ “Finnish Documentary Counters anti-Iran Propaganda in US Film,” *Payvand Iran News*, November 22, 2002, <http://www.payvand.com/news/02/nov/1078.html>. See also Milani, *Words, Not Swords*, 217.

¹⁷ Milani, *Words, Not Swords*, 217. Bozorg Mahmoody died in 2009 without seeing his daughter Mahtob again.

and a kidnapper. . . My sin, my only sin was that I loved my child, my daughter.”¹⁸ *Without My Daughter* also includes interviews with the Mahmoodys’ American friends still living in Iran, who accuse Betty of fabricating much of her story.

Beyond the questionable facticity of Mahmoody’s account, *Daughter* has been widely criticized as racist and xenophobic. Novelist Porochista Khakpour calls *Daughter* “a horror movie about Iran,” in which “we [Iranians] were Freddy Krueger.”¹⁹ *Not Without My Daughter* is a pre-9/11 example of xenophobic pulp nonfiction narratives portraying women, Americans, and most especially American women as captives of a hostile, militaristic, nationalized, masculinized religious fanaticism. Such stories are not merely popular among American audiences – they coincide with an increased scrutiny of both American Muslims and Muslim majority nation-states. The two most visible recent examples of this genre are Nafisi’s *Reading Lolita in Tehran* (2003) and Ben Affleck’s *Argo* (2012).

Azar Nafisi recalls her experiences of teaching the western literary canon in post-revolutionary Iran in *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books*. *Reading Lolita* eventually sold more than one million copies and spent two years on the *New York Times* best seller list; the book hit shelves in March 2003, the same month George W. Bush initiated a US-led invasion of Iraq.²⁰ Nafisi depicts Iranian women as particular victims of Iranian state violence and identifies politicized religion as the sole source of oppressive governmental politics. This pairing—what Mahmood and Hirschkind call the “twin figures of the Islamic fundamentalist and his female victim”—mobilized and justified massive economic and military support for US intervention in Muslim majority nations during the Bush administration.²¹

Argo, Ben Affleck’s cinematic adaptation of a CIA covert operation to extract embassy workers from post-revolutionary Tehran, opens with a surprisingly nuanced animated overview of Iran’s recent history, but quickly devolves into exclusively depicting Muslim men as violent, irrational, and hostile. The film won three Academy Awards, including Best Picture for 2012, as well as three BAFTAs and two Golden Globe awards,

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Porochista Khakpour, “Essay: Iranians Moving Past Negative Depictions in Pop Culture,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 27, 2010, <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/jun/27/entertainment/la-ca-iran-popculture-20100627> (emphasis added). Khakpour is the author of the novel *Sons and Other Flammable Objects* (Grove Press, 2007). Freddy Krueger is a horrifically scarred, razor-nailed, and be-striped sweated bogeyman who menaces the teenagers of director Wes Craven’s 1990s slasher film series *A Nightmare on Elm Street*. Notably, Krueger attacks *Nightmare*’s protagonists in their dreams and in their beds, lending overt sexual overtones to the more subtle psychosexual content of the film.

²⁰ Mitra Rastegar, “Reading Nafisi in the West: Authenticity, Orientalism and ‘Liberating’ Iranian Women,” *Women’s Studies Quarterly*, 34.1–2 (2006): 108. Thomas Meaney, “Huck Finn to the Rescue,” October 26, 2014, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/book-review-the-republic-of-imagination-by-azar-nafisi-1413929990>.

²¹ Charles Hirschkind and Saba Mahmood, “Feminism, the Taliban, and Politics of Counter-Insurgency,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 75, no. 2 (2002): 340–1.

including for best film and best director. Before naming *Argo* best picture, First Lady Michelle Obama hailed the film as one that “lift[s] our spirits, broaden[s] our minds, and transport[s] us to places never imagined.” That is: the First Lady of the United States suggested that the Islamic Republic of Iran is a place literally beyond Americans’ imaginings, praising films like *Argo* for helping Americans to better understand the lived reality of Iran.

Narratives like *Argo*, *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, and *Not Without My Daughter* are significant because, as Milani has argued, “women’s oppression has the power to attract immediate and passionate attention and ironically to prepare the public to accept policy options that they would find otherwise unpalatable.”²² The narrative of Muslim oppression of women has fuelled decades of militarized American hostility toward Muslim-majority states – and, as I discuss in my conclusion, surveillance of and violence toward American Muslims. Narratives of contraceptive nationalism, like Betty Mahmoody’s story, justify sustained this aggression by constructing Muslim masculinity as an irrational, violent, and emphatically sexual threat for American women.

Domestic Terrorism

The sexual peril of Muslim masculinity haunts Mahmoody throughout *Not Without My Daughter*. The author characterizes her husband as a “domestic terrorist”: an abusive and irrational religious outsider whose violence is limited to the domestic sphere. This domesticity neither negates nor diminishes his menace. Indeed, *Daughter* depicts this violence as all the more terrifying for its appearance of assimilation, of “normalcy.” Mahmoody’s husband further functions as a synecdoche for Muslim masculinity throughout *Daughter*. His character is merely the most visible and best developed instantiation of the sexual threat Mahmoody observes in all Muslim/Iranian men. This domestic terrorism mirrors the hostility, irrationality, and fanaticism Mahmoody implies are inherent to Islam.

Mahmoody primarily encounters Islam as an embodied threat through her husband’s domestic violence. Their early marriage was affectionate, though “cultural differences” (Bozorg’s reluctance to put Mahmoody’s name on their checking account, his treatment of her and their finances as his own “personal asset[s]”) foreshadowed their eventual discord.²³ But the 1979 Iranian revolution drove the Mahmoodys further from each other. Betty recalls that “the revolution took place in our home as well as in Iran. [Bozorg] began to say his Islamic prayers with a piety I had not witnessed in him before. He made contributions to various Shiite groups.”²⁴ Bozorg’s sympathies for the revolutionaries emerge as full-on religious fanaticism once their family arrives in Tehran; Betty notes that “the longer we remained in Iran, the more he succumbed to the unfathomable pull of

²² Milani, *Words, Not Swords*, 232–3.

²³ Mahmoody and Hoffer, *Not Without My Daughter*, 212.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 215.

his native culture.”²⁵ As Bozorg imprisons and beats his wife, “he seems to do so in the name of Islam as when he slaps her face, boasting, ‘I’m a Muslim!’”²⁶ When Betty pleads to return to America for the sake of their child, Bozorg insists that “Islam’s the greatest gift I can give my child.” Here again Mahmoody implies that American and Muslim identities are mutually exclusive. Bozorg’s family condones and even facilitates his abuses, “clad in the self-righteous robes of fanaticism.”²⁷ Mahmoody fears the “Islamic noose around [her] neck,” lamenting that she is “married to a madman and trapped in a country where the laws decreed that he was my absolute master.”²⁸ *Daughter* constructs Muslim masculinity as domestic terrorism, enacting intimate violence authorized by irrational and anti-American religiosity.

Her husband poses a specifically sexual threat to Mahmoody throughout her narrative. His initial seduction robs her of her senses, his entitlement to her body repulses her, and his repeated advances threaten her with unwanted pregnancy. Mahmoody narrates her early attraction to Bozorg as a kind of brainwashing: “I had never experienced such a strong physical attraction. We could not seem to get close enough to each other. Without realizing it, I turned my efforts to pleasing him.”²⁹ Even after captivity and violence mar their relationship, Bozorg still solicits sex from Betty. But these overtures are infrequent and sporadic, and Mahmoody is at great pains to convey how distasteful she finds her husband’s advances. Bozorg threatens to take a second wife if she will not provide him with a son.³⁰ Mahmoody accommodates her husband’s repellant desires to facilitate her escape attempts.³¹ As her plans solidify to escape Iran and her husband, their sexual activities occur on a more frequent basis: “it was necessary for me to feign affection.”³² Yet Mahmoody notes that this “feigned affection” heightens her anxiety about becoming pregnant by a man she loathed and feared.³³ Beyond her physical revulsion, she worried that “pregnancy would trap me more securely than ever before.”³⁴ She later classified these “horrid act[s]” as instances of marital rape.³⁵ The detailed and extensive narratives of domestic abuse also carry sexual connotations: Mahmoody refers to her husband’s “sadistic fantasies;” feminist film critics have suggested that domestic violence, and

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 67.

²⁶ Jack G. Shaheen, “Hollywood’s Muslim Arabs,” *Muslim World* 90, no. 1/2 (Spring 2000): 22.

²⁷ Mahmoody and Hoffer, *Not Without My Daughter*, 57.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 181, 67.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 50–1. Allegations of brainwashing are common in religiously intolerant rhetoric. See in particular Eileen Barker, *Making of a Moontie: Choice or Brainwashing?* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1984).

³⁰ Mahmoody and Hoffer, *Not Without My Daughter*, 228–9.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 84.

³² *Ibid.*, 248.

³³ *Ibid.*, 249, 281.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 248–9.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 367.

wife-beating specifically, may constitute a symbolic penetration of the victim.³⁶ Mahmoody narrates her relationship with her husband in terms of religiously authorized sexual abuse.

The sexual peril Bozorg poses as fanatical Muslim husband reflects the hypersexualized menace of Mahmoody's Iran. *Daughter* is explicit about linking violent masculinity, sexual predation, and excessive religiosity. Mahmoody "marveled at the power their society and their religion held over" Iranians.³⁷ In her interactions with Iranian men, Mahmoody finds herself molested by a "particularly pungent Iranian" bus driver³⁸; she and her friend Alice are both groped by Iranian taxi drivers.³⁹ Her husband's niece informs her that "they do that to foreign women," but Mahmoody refuses to report the incidents so that she can retain her mobility.⁴⁰ Note the emphasis on foreign women, the implication being that America's liberated sexuality must be read as lasciviousness in such a "repressed" context as the Islamic Republic of Iran.⁴¹ Mahmoody forbears these molestations to escape the family home, foreshadowing the risks she endures to escape the country.

Mahmoody also suggests that sexual contact with her husband may have inadvertently endangered her child; her depiction of this peril is racialized as well as sexual, as she implies that fanatical religious and political affiliations can somehow be transmitted genetically. The best filmic example of this authorial anxiety is an exchange between Mahtob and her father, set in the daughter's pastel bedroom:

Mahtob: Daddy, do I hate Americans?
 Bozorg: What do you mean? Of course not.
 Mahtob: Lucille says I hate Americans because you're from Eye-Ran.
 Bozorg: Sweetheart, Lucille doesn't really know what she's talking about. So we shouldn't pay too much attention to her. I've lived in America for 20 years. I'm as America as apple pie. So are you.

But since the audience is already aware that Bozorg will betray and abuse his American family members, his claim to be "as America as apple pie" rings false.⁴² His off-phrasing,

³⁶ On this point—particularly with regard to oedipal fantasies of being beaten/penetrated by a father—Carol J. Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 76. While the film depicts no sex between Bozorg and Betty, depictions of graphic and arguably sadistic violence are fairly frequent.

³⁷ Mahmoody and Hoffer, *Not Without My Daughter*, 5.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 274–5.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 264, 300–1.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 264.

⁴¹ This exceptionalist rhetoric juxtaposes American self-congratulatory sexual liberation against a monolithic, static Muslim sexual repression. On this point, see Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, xxv.

⁴² It is worth noting that the film emphasized American anti-Iranian sentiment to a far greater degree than the book. For example: in Gilbert's film, the doctors at Bozorg's hospital have extended racist exchange at Bozorg's expense; it is religio-racial discrimination (not malpractice) that gets him fired. The director, unlike Mahmoody herself, does not imply this discrimination is Bozorg's fault.

“America” rather than “American,” set in his daughter’s pristine American bedroom, underscores his dishonesty and his inability to fully assimilate.⁴³ His “reversion” to monstrous Muslim behaviors seems inevitable.

Mahmoody augments this concern about the potential contamination of her daughter with frequent descriptions of birth defects and deformities among Iranian children. She suspects that these physical maladies follow inbreeding, again suggesting Muslim men are given to sexual predation and perversity.⁴⁴

The film and pulp fiction versions of *Daughter* also portray Mahmoody’s daughter, Mahtob, at risk of an omnipresent, threatening Muslim sexuality. In the book, Betty worries that her daughter will be taken and sold into underage marriage by the Kurdish family hosting them, and in the film, a friend warns her that Bozorg’s family is “from the provinces. They’re more fanatical than most. Some consider a girl of nine ready for marriage. Child brides are not unknown.”⁴⁵ Mahmoody repeatedly connects sexual predation and Muslim fanaticism, also evidenced in repeated reports of the *pasdar* (Iranian religious/military police) kidnapping, raping, and executing women, as well as men from other Muslim countries (notably Iraq and Afghanistan) raping and murdering Iranian girls.⁴⁶ Iran is a vector for women’s sexual peril, even for Mahmoody’s own half-Iranian daughter.

Mahmoody repeatedly emphasizes the sexual peril of escaping Iran. Friends warn her about the “terrible and sinister smugglers of northwest Iran”—the same smugglers who ultimately secure her freedom—raping and murdering the people they’ve been hired to help.⁴⁷ But the author avows “they could pose no dangers more frightful than those threatened by my husband. I had already been robbed, kidnapped, and raped.”⁴⁸ The cumulative effect of these anecdotes is to construct Muslim masculinity as sexually predatory, lascivious, and abusive – a specific embodied threat to American women.⁴⁹

Contraceptive Nationalism

Daughter repeatedly shows the domestic terrorism of Muslim masculinity enacting intimate violence on the vulnerable bodies of women. This violence, Mahmoody frequently reminds her readers, is both religiously justified and permissible – evidence of the excessive and fanatical nature of (her xenophobic depiction of) Islam. Her resistance to the sexual peril presented by Muslim masculinity manifests as sexual manipulation of

⁴³ I am indebted to Dr. Ilyse Morgenstein-Fuerst for this insight.

⁴⁴ Mahmoody and Hoffer, *Not Without My Daughter*, 16, 32.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 386, 276, 291–2, 293.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 136, 332, 367.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 367.

⁴⁹ Compare Anne Norton, “Gender, Sexuality, and the Iraq of Our Imagination,” *Middle East Report* 173, no. 21 (December 1991), <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer173/gender-sexuality-iraq-our-imagination>.

her husband, most notably through her covert use of contraceptives, and her willingness to endure harassment and the threat of sexual violence outside her husband's family home.

Mahmoody's defiant navigation of predatory Muslim sexuality constitutes an embodied rejection of Islam as fundamentally un-American. As such, I suggest that *Not Without My Daughter* contributes to a narrative of contraceptive nationalism, discernible in pulp nonfiction accounts of interaction with American religious outsiders. This discourse emerges in the wake of second-wave US feminist activism toward gender equality during 1970s.⁵⁰ At the same time, the New Christian Right emerged as the voice of public morality and solidified the collapse of American values into conservative Christian sexual ethics.⁵¹ The post-1970s American imbrication of political religion and sexuality in the wake of the women's liberation movement and the emergence of the New Christian Right informs contraceptive nationalism as a rhetorical strategy; in this light, American ideals of (white) women's liberation seem innate and universal. Contraceptive nationalism discredits and contains religious and sexual difference by characterizing religious outsiders as sexual predators. This discourse participates in the negotiation and regulation of public morality; it is an ostensibly secular discourse that is deeply (if sometimes unconsciously) inflected by conservative Christian sexual ethics.

⁵⁰ On the emphasis of second wave feminists' activism toward women's bodily autonomy and reproductive freedom, see in particular Jane Gerhard, *Desiring Revolution: Second-Wave Feminism and the Rewriting of American Sexual Thought, 1920–1982* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

⁵¹ Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, an unprecedented confederacy of disparate Christian denominations set itself against the modern perils of teen pregnancy, gay rights activism, abortion, pornography, divorce, and similar sexual and gendered threats. "The New Christian Right" launched a massive and influential public campaign against perceived moral decline and threats on the family. The New Christian Right's attempts to protect the American family from the dangers of transgressive sex—and, more broadly, the consolidation of public Christian morality around issues of sexual ethics—set the stage for couching patriotic concern in the language of sexual regulation. This politicization of non-normative sexuality as symptomatic of national moral atrophy directly contributed to the merger of morality, values, and normative sexuality in American public discourse.

Cultural theorist Michael Warner notes that the regulation of sex-debates over abortion, contraception, and other transgressions-rallied a confederation of disparate Protestant communities (and even some Roman Catholics) in the late 1970s. "These Christians needed sex to exist as a movement," Warner notes. This conservative Christian alliance formed around—indeed, required—a conservative sexual consensus that condemned homosexuality, abortion, contraception, pornography, and other symptoms of "moral decline." Michael Warner, "The Ruse of 'Secular Humanism'," *The Immanent Frame: Secularism, Religion, and the Public Sphere*, September 22, 2008, <http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2008/09/22/the-ruse-of-secular-humanism/>. See also Daniel K. Williams, *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 5, 24, noting in particular Billy Graham's insistence that illicit sex was an especially pernicious threat to the home, "the citadel of American life," and thus to national security. On the construction and consolidation of evangelical identity around an embattled identity and an erotics of fear, see Jason Bivins, *Religion of Fear: The Politics of Horror in Conservative Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 15.

Hostage narratives like *Not Without My Daughter*—or *Argo*, or *Reading Lolita in Tehran*—are prophylactic, protecting the American body politic from invasion by presumably contaminating outside forces. In *Daughter*, Islam presents a racialized sexual peril embodied by Iranian Muslim men, who attempt to compromise a white Protestant woman's freedoms. Betty Mahmoody instantiates contraceptive nationalism in her vehement rejection of Muslim masculinity as irredeemably un-American, and exculpates her own exogamous transgressions through her grueling and treacherous bid for liberation. *Daughter* is thus not only a tale of captivity, but one of atonement. Betty Mahmoody narrates her repentance of exogamy and is redeemed through her embodied resistance and ultimate triumph over the sexual peril of Islam.

Mahmoody's embodied rejection of Muslim masculinity is first and most consistently discernible in her accounts of sexually manipulating her husband. The descriptions of her conjugal relations are unflinchingly denigrating. Her accounts of sexual encounters with her husband emphasize that their sex is infrequent, brief, and dissatisfying: "several minutes," during which Betty struggles not to vomit; a "few minutes of passion" she endures to lure her husband into complacency.⁵² That she is willing and able to trade her "affections" to lure her abusive husband into complacency highlights Mahmoody's exceptional resolve. "During the next several minutes it was all I could do to keep from vomiting, but somehow I managed to convey enjoyment. I hate him! I hate him! I repeated to myself all through the horrid act. But when it was over, I whispered, 'I love you!' *Taraf!* [empty courtesy]"⁵³ Mahmoody extols her ability to endure and even "convey enjoyment" during a sexual exchange she finds detestable, demonstrating the lengths to which she is willing to go to secure freedom for herself and her daughter.

Mahmoody repeatedly emphasizes her willingness to commodify her body to gain her freedom. She explicitly describes sexual interactions with her husband *as* exchanges, his bodily pleasure for her liberty. "Sex with Moody was merely one of many ugly experiences I knew I would have to endure in order to *fight for freedom*."⁵⁴ Indeed, Mahmoody insists that she is *using* her body to create her own path to escape. After manufacturing a reconciliation, she initiates a sexual encounter with her husband. "During the few minutes of passion that followed I was able to dissociate myself from the present. At that moment *my body was simply a tool that I would use, if I had to, to fashion freedom*."⁵⁵ Narrating instances of what Mahmoody describes as marital rape in terms of commodification—the exchange of sex for freedom—emasculates Bozorg and allows Mahmoody to reclaim her sexual agency, reaffirming her sexual exceptionalism.

⁵² Mahmoody and Hoffer, *Not Without My Daughter*, 83, 258.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 84, emphasis added.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 258, emphasis added.

Mahmoody's ability to resist the sexual control of her husband and of the Islamic Republic of Iran are presented as exemplary and, given Mahmoody's frequent references to her own nationality, as somehow inherent to her Americanness. That (she believes) her use of birth control endangers her life underscores Mahmoody's conviction in the "backwardness" and barbarism of Iran.⁵⁶ As a modern American woman, Mahmoody consistently emphasizes her right to control her own reproductive capacity.⁵⁷ *Daughter* depicts Mahmoody's sexual commodification as an act of uniquely American embodied resistance.

Mahmoody provides the most graphic example of embodied resistance in the narration of removing her intrauterine contraceptive device, or IUD. While still in the United States, the author and her husband experienced many months of domestic discord, including an extended separation following Bozorg's suspension under suspicion of malpractice. Following their reconciliation, Mahmoody had an IUD implanted without Bozorg's knowledge. Her covert use of contraception functions both to further emasculate her husband and to instantiate her own sexual agency. Once trapped in Iran, however, the IUD causes Mahmoody to fear for her life.⁵⁸ She records that her husband warned her that using "preventing conception against the husband's wishes. . . was a capital offense."⁵⁹

It was disconcerting to know that I carried within my body, unbeknownst to Moody, an IUD that could jeopardize my life. Would they really execute a woman for practicing birth control? I knew the answer to that. In this country men could and would do anything to women.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ The 1979 Islamic Republic of Iran's constitution includes no explicit condemnation of contraception. It is conceivable, however, that Bozorg Mahmoody might have misrepresented his country's position on contraception to his wife. See Chapter 1, Article 10 of the 1979 Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, <http://www.ivansahar.com/general-principles-of-iranian-constitution.htm>.

⁵⁷ It is important to note that Mahmoody's use of and attitudes toward contraceptive use were consistent with Protestant sexual morality in the 1980s. See Patricia Miller, *Good Catholics: The Battle Over Abortion in the Catholic Church* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 16.

⁵⁸ Her fear seems to be based in a misunderstanding of Iranian public policy under the Ayatollah Khomeini; see Mohammad Jalal Abbasi-Shavazi, Peter McDonald, and Meimanat Hosseini-Chavoshi, *The Fertility Transition in Iran: Revolution and Reproduction* (New York: Springer, 2009), 2, 24–25, 134, 230, 255. According to Abbasi-Shavazi, McDonald, and Hosseini-Chavoshi, directly after the revolution, Khomeini adopted pronatalist attitudes relative to his country's conflict with Iraq (2). However, "the government did not formulate a specific pronatalist policy." The national family planning program instituted under the Shah was suspended following the revolution. Though "the Islamic government did not implement any explicit policies to increase the population," contraceptives became less widely available. Thus Mahmoody's conviction that contraceptives were illegal and grounds for execution in Iran prove irrefutably (and gruesomely, as seen above) false.

⁵⁹ Again, this is false. Chapter 1, Article 10 of the 1979 Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran states that "since the family is the fundamental unit of Islamic society, all laws, regulations, and pertinent programs must tend to facilitate the formation of a family, and to safeguard its sanctity and the stability of family relations on the basis of the law and the ethics of Islam."

⁶⁰ Mahmoody and Hoffer, *Not Without My Daughter*, 134.

The IUD thus functions both as material evidence of Mahmoody's sexual agency and an object of anxiety in the context of domestic terrorism. "What if Moody found out about [the IUD]? What if Moody beat me so badly that I required treatment and some Iranian doctor found it? If Moody did not kill me, then the government might."⁶¹ Mahmoody's IUD functions in her narrative as evidence of her heroic embodied resistance to Islam. The device is cause for concern, underscoring the severity of the dangers she faces. That danger reinforces her construction of Islam and Iran as monstrously sexually repressive. Her concern for her life finally moves the author to remove the IUD herself.

During one of those days of anguish my fear centered upon one detail. Thrusting my fingers inside my body, I searched for the wisp of copper wire attached to my IUD. I found it, and hesitated for a moment. What if I began to hemorrhage? I was locked inside without a telephone. What if I bled to death?

At that moment I no longer cared whether I lived or died. I tugged at the wire and cried out in pain, but the IUD remained fixed in place. I tried several more times, pulling harder, wincing from increasing pain. Still, it would not come loose. Finally I grabbed a pair of tweezers from my manicure set and clamped them onto the wire. With a slow, steady pressure that brought cries of agony from my lips, I finally succeeded. Suddenly, there in my hand was the bit of plastic and copper wire that could condemn me to death.⁶²

Mahmoody's vivid narration of a relatively straightforward medical procedure dramatizes both the danger she thinks herself facing and her remarkable strength of will. In this context, the removal of the IUD becomes a melodramatized test of resolve. Her determination to rescue her daughter from her husband finally outweighs her fear of hemorrhaging. In removing the IUD, Mahmoody defies both her spouse and his country.

The incident can itself be read in the context of rape: the Islamic Republic of Iran forces Mahmoody to sexually violate herself to save her life and that of her daughter. Moreover, the juxtaposition of this heroic act with a practice deemed banal in the late-twentieth century United States (*i.e.* birth control) renders the "Muslim sexuality" of Iran repressive and gruesome in contrast to America's ostensibly "modern" and "liberated" sexuality.⁶³ That the author would go to such lengths to protect herself—only to brave her sister-in-law's wrath to steal oral contraceptives a short time after—garishly illustrates Mahmoody's embodied rejection of a purportedly life-threatening "Muslim sexuality."⁶⁴

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 230.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ American public attitudes toward contraception have become increasingly conservative in the 21st century. For this reason, I locate the rhetoric of contraceptive nationalism in the period between the mid-1970s and the early 2000s.

⁶⁴ Mahmoody and Hoffer, *Not Without My Daughter*, 255. Because she uses sex to influence her husband, Mahmoody remains concerned about an unwanted pregnancy. She sneaks into her husband's medical supplies at his sister's house to procure oral contraceptives.

Mahmoody's repeated references to the controlling nature of the Islamic government of Iranian contrast sharply with the banal bodily freedoms the author enjoyed in the United States.

Through this graphic act of sexual resistance, Mahmoody enacts an intimate violence upon her own body to evade the control of a hostile, irrational, oppressive Muslim masculinity. Mahmoody's ability to thwart the sexual control of her husband and of the Islamic Republic of Iran are presented as exemplary and, given Mahmoody's frequent references to her own nationality, as somehow inherent to her Americanness. Mahmoody does not present her American exceptionalism as a byproduct of her government's might. Indeed, she laments that her government cannot come to her aid. Rather, Mahmoody's nationality throughout *Daughter* seems to be almost biological, an inborn resistance to oppression and excessive religiosity to which her husband's Iranian-ness (depicted as excessive religiosity, violence, and sexual predation) acts as a foil. Her grief in having "overestimated the power of my government in dealing with a fanatical foreign power" recalls popular media depictions of the Iran hostage crisis (1979–1981), which set private American citizens against a singular "militant Islam."⁶⁵ Mahmoody's self-characterization is professedly individualistic and apolitical, something inherent to her nationality but separate from the acting government.⁶⁶

The author constructs her heroic degree of agency in contrast to Tehran, which she characterizes as a dangerously hypersexualized environment. She emphasizes her privacy, individualism, and agency, which readers should infer is inherent to all "normal Americans." Indeed, Mahmoody renders herself exceptional even among American expats, declaring that she "knew of no other woman—Iranian, American, or otherwise—who risked the vicissitudes of regular excursions into Tehran without the protection of a man or at least another adult woman companion."⁶⁷ She continued to navigate Tehran without a companion even after suffering the aforementioned sexual affronts. Mahmoody's privacy, individualism, and agency operate despite the seeming impotence of the American government, and stand in stark relief to her depiction of Iran as a hyperpoliticized, sexually menacing religious state. In these ways, *Daughter* exemplifies contraceptive nationalist rhetoric; Mahmoody narrates the sexual peril that "foreign" (which is to say, Muslim) men pose to her on both a personal and national level. The author warns readers of the visceral threat Muslim masculinity represents to women's bodies and the American body politic.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 127. See also Melani McAlister, "Iran, Islam, and the Terrorist Threat, 1979 - 1989," in *Terrorism, Media, Liberation*, ed. John David Slocum (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 146–7.

⁶⁶ See McAlister on the "depoliticization of the individual" in captivity narratives, specifically regarding the Iran hostage crisis. Ibid., 145.

⁶⁷ Mahmoody and Hoffer, *Not Without My Daughter*, 272.

Terror Babies and Liberatory Rape

Embodied resistance to Muslim sexuality emerges in Mahmoody's narrative as a quality inherent to American identity. Americans have commonly identified "the sexual' as properly the domain of personal privacy and individual ownership and thus the ultimate site of violation."⁶⁸ By locating her violation in the private—which is to say domestic—sphere, Mahmoody increases the affective efficacy of her narrative while establishing her inviolable American heroism as necessarily individualistic and supposedly apolitical. Mahmoody pits perverse, repressive, racialized, religiously-excessive Muslim sexuality against liberated and secular American sexuality. *Daughter* deploys language of contraceptive nationalism—an embodied rejection of inhuman Muslim sexuality—to marginalize Islam as essentially un-American. Betty Mahmoody uses racialized American sexual norms, which (as I have argued elsewhere) are informed by conservative Christian ethic, to articulate and authorize anti-Muslim religious intolerance while deploying anti-Muslim sentiment to discourage exogamy.⁶⁹

In addition to facilitating religious intolerance in contemporary America, discourses that set a self-identified exceptional American woman against a singular "Muslim sexuality" collapse the practices, moralities, and beliefs of millions of people into a terrifyingly perverse entity easily dismissed as foreign. Mahmoody characterizes Muslim men as terrifyingly familiar violators of domestic spaces, as beasts, and as figures whose very bodies betray their foreignness – thus suggesting Islam has always already been un-American. Ethnic studies scholar Sylvia Chan-Malik remarks that despite a significant Muslim presence in mid-1980s Michigan, Mahmoody's husband stands as *Daughter's* "prime example of a 'Muslim American': a resolute foreigner from the Middle East who claims to love the United States and partakes in all of its privileges while secretly harboring the mind and soul of a fanatical fundamentalist."⁷⁰ Such rhetoric marks Muslim men as legitimate subjects of discipline, containment, and even violence.

Were *Daughter* an isolated incident, a single memoir of questionable facticity, scholars might be able to dismiss it as irrelevant. But *Daughter* signals much larger and more alarming trends: the explosive proliferation of pulp nonfiction and documentary accounts of women's Muslim captivity; the mobilization of such narratives to justify otherwise objectionable and markedly militaristic foreign policies – many of which endanger and impoverish the lives of the very women they purport to save; the identification of Islam as a specific, embodied threat to the "American way of life."⁷¹ The rhetorics of

⁶⁸ Heather R. White, "Review of Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times," *Committee on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender History* 23, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 13.

⁶⁹ Megan Goodwin, "Good Fences: American Sexual Exceptionalism and Minority Religions" (PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2014).

⁷⁰ Chan-Malik, "Chadors, Feminists, Terror," 115.

⁷¹ On the popularity and influence of hostage narratives, see Milani, *Words, Not Swords*, and especially "On Women's Captivity in the Islamic World," *Middle East Report* 246 (2006), 40–46. Such narratives do not only influence American attitudes toward Muslims; as Michelle Gibson observes, American media

domestic terrorism and American sexual exceptionalism serve to constitute one another, and in this recursive imbrication, they demonstrate the mobilization of sexuality to police citizens and justify state violence – and to articulate and authorize religious intolerance.⁷²

Two recent examples illustrate elements of contraceptive nationalism in contemporary American public rhetoric: Representative Louie Gohmert (R-Texas)’s 2010 campaign to warn voters about Muslim “terror babies,” conceived in the United States and reared as terrorist operatives; and the emergence of conservative American women as the face of anti-Muslim activism in the United States.

Gohmert’s “terror babies” scare precisely demonstrates contraceptive nationalist rhetoric. During the week of June 21st, 2010, Rep. Gohmert addressed the House three times. Arguing for the repeal of the fourteenth amendment, Gohmert warned Representatives of an alleged terrorist plot to have Muslim women give birth in the United States, ensuring that their children would be American citizens. On June 24th, 2010, Rep. Gohmert warned that “terrorist cells overseas. . . had figured out how to game our system.”⁷³ Muslim terrorists, Gohmert warned, “would have young women, who became pregnant, [and] get them into the United States to have a baby. They [the Muslim women, presumably] wouldn’t even have to pay anything for the baby.”⁷⁴ These women would then allegedly “turn back where [the children] could be raised and coddled as future terrorists. And then one day – 20, 30 years down the road, they could be sent in to help destroy our way of life because they’ve figured out how stupid we are being in this country.”⁷⁵ Gohmert’s allegations received national news coverage: Texas State Representative Debbie Riddle discussed the “sinister issue” of “little terrorists” delivered by women from “Middle Eastern countries” on the August 10th episode of “Anderson Cooper 360,” though she refused to identify her “former FBI” sources.⁷⁶ (Cooper insisted that the

has used the trope of Muslim men oppressing women to denigrate other American minority religions—in particular, the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (FLDS). Indeed, a reporter for “Anderson Cooper 360” referred to the FLDS as “the American Taliban.” Such elisions have leant credibility and authority to government intervention into American minority religious communities. See Michelle Gibson, “‘However Satisfied Man Might Be’: Sexual Abuse in Fundamentalist Latter Day Saints Communities,” *The Journal of American Culture* 33.4 (December 1, 2006): 286–7.

⁷² Robert Diaz, “Transnational Queer Theory and Unfolding Terrorisms,” *Criticism* 50, no. 3 (Summer 2009): 537.

⁷³ Cited in Stohl, “US Homeland Security, the Global War on Terror and Militarism,” in *The Marketing of War in the Age of Neo-Militarism*, ed. Kostas Gouliamos and Christos Kasseris, 117.

⁷⁴ Gohmert, cited in *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ “Terror Babies; O’Donnell Campaign Scrutiny; Chile Miners’ Rescue; Home Invasion Horror,” CNN, September 17, 2010, <http://www.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/1009/17/acd.02.html>; “Texas Rep. Louie Gohmert warns of baby-making terrorists coming to US,” *New York Daily News*, June 27, 2010, <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/politics/texas-rep-louie-gohmert-warns-baby-making-terrorists-coming-article-1.182787>

⁷⁶ Debbie Riddle, “Terror Babies?; Former WWE Executive Wins Connecticut Primary; A Mother’s Wake-up Call; Preparing for the Next Storm,” CNN, August 10, 2010, <http://www.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/1008/10/acd.02.html> When refusing to provide the names of her sources, Riddle insisted that Cooper’s team “did not tell [her] that [Cooper] was going to grill [her].” “Anderson

Federal Bureau of Investigation found “absolutely no evidence of this ‘terror baby’ conspiracy.”⁷⁷ Gohmert appeared on “Anderson Cooper 360” two days later, but provided no evidence for the allegations beyond references to an anonymous former FBI agent.⁷⁸ Mother Jones and Jon Stewart lampooned Gohmert and his terror babies theory, but the incident demonstrates the persistence of public rhetoric identifying Islam as a unified, embodied threat to the American body politic.

The Southern Poverty Law Center, an American legal advocacy organization that identifies extremist organizations, represents victims of hate crimes, and provides tolerance-focused educational programs, recently identified American anti-Muslim sentiment as “peculiarly dominated by women.”⁷⁹ This core group of conservative female activists, on much the same terms as Mahmoody, emphatically reject Islam as anti-American. The SPLC labels Pamela Geller, leader of the American Freedom Defense Initiative, as “the country’s most flamboyant and visible Muslim-basher;” but the “Women Against Islam” article identifies twelve American women—bloggers, radio talk show hosts, authors, lobbyists, and television personalities, the majority of whom are white—as the “most hardline anti-Muslim. . .activists in America.”⁸⁰ Most have identified Islam as a unified and specifically embodied threat to the United States. Former Texas Republican Party Leader Cathy Adams lambasted conservative political advocate Grover Norquist because he is “married to a Muslim woman,” has a beard, and is “showing signs of converting to Islam,” presumably influenced (seduced) into Islam by his wife.⁸¹ Blogger Ann Barnhardt identified “the Muslim population [as] mentally and developmentally disabled on a mass scale” and as “mentally and physically devolving,” recalling Mahmoody’s descriptions of deformed Iranian children as well as early 20th century Protestant eugenics rhetoric.⁸² Author Ann Coulter attributes American gun violence to Black and Muslim American men, suggesting gun-related homicide is “not a gun problem, it’s a demographic problem.”⁸³ The aforementioned Pamela Geller posted a video implying Muslim men engage in bestiality with goats, echoing the parallels Mahmoody draws between Islam and sexual perversion.⁸⁴ In the wake of the 2014 Ferguson protests, blogger and retired New York police officer Cathy Hinners identified the Council for

Cooper Stuns GOP Rep. On ‘Terror Babies’: ‘They Did Not Tell Me You Were Going To Grill Me,’” The Huffington Post, August 11, 2010, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/08/11/anderson-cooper-stuns-gop_n_678650.html.

⁷⁷ “The Terror Baby Conspiracy; Dr. Laura’s N-Word Rant; Kids & Race; Suspected Serial Killer Arrested; Singer Usher Steers Kids to Achieve,” CNN, August 12, 2010, <http://www.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/1008/12/acd.02.html>

⁷⁸ “The Terror Baby Conspiracy,” “Anderson Cooper Stuns GOP Rep. On ‘Terror Babies.’”

⁷⁹ Mark Potok and Janet Smith, “Women Against Islam,” Southern Poverty Law Center, June 9, 2015, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2015/women-against-islam>

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

American Islamic Relations as a “Muslim terrorist organization” and alleged that CAIR was using civil unrest following the death of Michael Brown to “‘revert’ those disgruntled blacks to Islam.”⁸⁵ Here, like Mahmoody, Hinnens both racializes Islam and depicts Muslim identity as a regressive state.

In rhetoric reminiscent of both Mahmoody and Rep. Gohmert, television judge Jeanine Pirro has argued that Muslims have “conquered us [the United States] through immigration.”⁸⁶ But attorney and columnist Debbie Schlusel is responsible for perhaps the most poignant depiction of Islam as a physical threat to American women. Following the February 2011 gang rape of CBS Chief Foreign Affairs Correspondent Lara Logan in Cairo, Schlusel wrote:

So sad, too bad, Lara. No one told her to go there. She knew the risks. And *she should have known what Islam is all about*. Now she knows. . . How fitting that Lara Logan was ‘liberated’ by Muslims in Liberation Square while she was gushing over the other part of the ‘liberation.’ Hope you’re enjoying the revolution, Lara!⁸⁷

Schlusel’s account echoes Mahmoody’s elision of sexual violence with Islamic doctrine but does not mention the Egyptian women who defended Logan from her assailants.⁸⁸ In sum, the Southern Poverty Law Center’s “dirty dozen” article demonstrates that American anti-Muslim rhetoric identifies Islam as a specifically embodied danger to the body politic—and, in the case of Schlusel, the bodies of American women—while showing that a number of American women have presented themselves as uniquely suited to combat these threats to the nation’s shared values.

Conclusion

Not Without My Daughter is an infuriating and exhausting book – not only because it is racist and xenophobic, but because still, thirty years after publication, it is still beloved and celebrated by many Americans as feminist manifesto. As I have shown, Mahmoody’s narrative of contraceptive nationalism persists in contemporary anti-Muslim rhetoric.

⁸⁵ Ibid. A number of anti-Muslim individuals and organizations have attempted to discredit CAIR by alleging terrorist connections. See Neil MacFarquhar, “Scrutiny Increases for a Group Advocating for Muslims in U.S.,” *The New York Times*, March 14, 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/14/washington/14cair.html>, as well as Kathryn A. Ruff, “Scared to Donate: An Examination of the Effects of Designating Muslim Charities as Terrorist Organizations on the First Amendment Rights of Muslim Donors,” *Rights of Muslim Donors*, *New York University Journal of Legislation and Public Policy* 9 (2005–6), 447–472.

⁸⁶ Potok and Smith, “Women Against Islam.”

⁸⁷ Robert Steinback, “The Anti-Muslim Inner Circle,” Southern Poverty Law Center, June 17, 2011, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2011/anti-muslim-inner-circle> (emphasis added).

⁸⁸ “Lara Logan Breaks Silence on Cairo Assault,” 60 Minutes, May 1, 2011, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/lara-logan-breaks-silence-on-cairo-assault/3/>

Narratives like *Daughter* also portray Islam as condoning domestic abuse and marital rape without confronting the extensive prevalence of both phenomena within American households irrespective of religious identification. As queer theorist Robert Diaz argues, such a construction of hypersexualized Muslim masculinity “negates and disavows the multiple ways that the United States itself limits particular sexualities and sexual practices within its border.”⁸⁹ Domestic violence is rampant throughout the United States, and is no more likely to occur in minority religious households than in mainstream American ones.⁹⁰ Mahmoody relegates sexual violence and abuse to a foreign, racialized, and religiously fanatical sphere.

Not Without My Daughter and its pulp nonfiction kindred render Islam as unimaginably foreign, erasing the vibrant history of American Muslims and perpetuating orientalist attitudes toward the countries and peoples of the Middle East and Central Asia.⁹¹ Such narratives commodify very real violences toward women under oppressive regimes, Islamic or otherwise.⁹² Mahmoody’s valorization of her own exceptionalism occludes not only the efforts of Iranian women (and men) who worked to secure her escape, but the much greater and more dangerous efforts toward a freer Iran made by decades of Iranians.⁹³ Such rhetoric also precludes the possibilities of Muslim women’s “negative freedom” or conservative agency, as argued by Saba Mahmood.⁹⁴ The foreclosure of both modes of agency—resistance and submission—reinforces a “missionary discourse” toward “poor Muslim women,” insisting that Muslim women require saving from their male counterparts.⁹⁵ Such exceptionalist discourses moreover work, as Jasbir Puar argues in *Terrorist Assemblages*, “to suggest that, in contrast to [presumably white

⁸⁹ Diaz, “Transnational Queer Theory and Unfolding Terrorisms,” 537.

⁹⁰ Membership in an American minority religion can complicate member’s reasonable right of exit, however. On this point, see Michal Gilad, “In God’s Shadow: Unveiling the Hidden World of Victims of Domestic Violence in Observant Religious Communities,” *Rutgers Journal of Law and Public Policy*, 11.3 (Spring 2014), 471–550; as well as Sarah Song, “Polygamy in America,” In *Justice, Gender, and the Politics of Multiculturalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 142–168.

⁹¹ Milani notes that while “no book about Iran has achieved the phenomenal success of *Not Without My Daughter*,” American audiences have received *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books as Daughter’s* “sophisticated successor.” *Reading Lolita in Tehran* is Azar Nafisi’s memoir of resistance during her time in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Though scholars have criticized Nafisi’s work as orientalist and neocolonialist, the book has enjoyed wild popularity – it spent more than 100 weeks on the *New York Times* Best Seller list. Milani, *Words, Not Swords*, 217–8.

⁹² On this point, see the criticisms of the CIA-controlled Northern Alliance by Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), as quoted in Hirschkind and Mahmood, “Feminism, the Taliban, and Politics of Counter-Insurgency,” 344.

⁹³ Nima Naghibi and Andrew O’Malley, “Estranging the Familiar: ‘East’ and ‘West’ in Satrapi’s *Persepolis*,” *English Studies in Canada* 31, no. 2–3 (June 2005): 223–247.

⁹⁴ Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton University Press, 2011), 12.

⁹⁵ On this point, see especially Lila Abu-Lughod, “Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others,” *American Anthropologist* 104, no. 3 (2002): 783–790.

mainstream Christian] women in the United States, Muslim women are, at the end of the day, unsavable.”⁹⁶

For these reasons, hostage narratives like *Not Without My Daughter* remain relevant to the study of Islam, both as an American religion and as mode of embodiment many Americans cannot reconcile with their national identity. Mahmoody’s work demonstrates an anti-Muslim sentiment that foreshadows post-9/11 Islamophobia by almost two decades and has persisted in American public for nearly two decades following. The American public continues to read Muslim masculinity as a sexual menace to the American body politic.

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